

Friday, July 15, 2011

A Proof that the Christian God Does Not Exist

Christians are continually challenging the non-believer to prove that their god does not exist, and like to heckle non-believers on the matter because they say one would need to be omniscient in order to know that there is no god hiding somewhere in the universe.

For instance, one Christian recently commented on [my blog](#):

For anybody to reject something they have not seen takes a lot of work. For example searching the entire universe. Which they can not do.[sic]

This is not an isolated case. Other theistic apologists have employed essentially the same reasoning.

In an article titled [Strategies for Dialoguing with Atheists](#), apologist Ron Rhodes makes the following statement:

Some atheists categorically state that there is no God, and all atheists, by definition, believe it. And yet, this assertion is logically indefensible. A person would have to be omniscient and omnipresent to be able to say from his own pool of knowledge that there is no God. Only someone who is capable of being in all places at the same time - with a perfect knowledge of all that is in the universe - can make such a statement based on the facts. To put it another way, a person would have to be God in order to say there is no God.

Reasoning like this ignores the broader context of theism, namely that the theist's god is said to exist *outside* the universe, that it is not just some item existing within it, like a rock, an asteroid, or particle of dust. If an atheist had traveled the entire universe and found no god, the theist could easily say he was looking in the wrong place, for the theist says his god is infinite and not part of the material universe.

In fact, reasoning like this is really an admission that god-belief rests on one's ignorance, for it is where one has no knowledge that the theist's god is supposed to reside.

Even worse, given this kind of reasoning, one would have to have searched the entire universe to reject the notion of a square circle. In other words, anyone employing this type of reasoning to defend his god-belief, would - in order to be consistent - scoff at any thinker who rejects the notion that square circles exist. Since no one can travel the entire universe to be assured that there's no square circle hiding behind some asteroid or quasar, or under a pebble on some moon in another galaxy, no one is justified in believing that square circles do not exist at all.

If any thinker disputes the analogy between his god and the notion of a square circle, let him try to defend his god-belief. Meanwhile, readers are invited to review my own exploration of this matter here: [Gods and Square Circles](#).

Does the theist really believe that one needs to be omniscient in order to justifiably reject the claim that square circles exist somewhere in the universe?

But the atheist need not worry about not being able to prove that the Christian's god does not exist. I don't see why such a proof cannot be available. Below I present one that theists will have a very difficult time overcoming:

Premise 1: That which is imaginary is not real.

Premise 2: If something is not real, it does not actually exist.

Premise 3: If the god of Christianity is imaginary, then it is not real and therefore does not actually exist.

Premise 4: The god of Christianity is imaginary.

Conclusion: Therefore, the god of Christianity is not real and therefore does not actually exist.

Presumably the Christian will accept the first two premises. Most human beings, when confronted directly with the question, will typically acknowledge that there is in fact a fundamental distinction between what one imagines and what is real, and admit that something that one imagines does not actually exist.

The stories of fictional works like the Harry Potter series or Tolkien's tales of Middle Earth, are rooted in their authors' imaginations. No one really believes that the heroes and villains of these storybooks actually exist (or existed, as the case may be), and that the events that move their storylines along actually happened someplace. That's because it is introspectively obvious to most individuals, by reference to the world we live in and deal with everyday, that the stories and characters in these fictional accounts are ultimately imaginary.

Premise 3 is most likely going to make many Christians uncomfortable just in contemplating it. Many individuals who invest themselves emotionally in a life centered around a god-belief are likely to resent any suggestion, even hypothetical, that the god they worship is imaginary. If this premise produces in the theist a noticeable attitude change, perhaps it's because you're getting close to the central nervous system of his god-belief. But it seems that any adult thinker, even if she happens to be Christian, should accept the truth of this premise, assuming they don't have any qualms with the first two premises.

Subtle discomfort is not what one should expect when he presents premise 4 to theists. Rather vehement protest is most likely to result. And of course, the theist can be predicted to reply with something like "Prove it!" (as if he were going to accept any proof that his god is imaginary). At this point I would suggest that he review my blog [The Imaginative Nature of Christian Theism](#), in which I provide no less than 13 points of evidence - any one of which is damning enough - to meet his counter-challenge.

(Incidentally, I had posted the blog entry linked just above, in reply to a theistic apologist who had complained that I did not "prove" that his god was imaginary. Since posting the "Mighty 13," that apologist has not offered any response to my answer to his challenge. In fact, it was not long after this that this apologist's own blog posted an announcement that its own comments policy had been significantly revised, and debates were no longer to be allowed there. Go figure.)

The soundness and reasonableness of my argument's conclusion should be easy for anyone to digest, even for the Christian, so long as his commitment to the existence of the Christian god is not emotional in nature. If it turns out that the Christian god is in fact imaginary, then by virtue of this fact it is not real, and therefore it does not actually exist.

Christian apologists who want to object to my argument's fourth premise, which states that the Christian god is imaginary in nature, are welcome to address the points of evidence that I have cited in support of this premise. Ultimately, there is a single question that any atheist who encounters a pushy apologist need pose. And that question is:

When I imagine your god, how is what I am imagining not imaginary?

Since we have no alternative to *imagining* the Christian god when believers tell us about it, this question is most appropriate, especially since we're expected to believe that it is real. If theists think we have an alternative to imagining their god, what is that alternative, and how is it different from imagination?

Christian believers who have invested their psyches so deeply with the ambition to convert the world to their god-belief, have long ago passed the great divide between imagination and reality, such that they are unable consistently to distinguish between the two, especially when their god-belief is involved. But that's why challenges such as the one I raise are so highly resented by theists, for it 'heads 'em off at the pass', so to say, and slashes off their god-belief before it has a chance to take root. For anyone who is not already predisposed to believing that the imaginary is real, if his attention is called to the distinction between reality and imagination and he is explicitly reminded that the imaginary is not real, he's not likely to accept claims about imaginary things as truth. On the contrary, he's going to wonder about the content of the character of individuals who insist that something which they can only imagine is real.

The bottom line is that, whether or not atheists really have the burden of proof in the matter, it has been met in spades.

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Labels: [Burden of Proof](#), [imagination](#), [Theistic Arguments](#)

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