Does God Exist?

Some Scientists Think They Have Proof

by Robert H. Nelson

*The question of whether a god exists is heating up in the 21st century. According to a Pew survey, the percent of Americans having no religious affiliation reached 23 percent in 2014. Among such “nones,” 33 percent said that they do not believe in God—an 11 percent increase since only 2007.*

*Such trends have ironically been taking place even as, I would argue, the probability for the existence of a supernatural god have been rising. In my 2015 book, “God? Very Probably: Five Rational Ways to Think about the Question of a God,” I look at physics, the philosophy of human consciousness, evolutionary biology, mathematics, the history of religion and theology to explore whether such a god exists. I should say that I am trained originally as an economist, but have been working at the intersection of economics, environmentalism and theology since the 1990s.*

*Laws of Math*

*In 1960 the Princeton physicist—and subsequent Nobel Prize winner—Eugene Wigner raised a fundamental question: Why did the natural world always—so far as we know—obey laws of mathematics?*

*As argued by scholars such as Philip Davis and Reuben Hersh, mathematics exists independent of physical reality. It is the job of mathematicians to discover the realities of this separate world of mathematical laws and concepts. Physicists then put the mathematics to use according to the rules of prediction and confirmed observation of the scientific method.*

*But modern mathematics generally is formulated before any natural observations are made,*

Robert, name something from the field of mathematics that was formulated before observations were made.

*and many mathematical laws today have no known existing physical analogues.*

Robert, name one mathematical law that has no known existing physical analogue.

*Einstein’s 1915 general theory of relativity, for example, was based on theoretical mathematics developed 50 years earlier by the great German mathematician Bernhard Riemann that did not have any known practical applications at the time of its intellectual creation.*

Robert, not having practical applications at the time of its intellectual creation does not equate to having no known existing physical analogue as you are implying; nor does that support your claim that it preceded observations.

*In some cases the physicist also discovers the mathematics. Isaac Newton was considered among the greatest mathematicians as well as physicists of the 17th century. Other physicists sought his help in finding a mathematics that would predict the workings of the solar system. He found it in the mathematical law of gravity, based in part on his discovery of calculus.*

*At the time, however, many people initially resisted Newton’s conclusions because they seemed to be “occult.” How could two distant objects in the solar system be drawn toward one another, acting according to a precise mathematical law? Indeed, Newton made strenuous efforts over his lifetime to find a natural explanation, but in the end he could say only that it is the will of God.*

Robert, Newton lived well before modern science made numerous discoveries that removed the need for magical explanations of natural facts. He can be forgiven for his ignorance. You on the other hand ....

*Despite the many other enormous advances of modern physics, little has changed in this regard.*

Robert, perhaps you forgot about the 1953 Miller-Urey experiment which removed the need for a God explanation for the origin of life?

I wouldn't call that a little change. In fact, Creationists have been going nuts ever since, in a desperate effort to keep the money rolling in from the rubes.

*As Wigner wrote, “the enormous usefulness of mathematics in the natural sciences is something bordering on the mysterious and there is no rational explanation for it.”*

Robert, what Wigner and you find mysterious, mystifies nearly no one these days ... at least not anyone with a rational mind.

*In other words, as I argue in my book, it takes the existence of some kind of a god to make the mathematical underpinnings of the universe comprehensible.*

Robert, thanks for that tidbit. That is one more book that I can cross off my list so that I can concentrate on books that can actually teach me something.

*Math and Other Worlds*

*In 2004 the great British physicist Roger Penrose put forward a vision of a universe composed of three independently existing worlds—mathematics, the material world and human consciousness. As Penrose acknowledged, it was a complete puzzle to him how the three interacted with one another outside the ability of any scientific or other conventionally rational model.*

Robert, Penrose's mistake was in not realizing that human consciousness is part of the material world. It can be measured, analyzed, and controlled, as many experiments have proven.

*How can physical atoms and molecules, for example, create something that exists in a separate domain that has no physical existence: human consciousness?*

Robert, pay attention. I just answered that question.

*It is a mystery that lies beyond science.*

No Robert, it is only a mystery to Ghost Worshipers like you.

*This mystery is the same one that existed in the Greek worldview of Plato, who believed that abstract ideas (above all mathematical) first existed outside any physical reality.*

Robert, Plato didn't know where the Sun went at night. Modern science would be a better place to get your information.

*The material world that we experience as part of our human existence is an imperfect reflection of these prior formal ideals. As the scholar of ancient Greek philosophy, Ian Mueller, writes in “Mathematics And The Divine,” the realm of such ideals is that of God.*

Robert, I'll buy that if Mueller, or anyone else on Earth, can prove that their invisible ghost exists anywhere outside their imagination.

*Indeed, in 2014 the MIT physicist Max Tegmark argues in “Our Mathematical Universe” that mathematics is the fundamental world reality that drives the universe. As I would say, mathematics is operating in a god-like fashion.*

Robert, you could say the same thing about Black Holes. Does that make them gods?

*The Mystery of Human Consciousness*

*The workings of human consciousness are similarly miraculous. Like the laws of mathematics, consciousness has no physical presence in the world; the images and thoughts in our consciousness have no measurable dimensions.*

Robert, if that's true, how do you explain the fact that neuroscientists can measure alpha and beta waves created by our brains? How do you explain the readouts from machines that indicate what parts of our brain light up when our conscious minds focus on different subjects?

*Yet, our nonphysical thoughts somehow mysteriously guide the actions of our physical human bodies.*

Robert, they are only mysterious to those who don't understand them or don't *want* to understand them. I would guess that you fall into the second category.

*This is no more scientifically explicable than the mysterious ability of nonphysical mathematical constructions to determine the workings of a separate physical world. Until recently, the scientifically unfathomable quality of human consciousness inhibited the very scholarly discussion of the subject. Since the 1970s, however, it has become a leading area of inquiry among philosophers.*

*Recognizing that he could not reconcile his own scientific materialism with the existence of a nonphysical world of human consciousness, a leading atheist, Daniel Dennett, in 1991 took the radical step of denying that consciousness even exists.*

Robert, are we being a dishonest little Ghost Worshiper now?

Dennett is a compatibilist, and therefore, certainly does believe in the existence of consciousness.

*Finding this altogether implausible, as most people do, another leading philosopher, Thomas Nagel, wrote in 2012 that, given the scientifically inexplicable—the “intractable”—character of human consciousness, “we will have to leave [scientific] materialism behind” as a complete basis for understanding the world of human existence.*

*As an atheist, Nagel does not offer religious belief as an alternative, but I would argue that the supernatural character of the workings of human consciousness adds grounds for raising the probability of the existence of a supernatural god.*

Robert, let me guess: and this supernatural god, out of all the thousands of candidates on Earth, just happens to be ... yours?

*Evolution and Faith*

*Evolution is a contentious subject in American public life. According to Pew, 98 percent of scientists connected to the American Association for the Advancement of Science “believe humans evolved over time” while only a minority of Americans “fully accept evolution through natural selection.”*

Robert, when I google the percentage of Americans who believe in evolution, I don't get a "minority" - I get a "majority" ... around 60%. Where are you getting your data ... from The 700 Club?

*As I say in my book, I should emphasize that I am not questioning the reality of natural biological evolution. What is interesting to me, however, are the fierce arguments that have taken place between professional evolutionary biologists. A number of developments in evolutionary theory have challengedtraditional Darwinist—and later neo-Darwinist—views that emphasize random genetic mutations and gradual evolutionary selection by the process of survival of the fittest.*

Robert, but you aren't questioning evolution, right?

Then what was the meaning of that implied attack on evolution that I just read?

*From the 1970s onwards, the Harvard evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould created controversy by positing a different view, “punctuated equilibrium,” to the slow and gradual evolution of species as theorized by Darwin.*

Robert, Gould didn't substitute punctuated equilibrium for evolution - he added his theory to evolution. He said that it applied in certain cases.

That was very dishonest Robert. Don't you Ghost Worshipers have a commandment about that?

*In 2011, the University of Chicago evolutionary biologist James Shapiro argued that, remarkably enough, many micro-evolutionary processes worked as though guided by a purposeful “sentience” of the evolving plant and animal organisms themselves. “The capacity of living organisms to alter their own heredity is undeniable,” he wrote. “Our current ideas about evolution have to incorporate this basic fact of life.”*

Robert, how could they alter their own heredity if they are being guided by a purposeful sentience?

Either they are altering it or the sentience is altering it. Which is it?

*A number of scientists, such as Francis Collins, director of the U.S. National Institutes of Health, “see no conflict between believing in God and accepting the contemporary theory of evolution,” as the American Association for the Advancement of Science points out.*

Robert, you have given us a list of people who share your delusion in invisible all-powerful ghosts. But what you haven't given us is any evidence to support their beliefs.

That may be why they represent such a tiny fraction of scientists.

Science advances on evidence ... not on faith.

*For my part, the most recent developments in evolutionary biology have increased the probability of a god.*

Robert, that only proves that you will continue to reject any and all evidence that contradicts your belief in the supernatural and desperately grasp for straws if you think you can use them to defend your beliefs. You are no different than any other deluded, pathetic ideologue.

*Miraculous Ideas at the Same Time?*

*For the past 10,000 years at a minimum, the most important changes in human existence have been driven by cultural developments occurring in the realm of human ideas.*

*In the Axial Age (commonly dated from 800 to 200 B.C.), world-transforming ideas such as Buddhism, Confucianism, the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, and the Hebrew Old Testament almost miraculously appeared at about the same time in India, China, ancient Greece and among the Jews in the Middle East, groups having little interaction with one another.*

Robert, where is the miraculous part?

And history proves that they had more interaction than you want to give them credit for. For example, they shared ancient myths such as a global flood and a savior born of a virgin.

*The development of the scientific method in the 17th century in Europe and its modern further advances have had at least as great a set of world-transforming consequences. There have been many historical theories, but none capable, I would argue, of explaining as fundamentally transformational a set of events as the rise of the modern world.*

Robert, and yet people like you prove that not everyone can be helped. Many, if not most of the world's population remains mired in Medieval thinking. Education, while important hasn't been able to counter the threat of eternal torture. Pascal's Wager is powerful and continues to demonstrate its control, even over modern, educated people.

The answer lies to a degree in education, but to a greater degree in psychology. People like you desperately need to be helped, if you are to escape the threats of an invisible, murdering, torturing monster, whom you believe is real.

*It was a revolution in human thought, operating outside any explanations grounded in scientific materialism, that drove the process.*

Robert, any explanations not grounded in scientific materialism are grounded in magic. That is not a revolution in human thought. Magic has always been with us, and as people like you prove, will likely be with us for a long, long time to come.

*That all these astonishing things happened within the conscious workings of human minds, functioning outside physical reality, offers further rational evidence, in my view, for the conclusion that human beings may well be made “in the image of [a] God.”*

Robert, if we are made in the image of God ...

how come we are not invisible?

*Different Forms of Worship*

*In his commencement address to Kenyon College in 2005, the American novelist and essayist David Foster Wallace said that: “Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.” Even though Karl Marx, for example, condemned the illusion of religion, his followers, ironically, worshiped Marxism. The American philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre thus wrote that for much of the 20th century, Marxism was the “historical successor of Christianity,” claiming to show the faithful the one correct path to a new heaven on Earth.*

*In several of my books, I have explored how Marxism and other such “economic religions” were characteristic of much of the modern age. So Christianity, I would argue, did not disappear as much as it reappeared in many such disguised forms of “secular religion.” That the Christian essence, as arose out of Judaism, showed such great staying power amidst the extraordinary political, economic, intellectual and other radical changes of the modern age is another reason I offer for thinking that the existence of a god is very probable.*

Robert, the staying power of Christianity is easy to explain without resorting to magical ghosts. Just read up on The Crusades, The Inquisition, The Genocide of American Indians, Witch Burnings, Bible Belt Lynchings, or a host of other hideous Christian activities that were used to ensure their continued domination over every society that they infected.

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