



What “Proof of God” justifies your position? (part one)

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I begin a four-part series today.

Philosophers, theologians, and scientists have been grappling with the issue of God’s existence for millennia. Much of the discussion in past centuries may have been motivated simply by curiosity or by a protest against theological dogma. For many of us in the modern world, the notion of God is a very private one. God may show up in our prayers but frequently doesn’t have much effect in our daily decisions. Why might it still be important to ask whether or not God exists, today?

Why does God still matter?



up front that I don't really care what you truly, deeply believe in the privacy of your own mind. You could believe you are the King of Narnia. You could believe Harry Potter or Peter Pan are real, for all I care. I know many people who believe things at least as improbable as this.

You may not believe it, but I don't like debating people's faith, no matter what arguments they use to justify or rationalize why they believe. I don't think rejecting religious beliefs is the best road to atheism. In many ways, atheism is not really a belief system at all and is certainly **not** a replacement for religion. That's why I'm an "[empirical physicalist](#)"; it seems more like a philosophical position than simply not believing the "God claims" of others.

But people's beliefs, particularly the heartfelt ones, have a habit of making their way into public policy. If you [say](#), "In the case of North Korea, God has given Trump authority to take out Kim Jong Un," you are now using your beliefs (without much, if any, objective evidence) to justify, recommend, or set public policy. And that public policy could lead to a proliferation of global nuclear war, ending the time of "God's children" on this planet.

Is Trump's authority from God?



That's where I have trouble.

Religious beliefs are among the most blatant and pernicious belief systems when it comes to influencing public policy. Religious beliefs gave us prohibition and help governments and other public groups justify their ongoing wars against drugs, abortion, homosexuality, the sexual revolution, feminism, evolution theory, Big Bang theory, science, and – most notably – against other religions.

In the United States, despite being in the vast religious majority, Christians feel they increasingly suffer from religious [persecution](#). And they have begun to take steps to reverse what they see as their exclusion from public policy formation. Many atheists rush to point out that there is no persecution of Christianity, only a desired leveling of the moral playing field, a removal of the privileges commonly granted religious organizations such as freedom from taxation and the “right” to deny public service on the basis of Faith.

For this reason, it is important for those who hold religious beliefs to examine the reasons they use to justify their public policy positions.

For many people, a belief in God comes along with the religious beliefs they grew up with. There is no doubt that the emotional and social support many receive through the beliefs they share with their family and community provides great comfort. When asked why they believe, people will point to nature or the universe and ask how one could otherwise explain the existence of such beauty. They may claim they

“feel” God or have a “God-shaped-hole” in their hearts that yearns for a connection to something greater than themselves.

These are emotional justifications; they simply assume that God must exist because that is the only way the believer can imagine their feelings having a source. I usually try to be more rational about something as potentially important as a belief in how the universe works. I certainly hope none of our politicians make their important decisions on the basis of their “feelings.” Psychological studies into paranoia and schizophrenia suggest that feelings or subjective experiences are not always the best basis for making good decisions.

Many people have fuzzy notions of God. God could be a “force,” a “presence,” or a “Guardian/Protector,” for example. For many, their idea of God has some basis in their holy texts.

Perhaps unique to the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) is a belief in a single God. Other religions like Hinduism and Buddhism either have a proliferation of gods or no god in particular. The central claim of the Abrahamic religions is that God is the Creator of all: the universe, the Earth, all life, and the human soul.

In the next post, I’ll discuss the nature or character of the God of the Bible and we can start examining the claims made of His existence in greater detail.