

Discussion

God

by Jan Narveson

The question before us tonight is whether God exists. Well, not quite: it is, more precisely, whether we ought to believe that there exists such a thing as God is said to be. Still more precisely, it is whether it is reasonable to believe that. Putting it this last way, I believe, suggests, what is surely true, that there are many different kinds of things that might be appealed to on this matter, so that we may do well to be sensitive to those differences.

I am sure that the vast majority of people who say that they believe some religion are essentially passing on the results of early inculcation. And a fair number of those people, very likely, continue to sustain their beliefs because it feels good. Whether we should consider it "reasonable" to believe things of the sort that religions teach for those reasons is an important question.

Nevertheless, one considerable area of considerations on this kind of question has, I think, a certain pride of place. Asking whether God exists is, at least apparently, asking a (very grand) question of fact - whether there is an entity of a certain general description. *Prima facie*, when we ask a question like that, what is relevant is evidence: are there features of the world around us, or perhaps ourselves, which somehow suggest, or imply, or are most plausibly explained by the hypothesis that there is, or that there is not, such a personage?

One possibility is that it would be irrational to believe that God exists. This would be so if, for example, the belief was just nonsensical - a "belief" only in words, with no coherent content at all. Or again, that it was internally inconsistent; or that it was flatly incompatible with clearly relevant facts. Alternatively, it might be that it is irrational not to believe in God - that God's existence is either self-evident, or required by known facts. Writers like Anselm and Descartes argued famously for the first of those two alternatives. And, finally, it may be that belief in God is neither of the foregoing, and that the belief may be placed along a spectrum ranging from just barely possible to extremely likely. The familiar 18th Century Deists belong in this category, and hold that the facts call for a judgment somewhere near the latter end of that spectrum.

I shall, in the main, not argue that belief in God is literally irrational, though I have my suspicions along that line, and at least some versions of the theological view do seem to me to succumb to that charge. Nevertheless, I will argue that religious belief is definitely not reasonable. The hypothesis that there is a God is epistemically reasonable only if it does actually explain the way things are. In the end, I think, anyone who thinks that it does so is probably guilty of some kind of confusion. I will propose that the cognitive status of religious belief puts it among the intellectual non-starters in the way of hypotheses. La Place famously asked, concerning religion, "What need have I for that hypothesis?" I shall go a little farther than that, and say that we really need to avoid such hypotheses. That religious beliefs may be comforting, or dramatically interesting - or even just kind of fun

- is not denied. But those are hardly reasons compelling belief on rational grounds. Rather, they explain why so many people hold them, despite extreme paucity of more strictly cognitive appeal.

Now, people will no doubt say that there are many "gods" - or, more precisely, that different people have quite different beliefs about a god or gods. This is true, in a sense, but again I think we can narrow the field of possibilities sufficiently so that we will all be talking about the same thing when we address this question. We all, I take it, suppose that the entity intended by the term 'god' is (1) essentially a mind or spirit, rather than some sort of material force as such, and that this mind is characterized by (2) the possession of infinite power; or at any rate, enough to be able to "create the world"; and (3) supreme "goodness," in specifically moral respects. Thus, the claim made at the outset of the Judeo-Christian Bible, that 'in the beginning, God created the heavens and earth', may be regarded as a sort of defining feature, a laying down of the terms of reference, for the belief we are considering. A being of infinite power would have to have done that - nothing could possibly exist that such a being did not want to have existing, one would suppose, and at the very least nothing could exist without, as it were, his permission.

A lot of people for a very long time have believed that there is such a mind or spirit, though at this point it is well to bear in mind that there really are a lot of religious-type beliefs that differ pretty drastically from this particular one. I will, for this reason, make a slightly extravagant assumption: falling in step with the Judeo-Christian-classical Greek-western rationalistic tradition, I suggest that if we are to suppose that there are any genuine arguments possible on behalf of a religious hypothesis, this imperialistic type Western one has a great deal going for it. Religions such as pantheism, say, or the colorful galaxies of goddish figures abounding in some of the eastern religions, while a lot more fun than our boring Western tradition, do have the disadvantage, from the point of view of intellectual interest, that they really do seem rather arbitrary and fanciful. I mean, the very idea of having evidence, reason, for supposing that there really do exist all those chaps in the Hindu caste of divine characters really does strain the intellect.

Let us, then, turn to the matter of arguments for (or against) the existence of God. Now, many readers will have taken an "Intro Philosophy" course and had occasion to examine, with the help of some reasonably competent teacher, what are regarded as the standard arguments for the existence of God. Those who have not may find some of the next few paragraphs overly cryptic, and I apologize for that; but there simply is not time or space to go into everything at the depth the subject deserves here. So, I am going to settle for a very quick run-down on these classic arguments, and accompany most of them by a very quick dismissal which would be outrageous if it were not that the subject is so thoroughly discussed in philosophical literature.

1. "Ontological"

To begin with - logically and otherwise - we should mention the existence, and sometime popularity, of some perfectly fascinating arguments, at least from the logical point of view, known as "ontological" arguments. On this view, all we have to do is to understand the sheer idea of god to see that, obviously, there simply must be one (and, of course, only

one) of those things. (God is "a being greater than any that can be conceived; a being that cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than one that can be conceived not to exist," etc.) While there are a very few people working away in dusty attics trying to save something from this sort of argument, I stand with the overwhelming majority of my fellow philosophers in regarding that project as, essentially, misguided. Conceptual analysis can tell us at most what sort of gods there is if there are any; but it can not tell us that there is any such personage. Period.

2. "Cosmological"

According to these arguments, the "cosmos" is such that there simply could not be such a thing if there were not also a god around to create the thing. The argument lends itself to ready summary. First, it is claimed that the cosmos must be finite; second, it is asserted that no natural process can be uncaused - everything has to have a cause. So it is concluded that the cosmos has a cause. And what could this be, if not God?

Again, though, I have to say that along with an almost - but not quite - equally overwhelming majority of my fellow philosophers, my verdict on this is, again, a solid nix. The problem is an inherent one. On the one hand, some kind of extremely high-powered conceptual proof is offered for the thesis that there cannot be an "actual infinity," a real thing in the world that is, yet, endless in extent. (So, "the world is finite.") But then it is asserted that everything has to have a cause. The problem is that these two premises seem to be mutually incompatible. If everything has a cause, then the sum total of all caused events is infinite - no choice about that. If there literally cannot be endless sequences, because there can not be endless anythings, then what do we do with a supposedly infinite God? Either the argument shows that the existence of God is impossible, or it shows that it is possible for the cosmos to get along without one. And why ever should the claim that there has always, forever and ever going into the past, been a god be any more plausible than the view that there has always, forever and ever going into the past, been some kind of a cosmos?

William Craig spells out his version of the Ontological Argument in remarkably learned fashion; his contributions to the book, *Theism, Atheism, and Big Bang Cosmology*, are impressively studded with exotic symbols and listings of hypotheses from current physics and astronomy. And yet, after all this high-powered conceptual apparatus is brought in, out comes the same old argument we find in two sentences or so in Aquinas. The cosmos could not be infinite; yet everything has to have a cause; therefore the cosmos has a cause; and "this we call God," as they say.

The impressive, yawning gap between premise and conclusion seems to have escaped the author's notice, which suggests that he found it too obvious even to state. But, alas! Being the same old argument, it has the same old problem: God himself, clearly, has to be an actual infinite, if anything. But Craig's and Aquinas's first premise is that there cannot be any of those: actual infinities, they want to say, are impossible. Very well, then: if actual infinities are impossible, then it is impossible that there is a God. So you pretty well have to take your pick: either there cannot be a god; or there can be real infinities, in which case why cannot the physical universe be it? Craig offers an interesting argument

for the impossibility of infinities which I will be happy to discuss if anyone wants to - but it will not work - luckily for him, as I say.

An important subissue that arises here is my implicit assumption that God is a mind, a minded being. And minds simply do exist in time. The idea that God's somehow does not is sheer evasive double-talk, illustrative of the tendency of defenders of theism to change the subject to suit the needs of the rhetoric. God, some writers want to say, exists "out of time." How a being existing "out of time" can nevertheless manage to "do" anything is an interesting question. God is supposed to create things and to manifest love and other nice personal qualities. How do you do that if you do not exist in time? Try getting some TLC from the number 212,378, or the square root of two, and you get the idea.

This idea that somehow the cosmos has got to be due to the operation of some Mind is one that I am inclined to put down to metaphysical snobbery on the part of us humans. We have minds, of course, and that puts us, in certain respects, at a great advantage over mere physical objects or forces which, so far as we have any reason to believe, do not. Trouble is, they cannot discuss the subject with us! So if we tell them that we are better than they are - nyah, nyah! - they are not about to talk back. However, that is not much of a substitute for rational argument, as I suppose the reader would agree.

3. Arguments from "Design"

So we had better move on to where, in more nearly contemporary terms, the action is. These are the sort of arguments that flourished back in the 18th Century. Impressed by the progress of science and the powers of scientific method, the thinkers of that century and their successors down to the present proposed that various features of the world around us as we know it are such as to make it very likely that a creative intelligence is responsible for it. These "arguments from design," as they are called, seem to be of the right general type, broadly speaking, to rate a hearing from the thoughtful inquirer. Shortly, we will turn to them.

Emotional Considerations

But before getting down to brass tacks with those arguments, we should mention a few sideshow considerations that have, I think, strongly influenced a lot of people. It may have been noted that I have entirely left out of the above any kind of emotional stuff, and in a way, I apologize for that. After all, most people who have a religion attach a lot of emotional significance to it. They want to suppose that there is a personal God who will, as it were, be around to sympathize with them when things get tough, and they want to be able to write oratorios in his praises and that sort of thing. I sympathize with these people, and I do not wish in the least to denigrate the deep impulses from which these tendencies flow. Unfortunately, however, if we are to try to elevate such things to the level of argument, then they come up against a general problem which appears to me to be fatal: namely, that an argument of the form, "Wouldn't it be neat if p!," simply does not entail 'p'. Wishful thinking is not argument - though it is, too often, a substitute for it.

I must say that I do not quite understand how anyone can imagine that the sheer fact that he very much wants a certain thing to be true is, of itself, enough to make it true. One

wonders how such a person's belief-forming mechanisms work, or whether they work at all. But anyway, let us just point out that if you would like to have a rationally justified belief that there is a God, you had better roll up your sleeves and find some genuine reason why we should suppose this - rather than just singing louder.

The same is true of such "arguments" as that an awful lot of people have supposed that there is a God, so there must be one, right? I mean, can all that number of people be wrong? But, alas - just stating that is enough to make one realize that the answer is pretty obviously Yes - as evidence, after all, by the fact that since there are umpty thousand different religions, each incompatible with all the rest, almost everybody must be wrong anyway. Besides that, there are a whole lot of people - usually ones who have thought about the subject a lot more than most believers - who have no religion at all. In short, all these various people do not agree with each other; so they cannot all be right, and must, indeed, mostly be wrong.

In any case, of course, we have to do a lot better than counting noses when our question is whether some purportedly objective fact obtains, independently of our belief in it. And that is the kind of fact that the existence of God would, obviously, have to be.

Explanations and Best Explanations

So let us get back to the main kind of argument that, as I say, seems to deserve our most serious attention. That argument, the "argument from design," says that the Universe has such-and-such a "design;" therefore, it must have a designer. The Argument from Design is, actually, a somewhat primitive or, should we say, insufficiently clued-in version of a more general type of argument - the sort of argument that is typical of science. It is now called the "Inference to the Best Explanation." A set of phenomena is observed; the question is, what explains it. We provisionally accept the hypothesis that explains it "best," in view of everything we know, about this and other matters. A good hypothesis has to be intelligible, internally consistent, and consistent with everything we know as well - both the particular phenomena in question and whatever else we are reasonably confident of. Given that hypothesis, we would expect there to be the sort of phenomena we actually observe; in its absence, those phenomena do not make very good sense.

Before commenting in detail on the argument from design, we take note of an important ambiguity in the word 'design'. It can be used in two ways: to mean (a) something like "pattern," such as the layout of a checker-board; or it can mean (b) something brought about, or intended to be brought about, by somebody or other who has a scheme, a plan - in short, a design. The argument would be flatly question-begging if, looking out at the Universe around you, you were to say, "obviously it has design," but meaning 'design' in the second sense. If we are to have a genuine argument here, we are entitled only to the term in its first sense. In that sense, we observe, looking out at the universe, that it has a certain pattern or structure, and we then go on to suggest that it could hardly have had such a thing if there were not some terribly clever Person to design it like that (and of course, to build it, having designed it).

That is a respectable argument, in form; the only thing wrong with it is that, alas, its major premise is false. That is to say: it simply is not true that the only thing that could

give an entity some structure or other is some minded entity who wanted it to be that way. So far as available evidence is concerned, some lovely regular structures, such as crystals, say, just grow, due to wholly mindless natural processes. Nature is lots of ways, and one of them is crystal lattices, and another is the double helix, and still another is... but you get the point. If somebody is going to maintain, nevertheless, that some feature or other of the world around us is such that Somebody must have existed to make it that way, he is simply going to have to do a lot better than that.

It can also be pointed out that the observable starry sky does not have a "regular design" to appearance. The stars look to be just scattered around at random. So our phenomena are not adequately characterized when it is said that they have "design:" some do, some do not.

What is needed is an argument of the following general type. We have here a phenomenon to be explained. The phenomenon is the existence of the observable world around us. This we can all see if we have but eyes to see - no problem. We will ignore, for example, the "skeptics," who doubt that we have any reason to believe that anything "really" exists. Now, skeptics are lots of fun, and it is good intellectual exercise to try to respond to skepticism, if one has the leisure for it - but we definitely do not, just now. So we will have to forego this pleasure, and assume that the skeptic is well off the mark.

Not only do we reject the general claim that there is actually no world around us at all; we actually know a fair amount about the place by now - all of which is available for purposes of arguments such as these. Now: the religious person is offering the existence of God as an explanation of all this. His argument, then, is of the general type, "Inference to the Best Explanation." Obviously this is a rubric that brings up lots of important questions, notably, What makes an explanation a good explanation? And while we can hardly get to the bottom of the matter, we must say a little about this.

Well, for one thing, an explanation has to explain. That is: the proposal, the hypothesis, put forward as doing the explaining has to be such that, once you understand the ideas put forward in the proposed explanation, and you understand the phenomenon to be explained, you can see how, yes, the things mentioned in the hypothesis would lead to the phenomena being the way they are. But, preferably, you would be able to say a bit more. After all, tons of candidates might be able to meet this first requirement. Much better, then, would be to be able to say that, really, there is hardly any competition: the other proposals just do not cut it by comparison. Or at least any other hypotheses we can think of that might explain them are just too klunky to bother with. Good hypotheses have, we think, a certain elegance.

The next thing is that, needless to say, your explanation had better be consistent with the facts. If it implies that things would be different from the way they are, then that hypothesis is out the window, at least until somebody can show that maybe the recalcitrant facts can be accounted for by some side hypothesis. Meanwhile, though, what we want is that all the things we know are consistent with this hypothesis, and then, in addition, there are things that seem pretty much to scream out for just this one.

So what about the God hypothesis? Well, it does seem to have elegance, and if it has it at all, has it in spades. I mean, we are going to explain this whole shebang, as it were, all this stupefying welter of stuff in the universe as we know it, sat a single stroke, as being the result of some one gigantic mind at work. How elegant can you get? In fact, that is something of a delusion, as we will shortly see. But for the moment, I am willing to allow that on the face of it, the God hypothesis looks pretty elegant. So what else has it got going for it?

Theistic "Explanation" is a Fake

Alas, this is where things begin to get tricky. In fact, I would have to say that that is literally the right word for it: the appearance that the God hypothesis explains the existence of the world around us, when you look it straight in the eye, suddenly turns into a phantasm. Here is why. If we are going to explain something or other by the suggestion that somebody made it that way, did something to bring it about in conformity with an antecedent plan, then we at least have to know (a) what the plan was, and (b) how he did it.

Now, there is ample reason for balking over the second requirement. How, we are entitled to ask, would an infinite being go about creating something out of nothing? The supporters of the God theory are not bothered by that question, because they think they can just say, "Well, who are we to know a thing like that? I mean, give us a break - God can do anything, right? By definition he can! So go away and do not bother me about that!" In fact, that response sweeps a lot of perfectly reasonable questions under the carpet. But let us allow the believer to get away with this, for the time being. For it is the other thing that should really bother us. Why would an infinitely intelligent being do this sort of thing anyway? What theists fail to appreciate in this regard is that if we are to suppose that we have a genuine explanation of the type we are all familiar with, we simply must have an answer to that, one involving understandable purposes as well as the equipment to achieve them. But alas, we do not. And that is not all. It is not just that we do not, but in fact we cannot.

Consider: what we are told is that things are the way they are because some very bright chap wanted them to be that way. But how do we know that? I mean, how do we know that this is the sort of thing an infinitely intelligent infinitely powerful being would do, as it were, in his spare time? Well, when you think about it, it shortly becomes obvious that we have not the foggiest, remotest shred of a notion on this point. In fact, this "explanation" turns out to be nothing of the sort: it is not an explanation at all; or rather, it is an account that needs at least as much explaining as what we are trying to account for with it. Which makes it a nonstarter as real explanations go. "Saying that the creativity of a Divine Mind "explains" the existence of the world is whistling in the dark."

It has been regarded by some, lately, as a serious question whether biology classroom teachers have to give "equal time," or any time at all, to the supposed hypothesis called "creationism." In fact, there is no problem. Why did us folks with two legs and one head and so on win out over those weird organisms they found over in Alberta? Answer; because God wanted them to! And how do we know he wanted them to? Where did the creationist get his hot line to God? That is to say: how do we know he is the sort of being who would

have wanted to make this sort of world instead of any other sort he could have had instead? The answer is: we do not! Instead, the creationist says, "Well, that is the kind he must have wanted, since that is what actually happened." A "hypothesis" like that is, of course, totally useless for the explanation of anything. No matter what happens, the creationist is all ready to say that God must have wanted it that way - no reason given, or even possible, as to why he would have, and consequently no way to predict what he will want next. An "explanation" that explains everything explains nothing. No conceivable guide to research can be supplied by entertaining such a "hypothesis." It is an explanation, a theory, only in name.

Explanations in terms of motives makes sense, and are useful, when we can have independent evidence that agents of the kind in question have the kind of motives in question. We can understand why Johnny shot the hostage: his life was threatened by the police, he thought this would pressure them into acceding to his demands, he was nervous... But we do not and cannot have God available at first hand to check out his motivational system. The premise that X is a superintelligent superpowerful being tells us nothing whatever, as yet, about what he might actually want to do with that fabulous equipment.

Negative Evidence?

Actually, to be sure, the preceding is overstated in one respect. For there is one feature of the Deity that one might have supposed would supply some kind of clue regarding the sort of universes he might be expected to create: being a "perfect," a supremely "good" being, one might be forgiven for expecting the universe, and in particular this little inhabited corner of it, to be a really top-quality item - maybe an earthly paradise, for starters. But, alas, those of us who might have entertained any such expectations soon have them dashed. Consider a little problem that has been afflicting theological circles for a long time. If you look around certain corners of the universe it is not only utterly unclear why an intelligent being would have wanted to create any such thing - so very like a Rube Goldberg machine, when you think of it - but, much worse yet, there is a fair amount about it that, one might have thought, an intelligent being claiming to be such a good guy on top of it would be downright embarrassed to have created. Malaria, for example, or Tay-Sachs syndrome, stuff like that. But theological philosophers are all ready to regale us, with stories about how God is just out to try our souls with a bit of evil to worry about, and so on.

In the end, what they say is this classic line: that "The Lord works in mysterious ways his wonders to achieve." Right on! So mysterious that even when we have got stuff that looks exactly like the stuff he is not supposed to want us to produce, it somehow still "fits." What do you know? But again, the proposed reconciliation makes crucial use of mysterious premises. Incomprehensibly enough to us mortals, there is some point in all this apparently senseless suffering after all. Only we do not know what it is! Do not, and cannot... Therefore, believe!

So, in short, if you are looking for a genuine explanation of anything, theology just is not where it is at. Once you have got your explanatory being at hand, then you are in a

position to attribute this or that particular result to his operation. But if you do not have him yet, and are trying to infer his existence from the way things you, you are in over your (and everyone else's) head.

Morality

To all of the above, I do want to add a quick footnote on a subject that I suspect is of great interest and, maybe, concern to a lot of people: namely, the relation between religion and morals. In fact, a lot of people think, I believe, that religion is somehow the "foundation" of morals. It is worth concluding this short excursion by pointing out that that, too, is an illusion, only a more serious one than the first one.

The basic reason why the hypothesis of a God cannot explain right and wrong is simple. As pointed out at the beginning, God is defined as a being who is, among other things, infinitely good. But this means that if we did not know what the term 'good' means already, independently of anything we might "get" from a theological story, then it would follow that we simply cannot discuss the subject: saying that "God is good" would mean absolutely nothing. On the other hand, if we do know that already - and, of course, we do - then it is impossible that we needed to have got it from God. It is the other way around. The hypothesis of a morally perfect being running the show is the hypothesis of somebody running the show the way we think it should be run. Well, how is that? You have to do your homework first before you can answer that; which means that you cannot know what God thinks about it until you have worked out the right idea yourself. In short, all of the genuine thinking about this has to be done outside of theology, since all it can do is build the results into its religious account.

The reason why it is right to do so-and-so cannot, in short, be that some infinitely wise being says we should do it. He would not be an infinitely wise being unless he had darn good reason for saying we should do so and so; and he cannot conceivably have better reason than that it is right. Yes, we know: but why is it right? What makes it so? Appealing to God for answers to that question is logically useless. When it comes to morals, God is a fifth wheel. Unfortunately, it is a wheel that has steered a great many people way down some very wrong tracks, so this is no fussy little abstract logical point.

Politics and Religion

It is perhaps in point to add, too, that the structure of most religions, including this one, is ideal for turning ordinary, normally intelligent people into slaves, or dupes. Mankind is continually reminded of its shortcomings - "original sin," general wickedness, and general incompetence ("little children"), bolstering the need for a great Nanny in the sky to do our thinking for us, and tell us what to do. Obedience is the cardinal virtue, thinking things through on your own viewed with disdain or horror. The setup sounds uncomfortably like fascism: What story could be more useful to aspiring dictators, after all, than one according to which those rulers are merely the agents of God - who, of course, is always right, n'est pas? And if the dictators are clerics, we have a theocracy in reality, though all supposedly subordinate to the mysterious but awesome Big Dictator in the sky. Indeed, the natural political outlook of any religion, including Christianity, is theocracy - from which we have been saved only by the fortunate fact of schism, which has been

unsurprisingly rampant in the history of that religion. There is surely room to ask, though, whether theocracy and dictatorship are the happiest political models to be impressing upon a gullible populace.

The habit of referring moral and political beliefs to a mysterious but powerful deity is among the worst there can be from the point of view of human peace, good will, and freedom. Nobody can say with a straight face that God is in favor of this, or that, or the other action, political goal, or policy in particular. Such claims cannot be rationally settled, if that is what they are founded on. And since the beliefs engendered are very firmly held, often fanatically because of their religious aura, when others are encountered who disagree, there is nothing to do but fight it out. The other guys must be evil, on the side of the devil; our guys are in the right; and we "know" this - but there is, of course, no way to demonstrate it to the others, who must simply take it "on faith." Which they will not do, naturally. So - out come the arrows and the cannons.

Resort to religious rationales for real-world policies is a dodge, and a vicious one. The religious story mesmerizes people into unthinking belief, and then, in too many cases, into fanatical action. Any set of supposed "beliefs" put forward for actions that coerce one's fellows, needs to be scrutinized and, if it is impossible to verify it in the public court of discussion, set aside as simply unsuitable for its purpose. Anyone may have all the religious beliefs he likes, but politicizing those beliefs is taking them out of one's own backyard, or church, and proposing to cram them down the throats of others who do not share that particular vision. Obviously this cannot be acceptable to those others. Obviously peaceable, mutually helpful human relations cannot issue from any such basis. It has taken people many centuries to learn that lesson, and there are many left who have not learned it. Fancying that religious stories have some kind of respectable epistemic status can only impede progress in this very important respect. Religious freedom is the only acceptable political stance concerning religion; anything else means, simply, divisiveness, war.

Religion and Reason

I will conclude by suggesting that the idea that you can actually have a reason, in the sober scientific or logical sense of that term, for believing in anything as far-out as the existence of God is, actually, a bit on the fantastic side. In the minds of the many people who believe such things, we have to say that religious hypotheses are myths - charming, sometimes profound as may be, and often emotionally compelling - but still, basically, myths. People believe them because it makes them comfortable, or perhaps because it makes them uncomfortable and they are neurotics who just do not feel right unless they are guilty about something; and so on... but whatever else, it is not because these stories have some genuine conceptual content that can do some honest intellectual work. They are just not in that ball park.

Now, I for my part am very grateful that Bach wrote the Mass in B Minor and that all those devout people built Chartres Cathedral, and so on. Religion gets a lot of points for things like that, even if it also has the embarrassment of being responsible for, or at least greatly abetting, many or perhaps most of the wars that have ever been fought in the

West in the Christian era. But to bring in such things is to change the subject from that of whether there is literally reason to accept some theistic hypothesis. So here I leave off.

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