

# Truth

## The Failed Hypothesis of God

### Abstract

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God is an old hypothesis meant to explain what was inexplicable. It has no place in the modern world, where science has shown how hypotheses can be tested and rejected or accepted on the basis of their success in prediction. The hypothesis has it that God is a spirit and so cannot be tested, but believers in this "spirit" say it is able to effect changes in the material world, and has done in the Creation and prophecy, and still does in answer to prayer. Victor Stenger, in a book everyone should read, shows how science can test for the supposed interventions of God in the world, and shows conclusively that there is no evidence that He does intervene. Either God does not exist or He does not intervene as Christians pray He does.

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### Science and God

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Many Believers think science has nothing to say about religion or God, indeed *cannot* say anything. The reason is that scientists have mainly agreed to minimize dissent between science and religion out of a misguided respect for religious beliefs, however ignorant they are. The determined attack on science from evangelical fundamentalist Christians and Moslem fanatics has changed that, or ought to have. Scientists are beginning to see that the whole edifice of the modern world built since the Enlightenment, including science at its core, is under sustained attack. Victor Stenger, a professor of physics and astronomy, wants to change all this (*God the Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist*).

By using scientific evidence, Stenger rejects the deferential approach, and convincingly argues against the existence of any God like the patriarchal God imagined by Jews, Christians and Moslems. He thus disproves God beyond reasonable doubt. Regretably, Christians are never reasonable, and have little or no understanding of scientific method.

Christians, remember, say God intervenes in the material world, so He must leave evidence of any such interventions, mustn't He? Stenger thinks any God that can influence the material world must be detectable, so science ought to have something to say about claims of the action of God in the world, and therefore about God. Nothing stops us from using scientific method to form an hypothesis about God, making observations, and doing experiments to test it and reaching a valid scientific

conclusion. He writes:

The thesis of this book is that the supernatural hypothesis of God is testable, verifiable, and falsifiable by the established methods of science.

With an open mind and rigorous scientific method, Stenger seeks testable evidence for the hypothesis of God. If there is no sign of God intervening, then one has to conclude there is no God matching the characteristics of the Christian God. One of the reasons for the fundamentalists' attempts to undermine science is precisely their fear that science will do this, and they are provoking scientists out of the truce that early scientists, who were simultaneously Believers, had set up. Even if the proof is rejected by Christians as inadequate, they know that it will inevitably have its effect unless science, so successful in our world, is undermined. That is their aim.

## Evidence of Absence

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The feeblest of apologetic protests against scientific reasoning like Stenger's is the phrase, "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence!". In respect of evidence for God, it is a useful get out that impresses the flock but no one else. It is not so. If it were, then anyone could be accused of any crime, and the fact that there is no evidence against you would be no defence. Since the Holy Inquisition, in recent times only unholy neocons like Bush and Blair have ever dared to lock people up without evidence, and quite frankly most of the US and UK population have not yet caught on to it. Since the neocons started the terrorism bogeyman, this has become the state of the law. Unfortunately people think someone *accused* of being a terrorist *is* a terrorist. By the time they find themselves so accused, it will be too late to protest that the law is unjust even if not historically unChristian.

In science, repeated tests failing are the cornerstone of the scientific method. A test fails when it produces no evidence for whatever is being tested. It is an absence of evidence. It is quite true that one test is not enough because it might be a faulty test, but when the test is repeated and repeated by different people all aiming to ensure there is no extraneous reason why it should fail, the scientific rule is that the hypothesis that predicted a successful outcome for the test is false. So, the rule is that any hypothesis is false when there is no evidence for it. It is exactly the opposite of the Christian dictum. Stenger shows repeatedly that the expected evidence for the action of God in the world is absent, so the hypothesis of an God falls.

From the supposed characteristics of the Christian God, by making hypotheses, Stenger accumulates a body of doubt that God exists at all. Examples of the action of God on the material world are such things as prophecy and prayer, supernatural phenomena that Believers love to believe! Stenger reviews such supernatural claims, finding no compelling evidence for God. Thus inquiring into intercessory prayer as a healing mechanism he shows how, in many studies, erroneous evidence arises from flawed methods, then he cites how careful studies of prayer even by bodies of Believers, not by opponents of religion, fail to establish anything positive. Co-ordinated praying by large bodies of Believers for certain patients, had no discernable effect in relation to controls.

## Something from Nothing

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Turning to cosmic matters, which Stenger is a specialist in, and which Believers also love to believe are the special realm of a superpower like God, he demolishes Believers' arguments for God the Creator. Believers ask, "how can something come from nothing?" It is simple:  $0 = + 1 - 1$ , QED. A positive entity accompanied by an equal negative entity is still nothing in total. Einstein showed us that mass is energy, and a positive mass accompanied by an equal amount of negative energy in the form of gravity adds up to nothing. Not only that but  $0 = + 2 - 2$  as well, and an infinite number of other combinations. There is only one state in which nothing is 0, but an infinite number in which nothing is something which adds up to nothing. Which then is more likely?

The answer to the ancient question "Why is there something rather than nothing?" would then be that "nothing" is unstable. Physicist, Frank Wilczek, cited by V Stenger

Another hopeful question is "how do you explain the fine tuning of the universe". The Anthropic Principle explains it adequately, for me, but Stenger adds that it is wrong to think the conditions and constants of the universe are particularly fine tuned. With all the constants fixed, any particular one cannot be changed without dire consequences, but any one *can* change without dire consequences if the others are allowed to make compensating changes. That means that there are loads of possible combinations of the constants that will support life, even though they are different from those we see around us.

Think of it like the RGB values for colour. A pixel can be made redder from grey by increasing the R value or decreasing the G and B values. If grey were necessary for life in this thought experiment, and red was being increased thus spoiling the conditions for life, the G and B could also be increased in compensation to return us to grey.

None of this is asserted as a premise. Stenger is not dogmatizing. It all flows from testing the hypotheses that are implicit in Christian belief. He has come to his own conclusions but honestly, just as any good scientist must be in approaching an investigation. He is willing to accept evidence favourable to the God hypothesis, but there is none to be found that meets scientific standards. What is found is no more than would be expected without any God hypothesis—the universe to be just as it would be without a God.

## The Characteristics of God

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Believers remain attached to ancient proofs of God based on their imagined characteristics that Stenger cites all serious logicians as now discounting as false. The characteristics of God, omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence fail every test, even if they are confined to tests of consistency within His own holy works! God is considered to be perfectly good, yet Christians speak of something they call evil being in the world, and evil is something perfectly bad. It is inconsistent that a perfectly good being should create something perfectly bad. And this good God in the holy book demanded that the Israelites commit the most inhumanly wicked acts, used now as justification for similar atrocities by pious but overpowerful human

godfearers like Bush and Blair. A God tolerating revengeful abuse of innocents by His own disciples cannot be good.

God is not needed for morality. Morality is good, but this God is immoral, and it is utterly foolish to attribute human morality to an immoral being. Natural selection gives animals morals suitable for their situation in the environment. Humans are social. Our morality is particularly that of an animal that depends on remaining in groups for security. Something of the personal has to be sacrificed for that to work. We cannot kill our neighbours or they will kill us, and society will crack up. If we want to be seriously selfish, then we can be, but not in society.

Morality for us is a social phenomenon, and the desire many Believers have to think that morality comes from outside or beyond them is a valid feeling—it comes from society as a whole and is a condition of society succeeding. Yet Believers are all too often provably less moral than are unbelievers. When divine commands are detrimental to social living, then the deity responsible is not moral, and no one should follow them, the truth being that the commands are those of wicked self seeking men, not imaginary perfect gods.

Christians, though, are experts at believing inconsistent things at the same time, and they like to excuse evil with the evil angel called Satan. Unfortunately God created Satan, so it does not alter the argument, merely confusing it, because Satan is supposed not to be the equal of God, yet in practice he seems to be. As for miracles, they are not explanations of anything, when they are real being natural, and when only narrated, they are often metaphors.

Naturally, there is no persuading those determined not to listen, but the truth is Believers really do not have a case for God, and anyone intelligent will realise it once they read the science and logic of it. The horror of belief is that Believers stick to ancient works because they are allegedly sacred, and outdated and mistaken authorities because they are allegedly theologians, and they say theologians know about God in a way that no scientist can.

Yet, no scientist knew anything about electricity until Faraday began to study it. Are there Christians alive anywhere who will deny that Faraday and Maxwell got electricity right after using the scientific method to study it, and unless they had, their Christian TV sets, hair dryers, computers, and electric kettles would not work? How does any other phenomenon investigated by science differ, and why should it? Moreover, theologians from Augustine through Aquinas to Barth were making untested assertions whereas science tests its assertions. How can anyone accept what is untested against something that is tested and verified?

Merely to assert anything does not differ from pretence. Something asserted without verification need not be true, and probably is not. Children pretend to be soldiers and die, but they rise again with their next breath, they pretend to be superman and fly, but they are only running about on the ground with their arms held out like wings. Christians extend this into adult life, imagining a God that can do literally whatever he likes. I too can imagine such a being, but I consider it to be a flight of fancy whereas Christians believe their imaginary superman. To imagine it is not for it to be true. That is what Christians cannot understand, so they believe in their figment instead of reality, telling others they are evil for thinking otherwise, and even burning

them as heretics until only a few centuries ago.

Stenger does not say it, but these people are actually mentally deficient. Their minds have not developed beyond infancy, and not surprisingly, Christians consider it to be virtuous. These ignorant people like to compare God to love and to beauty, or any other abstract noun, but they do not treat God as an abstract noun, but as a real agent acting wilfully in the world. Whatever love or beauty is, and science can investigate them both, they have no will of their own, and do not act as independent agents in the world. They are not at all like God, and it is a typical Christian falsehood to pretend they *are* like God.

Christian apologists say that scientists would be offended if anyone attacked science in a similar way to Stenger's attack on Christianity, ignoring, apparently, that it is precisely what Jewish and Christian crazies have been doing for years, with people like Ben Stein's *Expelled No Intelligence Allowed*, as an example, being a perfect description of belief not science. Moreover, science is necessarily self critical. It advances through self criticism and choosing between alternatives by testing.

The difference between scientific criticism of belief and Believers criticising science is that Believers can only attack science by lying. This is something that scientists themselves often do not credit. Like most of us, they are brought up to think that Christianity, though perhaps mistaken, is honest. Thus they continue with the false notion that belief merits respect. That we should be ready to listen to the other side. That would be so, if the other side were honest. No deep study is needed to show professional Believers as utterly unrepentant liars. It is the only way they can keep people believing.

Stenger shows their own myths are precisely that—myths, what neocons admit in the modern world are deliberate lies—yet they persist in teaching them to children as true history. The supposed historical evidence in the Christian bible is not accepted any longer by historians and archaeologists, unless they are Christians when they too will persist in ignoring the evidence on the ground that their faith necessitates it! My pages at [www.askwhy.co.uk](http://www.askwhy.co.uk) covers this exhaustively.

## **Big Bang**

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Christians are always impressed by something they are persuaded to believe without understanding. They consider God to be infinite, and think of Him as being eternal. It is, for them, the answer to the question, "Who made God?". He was not made but always is! Why then cannot the world always be? Why does there have to be a Creator at all if there is no need for a beginning? Christian answer, "The Big Bang!" That was discovered by science, and proves there was a beginning, Christians think—being ready to accept science when it suits them—so the world must have had a maker. The trouble is that science can still account for a Big Bang with no beginning!

The Big Bang is a temporal illusion like the way railway tracks seem to join up at the horizon. Or, if you followed parallel lines inscribed around the globe, you would follow them forever, even though the globe is not infinite in extent. The expression is "finite but unbounded", and can give the illusion of infinity when there is none, or a beginning when there was none!

It is evident that time is not eternal in the sense of being infinite in extent, for if it were, there could be no finite subsections of it. Every division of infinity is itself infinity, so a God of infinite extent in time could not look upon anyone's finite existence and see anything. To Him, it would be infinitesimal—that is nothing! No Christian will accept such an argument because the God in their heads is super! He can do anything they imagine, even divide infinity into finite portions so that he can see each one and talk to its inhabitants personally.

Even if there were a Big Bang, science has been able to track it back by the laws of physics to fractions of a second from its occurrence, so even if a God made the Big Bang happen, He then left it to Nature to proceed! That means this Big Bang God does not intervene second by second in the running of the world, constantly sustaining it as Christians hopefully imagine, though any super being like God must be more intelligent than that. And, since no God is needed to explain the world evolving from microseconds after the Big Bang, it is easier to believe that He was also not necessary for the Big Bang itself. Yet, if we can track back to within fractions of a second from the Big Bang, how can time be without a beginning. Simply speaking, it is because time passes increasingly slowly as it gets closer to the imagined origin, just as quanta of energy get less frequent as energy gets greater, and for the same reason, quantization.

The Big Bang seems to have been a high energy and low entropy state. Since then energy has been dispersing, and entropy has been increasing. Entropy is chaos and it is increasing, yet the initial state of the cosmos was chaotic. The reason is that initially the chaos was confined but the subsequent evolution of the universe has meant the chaos was no longer confined. Think of it this way. A single chaotic state or many such states, which has the higher entropy? Plainly the many. As the universe expanded and cooled, many more chaotic states became available and so chaos increased despite it initially being as high as it could be—under those conditions! There is nothing for God to do in all this. The laws of physics, as we understand them now, in our modest state of knowledge, explain cosmic development without God.

Science cannot prove or disprove something imaginary—what certainly does not exist in reality—but there is no way of proving it is only imagined. Logicians know there is no way to prove a negative, and that is why it is up to the person positively making an assertion to offer proof, and not someone who denies it. It is another thing Christians refuse to accept. They say the disbelievers have to prove God does *not* exist. What can be done is what Stenger has done—show that none of the consequences of existence obtain. That, of course, is never enough for the believer, but the Believer is the one who should prove their assertion that God does exist. For that, they have absolutely nothing to offer other than wishful thinking.

Amazingly, some apologists complain that critics of belief like Stenger reiterate the same arguments repeatedly, as if Believers constantly offer us something new! If it is true that science and or atheists keep using the same arguments, it is because they are refuting the same tired old unfounded Christian assertions. Among these are that science has not yet shown how life arose, *ergo* God did it.

Believers sometimes resort to the ploy that we cannot know everything. True. Therefore there must be a God, or, we cannot know whether there is one or not. These people think science cannot help us there, because we are too feeble. It is

desperation because it does not address the evidence. Stenger says that our western concept of God has certain characteristics which must have certain outcomes. It does not, so there is no such God. Maybe there is a God that does not have the characteristics the Christians attribute to it, but then it is not their God, is it? And, when a God is so subtle that we cannot find any trace of it, even if it does exist in some sense, how can we ever know it does? Such a God is irrelevant to us. As Stenger puts it:

A God with no observable effect is indistinguishable from one who is nonexistent.

## **Science and the Supernatural**

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Sadly, many Christians, whether it is because they reject science and so will not listen to it, or because they are too stupid to discern proper science from bogus science, are prone to cite utter nonsensical pseudo scientific claims of the proof of God, the afterlife, or whatever. They accuse scientists as being like them, they only believe what they want. Thus, scientists do not believe in the supernatural, and will not even look for it. Those making such claims say the scientific establishment ignore them because they themselves do not want to hear. The accusation is that science cannot acknowledge such alleged truths as life after death because it does not fit scientific preconceptions. It is not so, and quite contrary to the way science works.

Why, one might ask, are scientists not looking for the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow? There is no end to a rainbow, because complete, it is a circle with the observer necessarily at its center, and most often it is incomplete because the myriads of droplets of water that cause it slowly disperse with no clear end to it. Either way the rainbow has no end and no pot of gold can be there, and the observer could never get to it, if it were. God is similar. Christians will not believe the solid evidence put forward refuting the notion. Rather they find a gap for God and get ensconced in it. Yet the gaps have been rapidly dispersing. Doubtless some will always remain, or so Christians pray, but they will serve to show that Christians are either dunces, insane or self-deluded. Maybe all three.

Science is an open endeavour, and anyone able to can follow their own interests as long as they use the methods of science, primarily the objective testing of any hypotheses. Unless they use scientific methods like these, their endeavour is not science. If their science is good, it will be well received, and they will get scientific funding. If not, they will get any number of Christian millionaires to fund them out of the gambling or financial rackets and used car scams they run. Christians and pretenders that the supernatural has been proven scientifically just cannot complain they are ignored by a godless world.

Of course, there are many among those who think faith is a virtue who believe that to demand evidence at all is a blasphemy. Normal people, who would not buy a pig in a poke or, to be more up to date, a used car without a careful inspection of it, and perhaps a test drive or two, will willingly be persuaded by shysters and grifters called pastors and priests that the God they worship actually exists and favours them, as long as they just have faith and their money keeps leaping spontaneously into the platter. They believe in a supernatural reward after death while rewarding confidence

tricksters in this life. Now that really is a useful scam, and one that our rulers and legislators favour too because it helps them keep people gullible.

Admittedly, there are scientists too who cannot resist the temptation of Christian gold pouring from the coffers of vastly wealthy men who, conscious of their own mortality, decide to impress God with their money. They should read their bibles. Their putative God told them explicitly, it was no way to get “treasure in heaven”, but that does not bother them. Following the example of the churches, they think God is like them—in it for the money! Otherwise why do they ignore God when he says from his own mouth, “Blessed are the poor”. Nowhere does he say “Blessed are the rich”, and indeed, if these Christians really think Christ is God, they ought to know he plainly did not think much of rich people at all. The only whisker of grace he offered was not paying for grasping scientists, lawyers or clergymen to write lies about him, but to give everything to the poor.

Other apologists like to use pseudo scientific arguments for at least remaining agnostic. They might say, “we know of no alien life but it would be wrong to say there is none, because we have no proof”. Maybe. And it is the same for God. Two things. If there is alien life then we shall eventually know by pursuing normal scientific methods of enquiry. If someone asks whether Mother Goose exists, should we answer “maybe” too? We can be sure that normal scientific methods have no chance of ever showing Mother Goose exists. All of us are certain Mother Goose is an imaginary character. God is in the realm of Mother Goose and not the realm of alien life.

Science is not dogmatically opposed to phenomena which are popularly called paranormal and supernatural, but there is no persuading those who wilfully refuse to understand the most important principles of the modern world. Stenger notes that religions make factual claims science can legitimately investigate, but equally nothing stops science from inquiring into supposed supernatural causes when there is sufficient and adequate evidence, though the explanation when it emerges, has so far always been natural. Science has been explaining the supernatural for hundreds of years, and many natural scientifically explored phenomena were thought once to have been supernatural. The eminent theoretical chemist and Christian, Charles Coulson, warned about the danger to religion of trying to fill gaps in science with divine explanations. His reason was that every time a divine explanation was explained by profane science, God was diminished.

Scientific explanation of the supernatural will not cease unless religion turns us back to the dark ages, as it threatens to do, and reintroduces the Inquisition, as we have noted Bush, Blair and Brown have been doing already by removing the protections of our liberties that liberals have introduced since the enlightenment. The latest such infringement of liberties in the UK is hiding the identity of witnesses. During the Inquisition, no one could know who their accusers were, and nor did they have the right to know what precisely they were accused of, under the umbrella of “heresy”. Both the US and the UK now have in their statute books the right to detain someone indefinitely without charge. The principles of the holy Inquisition are upon us. Take note.

Scientists put no emphasis on the supernatural because every investigation into it that has ever been done scientifically has shown claimed phenomena were not supported by proper evidence—they were frauds or were mistaken observations.

When there is no evidence for something, science cannot accept it. The reason is that its most fundamental tenet is disbelief. It is called skepticism. The scientist will believe nothing until there is adequate, properly tested evidence for it. The Christian will believe anything they are told by some clerical authority. That is called credulity and gullibility.

Stenger does not get everything right. He says falsified science is still science, but it is wrong. That means wrong science is science! The confusion is that science is a body of accepted tested and proven knowledge, but it is also a method, the scientific method, which is the making and testing for falseness of hypotheses. The body of science cannot contain wrong science, though it can contain the limits of certain hypotheses that are not universal. Some idea is accepted into the body of science because it is right. But wrong science is shown to be wrong by science, meaning by the scientific method. The hypothesis that God exists can be investigated by the scientific method and shown to be wrong. So, that hypothesis cannot be any part of science, the body of knowledge. Science as a method shows the hypothesis is wrong and so the scientific truth is that God does not exist.

Science gives us reliable knowledge about the real world and finds no evidence for God. God is an unnecessary and failed hypothesis.

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## **Dr Michael David Magee**

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Michael D Magee was born in Hunslet, an industrial suburb of Leeds, Yorkshire, in 1941. He attended Cockburn High School in South Leeds. He won a studentship to the Royal Military College of Science, Shrivenham, where he graduated with an honours degree in natural science in 1963. He went on to obtain a PhD degree from the University of Aston in Birmingham in 1967 and a teaching qualification, a PGCE, from Huddersfield before it was a university.

He carried out research at the Universities of Aston and Bradford, and at the Wool Industries Research Association, taught in a Further Education College in Devon for seven years and for ten years was an advisor to the UK government at the National Economic Development Office in London.

He has written three books, and, mainly in collaboration with Professor S Walker, a dozen scientific papers on the structure and interactions of small molecules investigated using microwave radiation. Working for the government he has written or edited some forty publications on microeconomic issues.

He was brought up by Christian parents but was never indoctrinated into one dogma and was able from an early age to make his own judgements about the Christian religion.

<http://askwhy.co.uk/index.php>