

Critique of Father Herbert McCabe OP the greatest modern theologian on the question of the creator

WHY IS THERE ANYTHING RATHER THAN NOTHING? ANSWER: GOD

It is clear that we reach out to, but do not reach, an answer to our ultimate question, how come anything instead of nothing? But we are able to exclude some answers. If God is whatever answers our question, how come everything? then evidently he is not to be included amongst everything. God cannot be a thing, an existent among others. It is not possible that God and the universe should add up to make two. Again, if we are to speak of God as causing the existence of everything, it is clear that we must not mean that he makes the universe out of anything. Whatever creation means it is not a process of making.

REPLY: People talk about creation out of nothing but it is better to word what they are trying to say as, "Creation not out of anything". It is clearer.

Creation by God from "not from anything" means that where there was 0 there is now 1. It does not mean 0 was turned into 1.

This is very important. It means that though something cannot just pop into existence it can if there is a God to cause it to pop. But that is contradictory.

McCabe denies that God really makes all things. He creates them. Making implies that nothing is turned into something making nothing a kind of material out of which anything is made. God does not really make all things because making implies that he is using nothing or something or himself to make the universe.

He says that God creating all things does not add to anything. In other words, God and the universe make 1 not 2. God alone and no universe still makes 1. If God and the universe do not make 2 then we see the contradiction in the notion of creation.

McCabe says that the doctrine of creation is best understood as saying that all things depend on God 100% to exist and to function.

It is interesting how the question is never "Is love behind the existence of all things?" It is never that question even for Christians. They still pretend that the "how come?" is a religious, not scientific, question. But it is not religious in itself. It is a secular question. What right have they to tell science what it should not and cannot discover? This arrogance is at the root of their faith.

McCabe makes God as the answer to why is there anything rather than nothing central to everything in life and religion. He says that we don't know what the answer is in the sense that we cannot really know God except as a mystery. He denies that we don't know in the sense that the answer could be anything or even something totally unlike any God. He means that God is the answer and we don't know what God is. This is a trick with words. The answer being a mystery does not mean that the mystery is God. McCabe says God is a mystery and it is very hard to sufficiently know what God actually means. He should just say that the answer to the question is that it is a mystery. It is cheating to define God as a mystery and then to say that this means God is the answer. If it is a mystery the mystery might be God or it might not be. To argue, "The answer is that it is a mystery therefore it is God" is an argument from ignorance and pretending to know what you don't know.

Suppose a creating God is logical. Such a God could create a grain of dirt and nothing else. It would have no purpose. But he could create it. The real answer to the question of why anything instead of nothing for the religionist is, "God just decided to create and that is all there is to it". That is not the answer religion wants to hear.

In his book God Matters, McCabe considers the dog Fido. Why does Fido exist instead of nothing? He then says to ask that

is to implicitly ask why everything else exists too. To ask why Fido exists is to put him in the context of the entire universe. So it becomes the God-question. McCabe says it becomes a question about why anything exists thus it is a God question for only God seems to be the answer. For McCabe it is not how the universe exists that is the mystery but that it exists.

McCabe talks about Fido the dog. He says the question is not "Why does this dog exist and not another?" The question is not why do we have Fido the dog and not Fido the giraffe? The question is why Fido instead of nothing. This is clearly saying Fido does not have a purpose. He is just made by God and that is all.

Why not ask why is there free will when there could have been none? Religion says we exist because we are meant to have a relationship with God. Even if we go out of existence at death that is still what God wants. The notion of being created by God for God does not necessarily imply we have eternal life because God might have a reason why we have to be eliminated at death. If you knew your baby was only going to survive for a day you would still have it. If we have free will so that we can use it to connect to God and achieve the purpose for which we exist which is supposedly then it is more important to ask why free will exists instead of there being no free will than it is to ask why there is something rather than nothing. If God is a mystery it follows that you cannot be dogmatic about there being a life after death. To embrace a mystery and then trimming it is not embracing a mystery at all. It is falling into the idolatry that McCabe warns against.

Religion says the question why something why not nothing is about asking what the meaning of life is. It is not. Asking why have we free will instead of having no free will is the question that asks that. Religion does not like that question because there is no evidence for free will. Free will is only popular opinion. And if we are not sure if we have free will, we cannot know if our reasoning about God and the supernatural is right. If we have no free will, wrong ideas are soon refuted by experience and that programs us to rethink and accept what we have learned. But in relation to God and the supernatural, we have no such bolt out of the blue to make us conform to reality.

McCabe says what matters is that the universe exists not how it exists. In fact if a God cannot create the universe then the how is important not the that. McCabe is reasoning, "There is a universe so God must have created it." The question is, "Can God create?" That is about the how. Zoe is found dead in the kitchen with a knife in her heart. She couldn't have done it herself and nobody could have got in. So you must ask how the knife ended up in her heart. You don't reason, "She has a knife in her heart so somebody killed her."

The believer ignores the how and says we don't know for we cannot understand the supernatural. The believer says that the universe was made miraculously. That is like saying that because you don't know Zoe ended up dead that a witch with magical powers may have done it. It is a cop-out.

If the how is not a mystery or like a miracle, then what do we want to believe in God for? It would follow that there is nothing remarkable then that the universe exists.

To anybody who wonders why God exists rather than nothing, McCabe says that though our logical laws don't cover that issue, there are logical laws we know nothing about. So for some reason God not existing is impossible. Only God understands it. God simply has to exist for the same reason that 1 has to be 1.

Is it logical to use arguments like that? Is it rational to say that there are laws of reason nobody on earth can know anything about? No.

Suppose our logical thinking tells us, "There must be a God who created all things". Why not say, "That is what our logic tells us. But there could be logical laws we know nothing about or cannot think of. Our thinking is necessarily limited because we are merely human no matter how smart we are. Thus it could be logically impossible for there to be a God though logic from our perspective says different"?

Rational people deny that there could be some undetectable logic. To affirm that there could be casts doubt on our logic. What if there is a law that shows that our reasoning that 2 and 2 are 4 is wrong? If logic cannot tell us that 1 and 1 is 2 then it is no good at all. If the concept of God demands that there is some logical reason we will never grasp why God has to exist and why his non-existence is illogical or logically impossible then the concept is incoherent and contrary to our logic. It makes our logic useless.

What is the lesser evil?

Supposing that there might be a higher logic that shows God must exist.

or

Supposing that there might be a higher logic that shows God cannot exist.

Neither is logical. God is a very big claim that you cannot make lightly. So if you are going to be irrational, it is worse if you are irrational in order to believe in God than not to believe. Assuming God does not exist is better for even you are wrong, God should still be able to work in you and do good through you for he should be bigger than your errors.

In fact supposing that there is no such higher logic is the best option.

At least McCabe is not saying that our logic shows that God must exist. He has to admit that he could be wrong to assume that some kind of logic that is beyond our grasp shows why God must exist. He doesn't know so maybe there is no such logic at all! There is in fact no reason to believe there is. The matter only arises for those who want to believe in God in the sense that McCabe understands God as the infinite creator and source of all things.

McCabe: "God is not first of all our creator or any kind of maker, he is love, and his life is not like the life of the worker or artist but of lovers wasting time with each other uselessly. It is into this worthless activity that we enter in prayer. This, in the end, is what makes sense of it." (225). So for McCabe the question of why anything rather than nothing is used in religion to propel people towards seeking meaning in life. But the inconsistent McCabe also says that it is in the worthlessness and ultimate uselessness of existence that we feel it ends up making sense. This is nothing more than the atheist principle that if life is useless we can still feel it is useful and enjoy it.

Prayer as in forming a relationship with God helps facilitate this process according to McCabe. Prayer is being conscious of our total dependency on God. This idea denies that prayer is necessarily talking to God or singing psalms or Masses or whatever. McCabe says it is okay to ask God for anything you want as long as it is seeing that you need God 100% for anything. But surely if anything arouses the feeling of meaning prayer is not an essential? McCabe makes out it is and that is dangerous for many people for prayer is not what is going to work for them.

Perhaps McCabe is giving us a paradox. Perhaps it shows he should not object to atheists who say life is useless and it is up to us to make it feel useful.

The notion that God matters because God is love is really saying that it is love that matters and love just happens to be God. But if God is love, then surely the atheist who loves is finding meaning in life through loving? Surely you don't need faith in God in order to have meaning in life?

Consider these two ideas about your existence.

#Existence is ultimately useless. It does not matter about the ultimate value of my life. There is no such value.

#Yet I can make my existence useful enough for me to want to stay alive. It is up to me to bestow enough value on my life

If you can only have one or the other, then clearly the second item on the menu, the decision to make your life feel important enough to you is the one to go for.

In fact, unless you start off with what YOU are going to do to give value to your life there is NO point in worrying about ultimate value. Ultimate value will mean nothing to you and people telling you it should will only damage you.

Most religion claims to offer you a way to achieve the ultimate purpose of your life. Such religion might feel good but is fundamentally cheating you.

