

Six Uses Of God-of-the-Gaps

When people don't know or don't like something about nature, they sometimes employ "God" to try to change things. The gap that "God" fills can be physical or emotional.

However, we are never told *what* a god is or exactly *how* a god does anything. Thus "God" is not a useful answer because it provides us with *no information*.

1) Science

The first and traditional area where god-of-the-gaps is used is science. So, for example, when humans didn't know what caused lightning, they invented a "God of Lightning." Then we discovered electricity.

In fact, god-of-the-gaps is the basis for the "Intelligent Design" movement: "This thing is so complicated that we can't figure out how it could have evolved naturally, so 'God did it.'"

2) Medicine

The human body has great healing powers of its own, which are not fully understood. Yet when someone is healed for reasons we don't understand, some people say "God did it." But if prayer and "divine intervention" were really reliable methods of healing, there would be no need for hospitals. A true miracle, like an amputated limb growing back on a human, never happens.

3) Ethics

For emotional and practical reasons, we may want there to be a system of simple, absolute ethics. Since nature doesn't provide this, some people claim that a god provides moral instruction through "revelation."

Yet even within Christianity there is no agreement on the ethics of such things as: drinking alcohol, masturbation, pre-marital sex,

contraception, abortion, embryonic stem cell research, divorce, the role of women, gay rights, the death penalty, voluntary euthanasia, and when and if we should go to war.

4) Meaning In Life

Some people desire a "cosmic meaning" in life. Since nature doesn't provide one, some people invent a god to give them one.

5) Emotional Security

People naturally seek emotional security during uncertain or troubled times. We've all heard the phrase "I had no where else to turn, so I turned to God."

God-belief may have a placebo, calming effect, but it's the *belief* that is responsible. A god doesn't really have to exist.

6) Afterlife

Our survival instincts make us want to live forever. Nature doesn't provide for this, so some people invent a god to give them an "afterlife."

Science And Religion

Evidence-based science and faith-based religion are only compatible if religion either makes no testable claims, or the results of testable religious claims are not at odds with scientific findings.

For example: To say that a god created evolution is not a testable claim, though it at least accepts the evidence for evolution. To say a god created the universe 6,000 years ago is a testable claim and is false.

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ATHEISM 101

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Definitions

An **agnostic** is a person who has no (scientific) knowledge of any gods. Therefore, everyone is an agnostic. People who nevertheless make a leap of faith and believe in at least one god are **theists**. People who lack a belief in all gods are **atheists**. (Most atheists disbelieve in the existence of anything supernatural.) People who don't care enough to take a position regarding the existence of gods are **apatheists**.

Burden Of Proof

Theists make the positive claim that at least one god exists. Therefore, theists have the burden of proof to demonstrate the existence of a god.

Atheists do not have to "disprove" the existence of gods. Atheists only need to demonstrate that there is no evidence or compelling reason to believe in any gods.

Worldviews

The theistic worldview presupposes the existence of one or more supernatural beings and/or a supernatural world that precedes and supercedes the natural world. Typically, a supernatural god creates the natural world out of nothing and rules over it. This is a "top-down" view of existence.

The atheistic worldview observes the natural world and makes no leaps of faith regarding the existence of a supernatural world or beings. This is a "bottom-up" view of existence.

Ten Leaps Of Faith

The god that most people believe exists requires at least ten separate leaps of faith:

- 1) **Something supernatural exists.**
- 2) **A supernatural being exists.**
- 3) **This being has consciousness.**
- 4) **This being is eternal.**
- 5) **This being created something out of nothing.**
- 6) **This being monitors the entire universe.**
- 7) **This being changes things through miracles.**
- 8) **This being is all-knowing.**
- 9) **This being is all-powerful.**
- 10) **This being is all-loving.**

Four Questions About Gods

1) **What are gods composed of?**

What is “spirit”? We know what spirit *isn't*, but we don't know what it *is*.

2) **What are the attributes of gods?**

Stories of various gods list differing attributes:

- a) Eternal vs. being born and dying
- b) Omni-present vs. confined to certain areas
- c) All-powerful vs. limited powers
- d) visible vs. invisible
- e) All-knowing vs. limited knowledge
- f) All-loving vs. evil vs. temperamental vs. indifferent
- g) How many gods are there?
- h) Where are gods located?

3) **How do gods do things?**

What mechanisms do gods use to accomplish things? *How* does a god create something from nothing? *How* does a god tinker with our DNA? “Miracles” and “magic” are not useful answers.

4) **What difference does it make?**

If the god that most people believe exists were to suddenly disappear, what would change in the natural world?

Eight Problems With Belief in Gods

1) The Problem of Scale – If humans are the ultimate goal of a god's creation of the universe, why did this god create *100 billion galaxies* when only a single star and a single planet were necessary? Why did *12 billion years* pass before we showed up?

2) The Problem of Silence – If a god exists who wants us to be aware of its existence, then why doesn't it clearly reveal itself? And if the punishment for not believing is eternal hellfire, then it is cruel for this god not to convincingly reveal itself.

3) The Problem of Revelation – If a god exists who wants us to understand him, why do we have so many different and competing revelations, religions, and holy books? How can we tell the difference between a revelation and a hallucination?

4) The Problem of Heaven – How can a person be perfectly happy in heaven if some of one's friends and loved ones aren't there too?

5) The Problem of Evil – If a god exists who is both all-powerful and all-loving, then why do natural evils, such as natural disasters, diseases, and birth defects, exist?

Often, people who believe a god exists that is providing them with answers to their prayers and an afterlife dare not displease this god. So they endow him with all good attributes and blame themselves for the problem of evil.

6) The Problem of Unintelligent Design – If an all-powerful, all-wise god designed us and other life forms, why didn't he do a better job? For example, why do our breathing and swallowing passages intersect so that we can choke to death on food? Why have 99% of all species that have ever existed gone extinct? (See the website: “Some More of God's Greatest Mistakes” at tinyurl.com/BadDesign)

7) The Problem of Free Will – If a god exists who knows the future, this means humans have no free will. Yet it is often claimed that this god will judge, reward, and punish us based on our free will choices.

8) The Problem of God's Size – If a god is the size of the universe, then god's consciousness, traveling at the speed of light within that god, would take *93 billion years* to travel edge to edge.

Even if information within this god could travel at 100 times the speed of light, that's still about a *billion years* from edge to edge. How does this god keep in touch with himself on a timely basis?

Meaning And Purpose To Life

Evolution supplies us with drives to survive, to reproduce (have sex), and to care about future generations. To accomplish this, we acquire knowledge and live in cooperative communities. Learning and interacting with the world and others gives our lives meaning and purpose, without the need for belief in any gods.

Ethics

Imagine a mother with two children, a girl and a boy. Now imagine that the girl starts hitting the boy. Does the mother reflexively say to her daughter: “Stop hitting your brother because it says not to in the Torah/Bible/Koran/Vedas/etc.?” No. At that point gods and religions are not what she is thinking about.

Instead, doesn't the mother say something like: “Stop hitting your brother; you're hurting him!” (consequences) or “Stop hitting your brother; how would you like it if someone hit you!” (empathy) ?

Consequences and empathy are the bases for natural ethics. These lead to cooperation and compassion, which are found in many animals, including humans.