DOES IT *MAKE SENSE* TO BELIEVE IN GOD?

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"I don't believe in God anymore," Gary (not his real name) said when I accompanied him during a recollection period as part of his school formation. It is difficult for him to logically reconcile the years of suffering and pain he and his family experienced, given the idea of a benevolent and caring God.

I was at a loss for words. Gary was clearly in pain. It seemed that the most reasonable thing to do at that moment was to make him feel that I was there to listen without dismissing what he was going through. Although I must admit, as a religious, I was initially tempted to preach about the existence of God. But a stronger inner calling invited me to empathize and desire to understand the depth of Gary's disbelief and the pain that led to it. Gary's disbelief *makes sense*.

As I reflect on Gary's struggle, it becomes apparent that his conclusion about God's existence mirrors a broader trend among today's younger generation. Research indicates that a significant portion of millennials and Gen Zers are departing from religion and belief in God for intellectual reasons or because they feel they have outgrown their faith.[1] Like Gary, they have encountered inconsistencies, contradictions, or compelling rational arguments that challenge their belief systems. These made them feel that their intellectual growth had pulled them away from their previous religious beliefs.

1. Aaron T. McLaughlin, Daryl R. Van Tongeren, Kelly Teahan, Don E. Davis, Kenneth G. Rice, and C. Nathan DeWall, "Who are the religious 'dones?': A cross-cultural latent profile analysis of formerly religious individuals" *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 14(4): 512–524. https://doi.org/10.1037/rel0000376.

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I was born in 1996 and share a generational identity with Gary, straddling the line between millennials and Gen Zers. My conscious and deliberate engagement with my Catholic faith was only fostered in college prompted by various opportunities, including involvement in college organizations. Despite this, my family did not prioritize religious practices in my upbringing. Without my experiences in college, my religious commitment would not be as profound today.

This pattern is not unique to me; it mirrors a wider trend among young adults nowadays. Many in my generation do not embrace religion, partly due to their upbringing. Compared to previous generations, parents of millennials and Gen Zers have been generally less proactive in fostering religious participation or modeling religious behaviors for their children.[2] This shift may stem from various factors, including the prevailing hyper-secular culture, materialistic influences, and a utilitarian mindset that prioritizes utility over spiritual beliefs. Consequently, many in my generation see little practical value in believing in, let alone worshipping, God.

As I explore the decline of belief within my generation, it is crucial to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon and remain receptive to various factors at play. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the two primary influences (mentioned earlier)—religious contradictions and social upbringing—may significantly shape the religious inclinations of young individuals today. Among these influences is the inclination to scrutinize the relevance and reasonableness of belief in a god. On this note, one cannot help but ponder: does it still ***make sense to believe in God?***

2. Daniel A. Cox "Generation Z and the Future of Faith in America." *The Survey Center on American Life* (2022), https://www.americansurveycenter.org/.

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Concerning the Question

In this synthesis paper, I aim to explore the question mentioned above. Before embarking on this exploration, I must first clarify some operational definitions. *What does "make sense" mean? What is "belief" in God? Who (or what) is "God?"*

When something *lacks sense* entirely, it appears nonsensical, disconnected from reality. But when something *makes sense*, it is comprehended , mainly when it is logically coherent. In other words, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, to make sense means to be *reasonable*[3] whether that refers to a person, a belief, an opinion, or a situation.

Immanuel Kant might argue that making sense involves organizing and interpreting knowledge coherently and rationally, guided by the principles of reason.[4] These definitions of making sense resonate more with the rationalist perspective, as they align with reason and logical coherence in understanding what makes sense. Yet, it is essential to recognize that Kant's philosophy does not end with rationalism. While he emphasizes reason, Kant also acknowledges the importance of sensory experience and empirical evidence, recognizing their inherent value. Nonetheless, his framework tends to rely on reason and logical coherence for its comprehensibility.

Gabriel Marcel expands the notion of *making sense* beyond the boundaries of reason. He argues that true meaning and understanding often emerge from encounters with others and a deep engagement with the *mysteries* of existence. Marcel offers a more holistic perspective that goes beyond the limitations of strict rationality, inviting individuals to explore the richness of human experience and the complexities of the

3. "Make sense," *Merriam-Webster Dictionary, Merriam-Webster.com*, 2024, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/.

4. Cf. Immanuel Kant, "Critique of Pure Reason."

human condition.[5] For him, there are other realms beyond mere reason and logical coherence when making sense.

Our exploration of *making sense* will initially stem from the perspective of reason. However, we will progressively deepen our approach to encompass alternative understandings of what it means to make sense, especially in the context of God's existence. Ultimately, our goal is to engage in philosophical inquiry and pursue an understanding of fundamental truths that transcend a single and limited perspective.

What exactly do we mean by "belief" in God? We must first differentiate between 'belief' and 'faith' to grasp this. Søren Kierkegaard distinguishes between the two: faith involves reliance, trust, and wholehearted commitment, while belief accepts something as true based on logic and empirical inference.[6]

Mark Wrathall, a philosophy professor at the University of Oxford, notes that while belief and faith are often deemed synonymous, they are distinct concepts.[7] However, they can coexist and complement each other.[8] In this paper, our exploration of belief aligns with the common understanding of acceptance based on logic and empirical inference. Nevertheless, we will also explore beyond this concept, recognizing the realm of mystery and faith.

Finally, what do we mean by "God?" Who is God, and what is God's relationship with us? This paper aims to explore various concepts of God and His implied relationship with us from

5. Cf. Gabriel Marcel, "Being and Having."

6. Z Quanbeck, "Kierkegaard on Belief and Credence," *European Journal of Philosophy*, https://philarchive.org/archive/QUAKOB-2.

7. From Simon Laraway, "Belief: Necessary or Not?" *Bringham Young Universtiy - College of Humanities.* https://hum.byu.edu/difference-between-faith-and-belief.

8. Ibid.

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different philosophical perspectives. Alongside these questions, we seek to address the question, *"Does it make sense to believe in God?"* with the guidance of the following inquiries: *Is it rational and logical to believe in God's existence? If not, do non-believers possess intellectual superiority over believers? Are believers merely fools and blind followers of religion? To what extent can human comprehension grasp the concept of God, and is this sufficient?*

God: Emanating from Our Human Needs

I have friends who identify as atheists and agnostics. During college, I encountered individuals who distanced themselves from religion because it was no longer reasonable to them. One friend, who, like me, was a Psychology major with a keen interest in Evolutionary Psychology, saw Charles Darwin's theory of evolution as sufficient to explain our belief in God. From this perspective, our inclination towards belief in a higher power arises from evolutionary adaptations for survival. To my friend, it *made sense* to abandon belief in God and anything supernatural, as these all seemed to emanate from our human need for survival.

Like Darwin and many other evolutionary thinkers, my friend subscribes to *naturalism*.[9] This viewpoint suggests that all phenomena, including religion, can be explained through natural processes without resorting to supernatural explanations. Belief in God and anything supernatural does not make sense because they cannot be tested or verified scientifically.

Renowned philosopher Daniel Dennett explores this naturalistic perspective in his article *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*. He introduces the concept of the *Hyperactive Agent Detection Device (HADD)*, a cognitive mechanism inherent

9. Cf. "Naturalism," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/naturalism/.

in humans and other animals.[10] This device predisposes us to detect agency in anything that moves and evokes awe or fear, eventually influencing how we interpret coincidental actions and their effects. This cognitive predisposition likely evolved as an adaptive trait to help our ancestors navigate a complex and often dangerous world.

Consider a scenario in which a community is facing an extended period of drought. As a member of this community, I notice the clouds gathering overhead. Desperate for rain, I attribute agency to a higher power responsible for natural phenomena. In this state of heightened sensitivity, any correlation between my actions and natural events (such as performing a specific ritual and coincidental rainfall) might reinforce my belief in a direct link between my actions and the weather. Over time, these associations can develop into superstitious beliefs, eventually evolving into the concept of gods controlling certain elements. I might then pray to a rain goddess, seeking her compassion to bring rain to the dry farmlands to ensure survival. Ultimately, these evolving beliefs culminate in the formation of formal religions, resembling those found in monotheistic faiths.

Dennett's observation is scientifically compelling. For him and many naturalists, God is perceived as nothing more than an illusion. The concept of God has emerged from our genetic and biological makeup and has been pragmatically helpful for our survival.

Another prominent figure who embraced this perspective is the renowned psychologist Sigmund Freud, known for his contributions to psychoanalysis. He believed that religion emerged from fundamental human psychological needs. He

10. From Daniel C. Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* (New York: Viking, 2006).

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portrays God as nothing more than an illusion born from our innate desires for security, comfort, and a sense of purpose.

In his book *The Future of an Illusion*, Freud suggests that humans have a primal longing to return to the safety and security of childhood.[11] In early childhood, we perceive our fathers as perfect guardians who provide us protection and security. However, as we mature, we recognize the imperfections of our protective figures, yet our innate yearning for security persists. In response to this yearning, we seek solace in the concept of God, viewing Him as a divine father figure who can shield us from anxiety and helplessness. In Freud's words, "God is nothing more than an exalted father."[12] For Freud, God serves as a *psychological coping mechanism*, providing believers with knowledge, consolation, and guidance to confront the harsh realities of adulthood.

Reflecting on Freud's psychological perspective, I must acknowledge that some form of coping mechanism somehow drove a part of my decision to embrace religion . It stems from my fear of death and subconscious desire to escape its inevitability. The prospect of becoming religious invokes a certain fantasy within me—a belief that I am somehow special and that death is not my ultimate end, in accordance with Catholic doctrine.

Embedded within my Catholic faith is the concept of heaven—an assurance of eternal life after death, a life free from pain and filled with peace alongside God. It has become evident to me that a part of my belief in God is a coping mechanism for my denial and fear of mortality. This struggle with mortality and religion is not unique to me; it is a shared

11. From Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. W. D. Robson-Scott (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1928).

12. Ibid.

human experience. The profound fear and avoidance of death often lead individuals to firmly adhere to "cultural worldviews," such as religious beliefs. This phenomenon has been substantiated by a study conducted by Mark Rubin in 2018 on the Terror Management Theory (TMT). The study sheds light on how the apprehension of death influences human cognition and behavior, particularly in fostering belief in God to manage *existential anxieties*.[13]

Reflecting thus far on scientific and naturalistic explanations, belief in God appears rooted in our biological needs and psychological mechanisms for *addressing survival needs* or *existential anxieties*. These scientific perspectives hold considerable sway over my generation, serving as the dominant figure in explaining what (or who) God is—"nothing more than an exalted father."[14] It reveals why believing in God, let alone adhering to a religion, may no longer make sense.

The inclination to this perspective is understandable. After all, the methods of naturalism and science stand out as one of the few things that *fulfill* our *natural craving for certainty*, particularly in this profoundly uncertain world.

However, I firmly believe that relying solely on naturalism and science to conclude God's existence may not make sense, as they are *inherently limited* in their ability to do so.

Firstly, it is *illogical* to conclude that the origin of a belief determines its truth value—a concept known as the *Genetic*

13. Mark Rubin, "Fear of Self-Annihilation and Existential Uncertainty as Predictors of Worldview Defense: Comparing Terror Management and Uncertainty Theories," *Journal of Social Psychology* 158, no. 3 (2018): 298–308, https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2017.1341375.

14. From Sigmund Freud. *The Future of an Illusion*. trans. W. D. Robson-Scott. *New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation* 1928.

Fallacy.[15] This fallacy occurs when someone argues that the origins of a belief determine whether it is true or not. For example, saying, "Because belief in God comes from human needs, God does not exist" is flawed. Why? Because the origin of belief cannot disprove (nor prove) the existence of God. So, recognizing that belief in God might come from human experiences does not mean that God does not exist. Moreover, is it possible that God could have utilized our human condition to help us comprehend Him?

Secondly, the dominant figure of science often reduces belief in God to its perspective, known as *scientism*. This ideology asserts that everything can be understood solely through science, disregarding the limitations of human intellect.[16] Relying solely on this *overlooks the complexity* of human experience and the potential for realities beyond empirical observation.

Claiming that science and human intellect alone can explain everything implies placing ourselves as ultimate authorities, akin to gods. This assertion is self-defeating because not everything is comprehensible through scientific framework or human understanding. Limiting everything to science may lead to bias and reductionism, forcing more complex phenomena into narrow scientific frameworks.

It is clear now that naturalism and science give us *a sense* of the motivations behind our beliefs in God. However, using them to deny God's existence is illogical and reductionistic.

15. Louis Catalan, "Religious Non Realism" (lecture, Loyola School of Theology, February 13, 2024).

16. Anthony Rizzi, "The Science before Science: The Grounding and Integration of the Modern Mind and Its Science." In *Reading the Cosmos*, edited by Giuseppe Butera (n.p.: American Maritain Association, 2011): 10, https://maritain.nd.edu/ama/Reading/.

God exceeds science and human intellect, being *that which nothing greater can be conceived.*

God: A Logical and Pragmatic Choice

When I think of God, I imagine someone who is all-powerful and all-knowing. Yet, according to St. Anselm of Canterbury, God surpasses even these grand attributes. Anselm believes that God is, by definition, the absolute best thing we can imagine—being *that which nothing greater can be conceived*.[17] He argues that God transcends human understanding, as any concept we conceive is inherently lesser than God. Yes, even the framework of science cannot fully and reductionistically capture the magnificence of God and all His qualities.

Anselm delves into the whole concept of God by pondering the difference between *existence in reality* and *existence in the mind.* He suggests that it is better for something to *exist in reality* and not only in our *minds*.[18] For instance, I am aiming for an A in my Philosophy class. It is way better for that A to be real, and not simply an idea in my head. Otherwise, I would just be fooling myself.

This principle applies even more profoundly to God. If God is to be *the greatest of greatest conceivable Being* (surpassing all other conceivable beings) then His existence must exist both in the realm of the mind and the realm of reality. To confine God's existence solely to mental conception would imply that other beings (existing in both the mind and reality, such as my Philosophy grade) could potentially surpass God in greatness. According to Anselm, this notion is inherently illogical, as

17. From *Monologion and Proslogion, with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*, trans. Thomas Williams.

18. Louis Catalan, "Ontological Argument" (lecture, Loyola School of Theology, February 20, 2024).

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it would undermine the very essence of God as the greatest conceivable existence. Simply put, it is illogical to say that God exists only in our minds.

Anselm's argument is known as the *Ontological Argument*. René Descartes presents a similar line of reasoning, asserting that the concept of God as a supremely perfect being inherently entails existence. Just as mountains and valleys are inseparable—both being "existents" in themselves, reliant on each other for existence—so too is the concept of *God* inseparable from *existence*.[19] Descartes contends that *existence* is a *necessary perfection*, and since God is the most perfect conceivable being, He must necessarily exist.

The ontological argument has encountered various counterarguments, including Gaunilo's *Lost Island* analogy[20] and Kant's assertion that real existence is not necessarily a predicate of God.[21] However, what is worth noting about it is its endeavor to provide a logical analysis of the concept of God's existence. It seeks to establish the existence of God through logical coherence, suggesting that *believing in God* does indeed *make sense*.

Not only is it logical to believe in God, but it is also *pragmatic*. Blaise Pascal offers a compelling argument for this. His famous argument, *Pascal's Wager* suggests that it is pragmatic to believe in God, even in the absence of irrefutable evidence.

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19. René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy" translated by Michael Moriarty (*Oxford University Press Inc*., New York, 2008) chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://personal.lse.ac.uk/ROBERT49/teaching/ph103/pdf/Descartes_1641Meditations.pdf.

20. Cf. Thomas Williams, trans. *Monologion and Proslogion, with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm*.

21. Louis Catalan, "Ontological Argument" (lecture, Loyola School of Theology, February 20, 2024).

This is because the potential benefits of belief outweigh the potential costs of disbelief.[22]

Pascal invites us to imagine someone deciding whether or not to believe in God. *Situation A*: If he believes in God and God does exist, he gains everything. He goes to heaven and experiences eternal happiness. *Situation B*: If he believes in God and God does not exist, he loses nothing. He simply lived believing in something untrue, but he has not lost anything tangible. *Situation C*: If he does not believe in God and God does exist, he loses everything. He will miss out on heaven and face eternal suffering or separation from God. *Situation D*: If he does not believe in God and God does not exist, he gains nothing. He simply lived without believing in anything supernatural, which is fine if there is no afterlife or divine consequences. The preferable choice is *Situation A*, suggesting that belief in God is a pragmatic decision.[23]

While it may seem logically satisfying to approach the existence of God through the lens of pragmatism and logical coherence, I find that there is still a *void* in my heart. It is just not enough. Both the ontological and pragmatic arguments present God in abstract terms, focusing on philosophical definitions and logical deductions rather than empirical phenomena.

In this case, who, then, is God? God is primarily an intellectual deduction or a rational justification rather than a tangible presence in our lives. St. Anselm coined the term "faith seeking understanding," implying that faith and belief are

22. Giuseppe Butera, "Introduction: The Philosophy of Nature is the Beginning of Wisdom," In *Reading the Cosmos*, edited by Giuseppe Butera (n.p.: American Maritain Association, 2011): 2. from https://maritain.nd.edu/ama/Reading/.

23. Butera, "Introduction: The Philosophy of Nature is the Beginning of Wisdom," 2.

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prerequisites to appreciate fully these deductive and abstract concepts of God. But what about individuals like Gary? What about the younger generation, who may need a strong foundation in belief and faith? Those who identify as agnostics? Indeed, while the deductive reasoning of Anselm or the pragmatic justification of Pascal may satisfy their logical inquiries, it may fall short of convincing them that believing in God truly makes sense in their personal lives.

Even as a believer, I am frankly unsatisfied with logical deduction and pragmatic justifications. Pascal's approach simply asks me to believe in God because the potential benefits of believing outweigh the potential costs of not believing. Somehow, God is mere utility or subjective usefulness. If this becomes my sole reason to believe, it may lead to a transactional relationship with God—lacking genuine connection and rooted only in my self-serving motives.

Indeed, the ontological argument inspires a certain awe toward God, seeing Him as the greatest imaginable being beyond human comprehension. However, it also makes Him feel somehow distant. God is described as *that than which nothing greater can be conceived*, entirely beyond human understanding and beyond reach in His greatness. This feeling of distance makes me grapple with the incomprehensibility of God. I wonder philosophically, as an agnostic might: *how is God, which is too immense to comprehend, different from no God at all?*[24]

24. Cf. Mark Geldard, "Why Study Philosophy of Religion?" *Themelios 9.3* (1984) chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://s3.amazonaws.com/tgc-documents/journal-issues/9.3_Geldard.pdf.

Glimpses of God

"Why is there something rather than nothing?" wondered Wilhelm Leibniz.[25] Why are we here instead of not here? Why does the Earth exist instead of being in a state of nothingness? And why does the universe exist instead of not existing at all? Leibniz suggests that there are no random or unexplained occurrences. Everything has a reason for existing or happening.

Leibniz's thoughts resonate with the phrase attributed to the Greek philosopher Parmenides, "ex nihilo nihil fit," which means *out of nothing, nothing comes*. It does not make sense for something to pop into existence without a cause. Thomas Aquinas asserts that every existing being has a prior cause that brought it into existence. Aquinas refers to these dependent beings as contingent (or possible) beings.[26]

I, for example, as a contingent being, exist not out of nothing but because of my parents. Mountains are not formed out of nothing, but because of the movement of the Earth's lithospheric plates. Stars do not exist from nothing; they form through stellar nucleosynthesis within nebulae. Every possible being is dependent on a prior cause that made it be. Out of nothing, nothing comes.

Now, it is easy for me to apply this concept of efficient cause to reachable things, but when I extend it to phenomena vastly larger than myself and the world I inhabit, I am filled with awe and humility. One such phenomenon is the *universe*. I am humanly challenged to comprehend that the vast and seemingly infinite universe is merely a contingent being – implying

25. Louis Catalan, "The Existence of God: St. Thomas Aquinas's Argument from Possibility to Necessity" (lecture, Loyola School of Theology, February 6, 2024).

26. Thomas Aquinas "Five Ways," trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (Saint Augustine's Press).

a prior cause. Like Aquinas, this notion naturally leads me to contemplate the ultimate cause—the genesis of everything and the driving force behind all causes.

To grasp the notion that the universe is a mere contingent being, let us use a language comprehensible to us: science. In 1912, astronomer Vesto Slipher first observed that galaxies were highly *redshifted*, indicating they were moving away from Earth.[27] A theoretical physicist, Georges Lemaître, furthered this understanding, concluding that the universe is expanding.[28] Lemaître suggests envisioning the cosmic clock running backward: galaxies move farther away as time progresses.[29] However, in the past, they were closer together. If we rewind time, everything in the universe converges into an incredibly dense entity—what Lemaître termed the *primeval atom*.[30]

The primeval atom originated as all its energy condensed into a tiny point. This dense point exploded with unimaginable force, generating matter and propelling it outward, ultimately forming the billions of galaxies in our vast universe. Astrophysicists coined this monumental explosion as *The Big Bang*.

While it is generally accepted that the primeval atom serves as the cause of the universe, this raises additional questions:

27. Chelsea Gohd "What is Dark Energy? Inside our accelerating, expanding Universe" *NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory* 2024 https://science.nasa.gov/universe/the-universe-is-expanding-faster-these-days-and-dark-energy-is-responsible-so-what-is-dark-energy/.

28. Simon Mitton. "The expanding universe of Georges Lemaître" *Astronomy & Geophysics*, Volume 58, Issue 2 (2017): Pages 2.28–2.31 https://doi.org/10.1093/astrogeo/atx060.

29. "The Big Bang, Cosmology, part 1: Crash Course Astronomy #42" [YouTube video, 13:22 mins] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9B7Ix2VQEGo.

30. Michael Ner E. Mariano, "Cosmology, Cosmogony, and the Big Bang Theory," (lecture, Loyola School of Theology, September 21, 2022).

What caused it, what caused that cause, and so on? Indeed, it did not arise from nothingness—*ex nihilo nihil fit*. In other words, the primeval atom is simply a contingent being, as is the series of phenomena that caused it—all dependent on prior causes for their existence. When viewed within a larger framework, we perceive an even more immense system of efficient causes, suggesting that the totality of this system might also be a contingent being, dependent on a prior being for its existence.

While we can endlessly question chains of prior causes, it may be counterproductive. It may be more logical to infer that a *necessary Being* exists beyond these laws, capable of initiating this seemingly infinite chain and immense system of causes without being subject to it. For Aquinas, this *absolutely necessary Being*, the uncaused cause, is *God*. God serves as the ultimate primordial cause for the existence of all contingent (or possible) beings.

For Gary and many of my generation who identify as agnostics and atheists, the word "God" may act as a trigger word, unconsciously sparking skepticism. However, they could at least agree that it makes sense to infer that an *absolutely necessary Being* can initiate this seemingly infinite chain of causes without being subject to it.

If there is anything worth acknowledging that does not seem to make sense, it is *life* itself—our existence and those around us. The probabilities involved are simply too vast to explain confidently the essence of certain phenomena leading to life. This is the sentiment I often find myself in when I reflect on the *Fine-Tuning theory*.[31]

Let us again seek the aid of science to explain this theory. In the 1960s, astronomer Carl Sagan outlined two criteria for

31. Cf. "Fine-Tuning," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/fine-tuning/.

https://publications.lst.edu/

a planet to support life: the *right kind of star* and *a planet at the right distance from it*.[32] Given the vast number of planets in the universe, scientists anticipated that billions would meet these criteria. This led to an optimistic expectation for finding extra-terrestrial life. This optimism led to the launch of a project called Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI), to listen for signals from outer space that might be signs of intelligent life.[33] However, as time passed, the anticipated signals failed to materialize, leaving SETI with profound silence.[34]

As our understanding of life and the universe has expanded, it has become apparent that far more factors are necessary for life to exist than initially thought. Sagan's initial two criteria expanded to include over a hundred parameters, each requiring precise alignment for life to flourish.[35]

This realization means that significantly fewer planets can support life than previously assumed.[36] As the parameters broaden, the stock of potential life-supporting planets decreases from billions to millions, from thousands to hundreds, and now potentially down to just one. Thus far, it is only Earth that possesses these more than a hundred

32. "What is the Habitable Zone or Goldilocks Zone?" *NASA* https://exoplanets.nasa.gov/faq/15/what-is-the-habitable-zone-or-goldilocks-zone/.

33. Carl Sagan and Frank Drake, "The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence," *Scientific America* (1997) https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-search-for-extraterre/.

34. Ian Crawford. "Where Are They?" *Scientific American* Vol. 283, No. 1 (2000): pg. 38-43 http://www.jstor.org/stable/26058784.

35. Tim Boyle, "Does Life Exist On Any Other Planet In The Universe? Another Look At SETI," *Kwansei Gakuin University, in Nishinomiya, Japan* https://www.konkyo.org/English/DoesLifeExistOnAnyOtherPlanetInTheUniverseAnotherLookAtSETI.

36. "Does Science Argue for or against God?," *Prager University* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjGPHF5A6Po.

parameters necessary for sustaining life;[37] parameters that other planets lack.

What is more impressive is that the fundamental forces governing the system of the universe are *finely tuned* to an incredible degree. Even the *extremely slightest changes* would make life impossible. For instance, scientists have found that gravity, electromagnetism, and the strong and weak nuclear forces were set within a fraction of a second after the Big Bang.[38] If the balance between gravity and electromagnetism had been different in the tiniest fraction of the tiniest inconceivable fraction, stars would not have formed.[39]

When one factors in all the other necessary conditions, the chances of the universe existing are unbelievably tiny. The universe itself is a miracle. The idea that this happened by chance is hard to grasp; it is like flipping a coin and getting heads ten quintillion times in a row.[40] This raises profound questions about the likelihood of life emerging by random chance, compared to Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

It is as if someone "fine-tuned" or designed this apparent miracle. Could this be glimpses of God or, to use a more inclusive term, a necessary Being? The cosmological and analogical (that is, the fine-tuning theory) argument may lead to a potential image of God as the sustainer of life, let alone the creator of it.

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37. Boyle, "Does Life Exist On Any Other Planet In The Universe?".

38. Simon Friederich, "Fine-Tuning," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2023 Edition, Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2023/entries/fine-tuning/.

39. "Does Science Argue for or against God?" *Prager University* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UjGPHF5A6Po.

40. Ibid.

At this juncture, it appears reasonable to assert that believing in God makes sense. This is supported by logical and pragmatic considerations and empirical glimpses that can be inferred through cosmological and analogical arguments (drawing upon data from cosmology and physics).

Contrary to the belief of many in my generation, the absence of belief in God does not necessarily equate to intellectual growth or superiority. Believers should not be dismissed as foolish; indeed, we can employ reason to support our belief and faith.

However, it is crucial to recognize that these assertions are human inferences contingent upon our cognitive abilities and the limitations of human intellect. Nevertheless, one might question: *Is reason alone* really *sufficient?*

God Beyond Reason

To reach a specific certainty, René Descartes doubted. He began by considering that many of his beliefs might be false.[41] Engaging in radical skepticism, Descartes questioned the validity of everything he had previously accepted as true. Ultimately, this introspection led him to the seminal conclusion that rationally validates our existence: *Cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am).[42]

Descartes' dedication to the pursuit of certainty echoes a fundamental human longing for assurance. We are creatures of certainty. We often seek what is certain, yearning for validation that is both reasonable and assured. Uncertainty is a threat to our human survival. Uncertainty challenges our ego

41. From René Descartes, "Meditations on First Philosophy," trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 2008)

42. Ibid.

and sense of superiority. As a result, we often seek refuge in comprehensible frameworks that offer certainty—rationalism, empiricism, scientism, naturalism, and many more.

I am not attempting to criticize the use of these human frameworks; they serve as valuable tools, guiding us to better understand and navigate our world and existence. They help fulfill our innate longing for certainty—a perfectly normal inclination. However, arriving at a conclusion that promotes an *absolute human framework* (or ideology) as the sole interpreter of reality raises concerns for me.

It is essential to apply a healthy skepticism, a degree of Descartes' doubt, toward these human frameworks. I emphasize "human" frameworks to highlight their inherent limitations. They are bound by our cognitive and emotional capacities, including logical reasoning and memory, which are inherently limited. They rely on language, which shapes and confines our thinking. And while language is a tool for communication and conceptualization, it can also limit our ability to articulate some ideas or concepts, particularly those that lie outside the scope of our linguistic framework. Again, human frameworks are inherently limited.

Søren Kierkegaard recognizes this, acknowledging the inability to provide solid rational evidence, especially concerning God's existence. Hence, for Kierkegaard, belief in God necessitates a leap of faith, a recognition that rational evidence alone may not suffice.[43]

A concept that challenges our obsession with certainty is *embracing mystery*. This term carries weight—it is almost perceived as a threat, a countercultural notion, a value that

43. Søren Kierkegaard, "Fear and Trembling," in *Selections from the Writings of Kierkegaard*, trans. L.M. (Hollander, Austin, Texas: University of Texas, 1912).

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does not make sense. Yet, we now understand that it holds significance, particularly when viewed through the lens of recognizing the inherent limitations of our human frameworks.

Gabriel Marcel embraces this realm of mystery and incomprehensibility. It is essential to clarify that he does not deny the significance of human frameworks or reason in comprehending God's existence. He acknowledges that a sufficient amount of it aids us in understanding our world and potentially grasping aspects of God. Such an approach is intrinsic to disciplines like science and philosophy, and it has been our method thus far in addressing the question, "Does it make sense to believe in God?" This may align with Marcel's *Primary Reflection* concept, which seeks to understand lived experiences through a certain level of abstraction and objectification.[44] However, he suggests that there is a deeper dimension beyond this level of engagement with God—he calls this *Secondary Reflection.*

Within this deeper dimension, one is invited to find personal meaning in belief in God, transcending mere reason. The secondary reflection is not about dissecting or analyzing; it is about integrating and unifying our personal experiences of the world.[45] While the primary reflection aids in objectively inferring the existence of God, dwelling solely at this level may constrain our understanding. The secondary reflection surpasses these limitations, urging us to reflect: " *Who is God for me ?*" Admittedly, this does *not easily make sense.*

Indeed, understanding secondary reflection can be challenging, but it is not abstract; it simply respects the realm of mystery inherent in our experiences. An analogy of this may be about how we relate with others, say, a loved one.

44. Gabriel Marcel, "Primary and Secondary Reflection: The Existential Fulcrum," with an interpretation by Manuel B. Dy Jr.

45. Ibid.

My knowledge of this loved one of mine can be analyzed and dissected through sets of objective categories (primary reflection): " She is a woman, she is a member of..., she is 28 years old, and so on." However, this set of categories is not enough for me to conclude or encapsulate my most accurate knowledge of this person. She becomes a mystery! Yes, she can be identified through these categories, yet she is also beyond them. Only my lived experience and direct encounter (secondary reflection) with her make me say, "I truly know her!" and sets of objective categories are not enough to encapsulate such depth of familiarity.

Marcel suggests that this understanding can be applied to our understanding or relationship with God. Who is God to me? How can I genuinely know Him? Is it enough to comprehend Him through a set of objective (logical) categories? Or is He a Being who partially reveals Himself through these categories, while simultaneously transcending them entirely? Perhaps, akin to relating with a loved one, genuine understanding of God comes through personal relationship and direct encounters, implying that God is ultimately a mystery.

Marcel also warns against our inherent inclination to possess, suggesting that our pursuit of certainty and articulation might be intertwined with this desire—the notion of "having" a particular idea or knowledge. He encourages us to avoid becoming overly fixated on "possessing" definitive explanations, as this can lead to a rigid adherence to our limited human understanding and frameworks. Let us not allow scientism, naturalism, rationalism, and empiricism to overshadow or diminish moments of deep transcendence, hope, and love. While these frameworks offer valuable guidance, they should not overshadow the profound and incomprehensible connections we experience with others and with God.

Conclusion

In the realm of reason, ***believing in God makes sense.*** Such belief is supported by logical and pragmatic considerations and empirical glimpses inferred through cosmological and analogical arguments. Believers should not be dismissed as foolish; we can use reason to support our faith.

Contrary to the prevailing belief among many in my generation, the absence of belief in God does not necessarily signify intellectual growth or superiority. The human frameworks that non-believers often adhere to, which they consider sufficient to conclude the absence of God, are inherently limited. One might argue that it sometimes requires even more faith for non-believers to maintain their stance than believers.

In the realm of mystery, I go back to my encounter with Gary. Words and reason seem inadequate to reconcile Gary's relationship with God, particularly in light of the deep pain he and his family have endured. I hesitate to categorize him simply as a non-believer, sensing there is a deeper truth behind his perspective. At a certain point, I realized that it becomes less about convincing Gary that it still makes sense to believe in God, but rather more about simply being present for him.

"Tell me more about it, Gary. I am here to listen and offer support in any way I can," or "Gary, your experiences are really difficult, and I can only imagine the pain you are experiencing now. Know that I am here for you." In these moments of presence, I hold faith that within and beyond my encounter with Gary, as well as his encounter with me, lies the presence of a Being who is beyond us yet remains intimately involved with us, guiding us through the complexity of this uncertain world.

And as I dive deeper into this manner of *presence-ing* with Gary and him to me, it is slowly making sense to me that perhaps

beneath his conclusion "I don't believe in God anymore," lies ***a deep longing for God.***