

Is There a God?

by Ernest O'Neill

The sermon explores the question of God's existence, addressing misconceptions and presenting rational arguments for belief in a Creator.

Duration: 27:43

Scripture: Genesis 1:1, Exodus 20:3, Psalm 19:1, Proverbs 3:5-6, Jeremiah 29:13, Matthew 22:37, Romans 1:20

Topics: "Existence Of God", "Natural Theology"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the evidence for the existence of God by drawing analogies from everyday life. They explain that just as we can infer the presence of a dog when we see a bone, we can infer the existence of a higher being when we observe the complexity and order in the world. The speaker also emphasizes the importance of recognizing our obligations if we believe in God's existence. They use the analogy of finding a watch on the beach to illustrate the need for a watchmaker, highlighting that the being who created us must be at least as personal as we are. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the uniqueness and diversity of humanity and the precision of the universe as further evidence of God's existence.

Transcript

For eight years we have been meeting together on Sunday mornings and a number of us at the Christian Core Training School classes during the week to study the Christian explanation of reality. But all our studies are based on certain presuppositions and we have always felt that it's very important to regularly re-examine those presuppositions so that we are not involved in some kind of deception or illusion. And that's really what we try to do every year at the beginning of each academic quarter.

We try to examine the basic presuppositions on which all our studies and all our activities together are based. And so during the next three or four Sundays I'd like to take each of the presuppositions and simply share with you why we feel they're justified. The first one we'll deal with today is the answer to the question, is there a God? Just, is there a God? So will you think about that a little yourself? Is there a God? I'll tell you that one of my problems was I continually answered another question even though I kept saying that I was answering the question, is there a God? I kept actually trying to answer other questions and you might like to know some of those other questions that even our professors at school and our teachers answer and they claim to be answering the question, is there a God? First one I had trouble with was the people, liberal theologians often, who said, what does it matter? What does it matter whether

there is or is not? If it gives old ladies and poor psychological cripples some comfort, what does it matter whether there's a God or not? Well, I think there are many old ladies who feel the same way as I do, who do not want to live an illusion.

We don't. We are not such cripples that we need an illusion or a lie of which we are willing to be the deceived victims. So we don't want a God that is just an illusion.

And often when I heard people asking the question, is there a God? I often thought, ah they're saying, is there some great authority of other that will give poor souls some encouragement in their life? That's not the question, little ones. That's not the question at all. The question is, is there a God? Is there a supreme being? I think some of us maybe don't have trouble with that misconception but we have trouble with another one.

We say, oh you mean, is there a miserable, gloomy, old gentleman living in heaven somewhere who tells us not to go to the theater, not to dance, not to smoke, and he looks down and if he sees any of us enjoying himself at all, he yells, cut it out! And I found that that was the question I was trying to answer. I was giving the name God to all the distorted, depressing misconceptions of him that I had accumulated during the past years. And I was saying, does such a morbid old being exist? Now loved ones, that's not the question we're asking.

That is an emotional question. But the intellectual question we're asking is, is there a supreme being who is greater than all of us here and who is responsible for putting us all here? Some of you may wonder, well, I mean, why do some of the greatest minds in our world not believe in God? Well, because of this third misconception. A lot of us think we're asking, not the question, is there a God, but is there a being that I must obey? And of course, we don't want to have anybody that we have to obey, so we answer no.

That's what causes many of the most intelligent men and women in our world to deny the existence of God. It's amazing, but they do. They deny the existence of God, not on intellectual reasons at all, but because they know the consequences that would follow once they admit that there's a God.

And the consequences are that they would have to obey that God. Now you may say, oh, no, no, I have a biology professor that is absolutely clear of that kind of foolish, childish, emotional prejudice. Loved ones, let me read you, of all people, one of the coldest intellectuals in our generation, and that was Aldous Huxley of the famous Huxley family.

And here is his own statement, which is really an unbelievable admission for an intellect of his stature. I had motives for not wanting the world to have a meaning, consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption. You see, once you assume that the world has no meaning, or once you assume that there is no God because you don't want there to be a God, anybody can find reasons to back that up.

The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics. And that's amazing for Huxley to say it. The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics.

He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do, or why his friends should not seize political power and govern in the way that they find most advantageous to themselves. For myself, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an

instrument of liberation, sexual and political. So, be very wise and alert when you find some intellectuals denying the existence of God.

Don't be naive and say, oh, if they've tackled the question honestly and answer no, then why shouldn't I? They have not tackled the question honestly. If a man like Huxley, with his stature, admits that he denies meaning in the world and denies the existence of God because he wants to be free to do what he wants in his life, then, loved ones, any intellectual is capable of the same mistake and the same wrong approach to the question. What do some of the giants say in answer to the question? What do giants, intellectual giants like Darwin and like Einstein say in answer to the question, is there a God? Because I think some of us feel, well, I mean, we have our thoughts, but are we in line even with those who have brilliant minds? And here is Einstein's own statement and maybe a book that you want eventually to get.

It's called Know Why You Believe by Little, and he quotes Einstein's own statement of his faith. My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit, and it's a capital S at spirit, who reveals himself, a capital H at himself, in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my idea of God.

Probably no man has understood the complexity or the beauty and the order of our world as Einstein has, and yet he says himself, of one thing I'm absolutely certain, this carefully designed universe is the result of the activity of a mind that is far superior to any of ours, and it's that mind that I regard as God. What about Darwin? I think a lot of us think of his Origin of the Species for what it is, just an incredible book, an incredible breakthrough in thinking, and yet we automatically say, well, of course, Darwin destroyed any idea of God that we ever had. Darwin ends his book, The Origin of the Species.

This is almost the last paragraph of the book, and he ends it like this. There is a grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one, but Creator is capital C. It's no idea of an élan vital or an impersonal force. It's a capital C. Having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one, and whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity from so simple a beginning, endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been and are being evolved.

Of course, Darwin saw the theory of evolution just as that, a theory, a hypothesis of the way the thing might have developed after the Creator created, and whether you and I are arguing for evolution or not, we ought to see that Darwin, who is regarded as the father of evolution, wrote that sentence. There is a grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed by the Creator into a few forms or into one. In fact, loved ones, it doesn't matter how far back you go.

If you go to 400 BC and go with Plato and Socrates, you find them absolutely certain that there is a God, with no doubt in their minds at all. You go further back, you go to 4000 BC in Mesopotamia, and you find that people are talking in the same terms. They're talking of a God who is real and personal.

Here's from one of the most ancient engravings we have. A man must truly proclaim the greatness of his God. A young man must wholeheartedly obey the command of his God.

It's 4000 BC. So, throughout the world's history, in whatever place you go, among whatever people you travel, there has always been this unquestioned assumption that there is a God, that there is a supreme being. And not only an unquestioned assumption that there is such a being, but there has gone along with

it a worship and respect of that being.

And whatever tribe you visit, whatever group of people who have never been touched by civilization we eventually communicate with, among every tribe and every nation, among all peoples, there has been a general unquestioned assumption that there is a God who created the universe. And we here tend to ask the question, well, why? Why is there such a general unquestioned assumption that there is a God? Well, loved ones, honestly, it takes dumb, stupid sophisticates like ourselves to ever question it. It really does.

It takes you to be educated to reject the idea that there's a God. It really does. If you just let your mind run in the way it normally does in everyday life, and follow through the normal cause-and-effect thinking that the mind operates on in daily life, you're bound to come to the conclusion that there's a God.

You go outside. I hope those of you who have heard this before will laugh at the game. You go outside, outside your room door, or outside your house, and there at the sidewalk, a solid gold Cadillac.

Or, for those of us who don't like that, a 650 Honda. You go outside in the morning, and you see those there. Now, you know what your mind asks.

It asks, what explosion put this here? It just doesn't, you know. It just doesn't ask what Big Bang Theory is responsible for this. It doesn't.

It immediately asks, who put this here? Because all of us know that explosions destroy, and they don't create. And they certainly don't create machinery like a Cadillac, or like a Honda. Or, do you go out, and you look at them, and you say, aha, obviously, it came about through spontaneous generation from some decomposing substance.

And so you look for the decomposing substance. Well, you know, you don't. You don't.

Your mind just does not ask those questions. It has to be taught to ask those questions. It actually has to be perverted to ask those questions.

Your mind automatically says, who left the Honda here? Who left the Cadillac? Or, as Clouseau would say, you know, do you try the other old ploy? Ah, yes. The Cadillac evolved from a Volkswagen, and the Honda evolved from a ten-speed swim bicycle. Well, you don't.

You don't. Because you're still left with the problem of who put the bicycle there, or who put the Volkswagen there. And actually, the mind knows that even if there is some evolution, and there is obviously some kind of evolution within the species at least, even if there is some evolution, even if there was ever an explosion, even if there was ever spontaneous generation, somebody had to originally create the thing from which these things evolved.

If there was an explosion, who made what exploded? Somebody must have created something originally if there was a decomposing substance. Who created the substance that decomposed? Who created the stuff that exploded? Who created the original single-cell amoeba that eventually evolved? In other words, those so-called answers are not an explanation of creation at all. And normally, when one sees a world like this, or one sees a mountain, one responds the same way as Einstein does.

Same way as the most primitive person in the whole universe would respond. One says, who put the mountain there? Who put the world here? Maybe you say, well, why do you ask who? Why do you ask

who put the world here? I can see that something must have started it all somewhere, but why do we say it's a him and not an it? Well, loved ones, the same way as we draw other conclusions from everyday life, we look at what is here and we work back to the kind of force or being that would have had to create it. So you go out of your room door into the corridor in the dormitory and you see a bone lying on the floor.

You just do not say, that cannibal girl down the corridor, or that savage counselor has been chewing up freshmen again. You don't. You don't.

You see a bone, looks gnawed. You know what normally produced gnawed bones, there's a dog somewhere. That dog is out again.

Or if you work it the other way, you go outside your door and you find a piece of paper with a simultaneous equation one side and Paradise Lost, part of Paradise Lost written on the other. You just do not say, oh, that stupid dog has lost his assignment again. However clever the dog is, you know that a dog cannot produce Paradise Lost.

A dog cannot produce simultaneous equations. And that's why we say who. Can you imagine a chair making you? Can you imagine even an animate object like a dog making you? We can't.

We automatically say no. Whatever made us, whether he made us in one moment, or whether he made us over a period of time, he must have been capable of putting these powers of development within us. So he must be as personable at least as we are.

That's why we ask who. Because the being that created us must be at least as personal as we ourselves are. I mean, you look at this incredible world and look at three and a half billion of us, different people.

Not two of us the same, really. Not even twins are absolutely the same. And look at three and a half billion of us with different faces, with different ways of loving and being kind, with different ways of being understanding, with different ability to communicate with each other's personalities.

And then look at the universe itself with seasons that are absolutely reliable, with planets that orbit so precisely that we can depend on them to be in that spot when we shoot our men to the moon. With bodies that seal themselves when they're cut, often without much care on our part. With blood that contains more than 64 different substances, and travels miles and miles around our body every day, and never becomes sludge, but continues to maintain itself in its present state.

When you consider the air pressure that is exactly right for us, all you have to do is go up a couple of feet almost, it is compared with space in a plane, to begin to experience the difference of pressure on your body. And our air pressure is exactly right. Water itself is a miraculous substance that is exactly right in its boiling point and its freezing point for us to maintain our lives.

When you look at a world like this, you have to conclude some person who is at least as personable as us, and as intelligent as us, has designed this thing. You just do not think of it as something that happened by chance. Loved ones, it's like the old illustration you remember, I think the philosophers have used it for generations.

You're walking along a beach, you find a watch. Your mind immediately says there must be a watchmaker. There must be someone who is able to calculate the infinitely small distances that are connected with the manufacture of a watch.

And you just don't think of taking the watch apart, throwing it into a dishwashing machine, letting it turn for 15 minutes, and expecting that time plus chance will produce a perfect watch again. It won't. And time plus chance could not have produced this carefully ordered designed world that we have.

There is another reason which I think is strong for believing that there is a God, and it is something a little different from our personableness. Have you ever thought of this? That there are three and a half billion of us here in this world who spent most of our time being self-assertive, self-defensive, trying to get our own way and insist on our own rights. That's what comes naturally to us, isn't it? I mean, the more of us that are born, the more of us lie, the more of us steal, the more of us fornicate, the more of us swear, the more of us fight.

We spend a lot of our time fighting personally, internationally, nationally, socially. The bigger a city becomes, the more of a jungle it becomes. We find it far easier in our personal lives to lose our temper than to keep our temper.

We find it far easier to be critical of other people than to be kind to other people. And yet we keep on saying these things are wrong. Now, why? Where do we get that sense of moral obligation from? I mean, you'll agree it's a nuisance to us.

It is a nuisance. It brings guilt to us. It doesn't make life easier.

And it isn't easy to obey these things that we say we should do. We all say we should love each other, and yet we find it more natural to hate each other. We all say we should be unselfish towards each other, and yet we find it more natural to be selfish.

We all say we should build each other up, and yet we find it more natural to criticize each other and tear each other down. And yet we keep on saying that those things are wrong. Now, loved ones, it can't be hard instinct, because you know often you do what you believe is right against the pressures of your peers.

It certainly isn't what is convenient, because often you do things that you feel you to do that are very inconvenient. It can't be what pays you to do, because often it is a real disadvantage to you to do what is right. It can't be what you were educated to do, because wherever you go in the world, unselfishness is lauded as something that a person should be.

Wherever you go in the world, everyone condemns Cardice in the face of enemies. Everybody condemns anyone who lets their friend down. Wherever you go in the world, even where there's no education, you find the standards are more or less the same.

How could that be when none of us take to goodness naturally and when it's a nuisance to us? Is it not because there is a being who has created us, who has standards that are higher than our natural ones and has wishes for our lives and plans for us that he is continually trying to communicate to us through our consciences? Is there a God? The circumstantial evidence points to that as the most rational and the most plausible reason for the existence of our world, for our own existence as persons, for the order and design that is evident in our universe, and for the sense of moral obligation that our conscience continually communicates to us. Yes, loved ones, I would say it's the most rational explanation for all that we see around us, and it's the one that your mind is driven to most naturally and most logically, if you simply let your mind work in an unprejudiced, common-sense way. And yet it's amazing, all that is just circumstantial

evidence compared with the empirical evidence that is provided in this history book.

And next Sunday, I'd like to try to talk about the evidence for the existence of God that is in this book and about its reliability. I think you, if you believe this moment that there is a God, have obvious obligations, you know, you can see them yourselves. And that's the real test.

What are you going to do now if you believe there's a God who put you here? What are you going to do? Let us pray. Lord God, we see that it's difficult to avoid the calls and claims of logic and of the evidence that we see around us. And Lord God, we would ask your forgiveness if we have been avoiding this issue for too long, so that we would be as free as Huxley is to do whatever he wants.

Lord, we see that that is not using our minds, and that we are obligated before you to use these minds, and to follow them out to logical conclusions, and then to arrange our lives accordingly. So, Lord God, this coming week, we intend to begin to look for you and for your voice in our consciences, and to begin to respond to you, and to find out why you put us here. We will do this just in honesty and truth, for your sake and for our own.

Amen.

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