

Geoffrey Berg: Summaries of his Six Arguments against the Existence of God

Six Ways of Atheism "Refuted"

<http://www.christianapologeticsalliance.com/2012/09/22/six-ways-of-atheism-answered/>

Geoffrey Berg, The Six Ways of Atheism (2009).

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Six-Ways-Atheism-Disproofs/dp/0954395662>

Note: Argument summaries have been written by Mr Berg

These are six new arguments against the existence of God presented by Geoffrey Berg in his book the Six Ways of Atheism. Not all of them are meant to be understood as disproofs of God but merely proofs that we should consider God's existence unlikely.

Argument 1: The Aggregate of Qualities Argument

1. If God exists, God must necessarily possess all of several remarkable qualities (including supreme goodness, omnipotence, immortality, omniscience, ultimate creator, purpose giver).
2. Every one of these qualities may not exist in any one entity and if any such quality does exist it exists in few entities or in some cases (e.g. omnipotence, ultimate creator) in at most one entity.
3. Therefore it is highly unlikely any entity would possess even one of these qualities.
4. There is an infinitesimal chance that any one entity (given the almost infinite number of entities in the Universe) might possess the combination of even some two of these qualities, let alone all of them.
5. In statistical analysis a merely hypothetical infinitesimal chance can in effect be treated as the no chance to which it approximates so very closely.
6. Therefore as there is statistically such an infinitesimal chance of any entity possessing, as God would have to do, all God's essential qualities in combination it can be said for all practical and statistical purposes that God just does not exist.

MY COMMENT:

Berg is saying that statistically it is virtually impossible or close to it for God by coincidence to have all the infinite powers. Religion answers that God has these powers by default and it is not like he has the powers by chance. Religion says God is utterly simple and is non-material and is not an entity but the source of all entities. This seems to prove that Berg is criticising the wrong view of God.

Let us take it for granted that religion is right. It follows then that this argument only explains the infinite powers God needs. If God has infinite powers he does not need then clearly Berg has a point. If God has infinite capabilities that he can do without then Berg is correct.

Let us work out the properties that the creator does not need to have. It does not need to be alive. It does not need to be conscious. We are to believe that God is infinite life and infinite consciousness. Anything else might be like God but it is not God and not to be worshipped. But that is only a religious demand. It is nothing other than the stupid, "We want a God who is alive like us. Therefore such a God exists."

If there is a creator and it is an it, this creator despite its infinite power cannot be worshipped. It is not God in the religious sense. God in the religious sense is indeed too good to be real.

Argument 2: The Man and God Comprehension Gulf Argument

1. Man is finite (in time, space and power etc).
2. God if he exists is infinite (in time, space and power etc).

3. Therefore mankind cannot possibly recognise God or even know that God exists.

MY COMMENT:

You can know something exists without understanding it. We don't understand how we are conscious beings for example. Is that enough to prove God does not exist? No.

Berg wrote that we see all those different entities in the universe. He says that if we have an experience of God, this experience is more likely to be the experience of a deceiving spirit pretending to be God. As we tend to worship a version of God that suits ourselves the experience is more likely to come from ourselves than God.

Argument 2 needs to be edited as follows:

1. Man is finite (in time, space and power etc).

2. God if he exists is infinite (in time, space and power etc).

3. Man cannot comprehend God.

4. We know that there is a bigger chance of encountering deceiving psychological forces or paranormal ones than there is of encountering God. If man cannot comprehend God man is more likely to worship a version of God in the place of the real God.

5. We know that our imagination and maybe paranormal forces will pretend to be good and pretend to be God.

6. Therefore it is improbable that anybody really knows God or recognises God.

If adoring a God who is in our head only happens too much it is an indication that God probably might not exist for a God would want a relationship with us.

We can only experience a being with intelligence. We cannot know if its intelligence is finite - in which case it is not God - or if its intelligence is infinite in which case it is God. Therefore we only assume that the being we experience is God.

We may say that in everyday life we take things on trust and so if we have an experience purportedly of God we should take it as an experience of God. But our trust in matters of our daily life is based on experience. We know we should do it. We have reasons for doing it. We don't know enough about experiences of God and they are too opaque and rare to base trust on. It is a different situation.

If God is real and he is good and this goodness is his primary quality, then it follows that the nearest we can get to knowing him is by recognising goodness and finding it in our hearts. Miracles and religious experiences and scriptures cannot substitute for that. We should not be looking for or depending on mystical experiences. Even then we are knowing him indirectly. Why? Because God and goodness are not the same thing. Good is not good because God says it is good. It is good because it is good. The risk of psychological projection would be extremely high. We could be confusing our own ideas about good with God.

Christians will say that mystics know God and we should take their word for it that they do. They say that we take it for granted that many things we are told every day are true so we should assume God is true. Mystics disagree with one another and there is no scarcity of mystics who talk about their experience but show no sign of a changed life.

Berg notes that believers will say the argument does not refute the existence of God for it merely exposes the human incapacity to understand. True. But if God has made us in such a way that we tend to worship mental idols of him rather than him then we should agree that if a person has an experience of God that the experience is probably not of God at all.

Berg says we would recognise that a cruel and nasty being could not be God (page 57). The trouble is, once you say a good God is forced to allow evil for he needs it for a good and justifiable reason, God could try to come across and evil and nasty but we would never be able to tell if he really is evil and nasty. There is no way to tell when it is Satan or God. Instead of recognising this God as good, believers trust. This kind of trust is telling yourself he is good. How could that please him for it is not about seeing and celebrating his goodness?

To conclude, the argument is incomplete. If you observe how few people really care about any real God that is out there it shows you cannot argue, "Enough people report an experience of God which indicates there might be a God." The

argument when fixed succeeds in telling us that there no reason to believe.

Argument 3: The 'God Has No Explanatory Value' Argument

1. God if he exists must be the ultimate being and provide the answer to all our ultimate questions - otherwise he is not really God.
2. Yet even supposing as a hypothesis that God exists the questions that God was supposed to finally answer still remain (though in some cases God is substituted in the question for the Universe).
3. Therefore hypothesising God's existence is only unnecessarily adding an extra stage to such problems and has no real explanatory value.
4. Therefore according to Logic (Occam's Razor Law - 'that entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity') we should not postulate God's existence and there is no adequate reason to suppose that God exists.
5. Therefore we should suppose that God does not exist.

MY COMMENT:

This is a disproof of the rationality of believing in God not God.

If we need a creator to explain creation, that creator may not be a living conscious force. Thus we have no need to call it God.

If God is 1 then it is 1 if there is no universe created.

God creates. Religion says it is still 1. Creation adds nothing. It is not God + Creation = 2. This shows that they are in fact claiming that the creation popped into existence because God told it to. It did not come from anything not even God's power. This is magic pure and simple. The absurdity of creation is an absolutely certain proof that God does not exist.

God is supposed to have made the powers of chance. Chance would mean that what is outside anybody's control. If God controls chance then chance does not exist. We would then be all fatalists - a dangerous belief that nobody wants to advocate. (The concept of God goes logically with the fatalistic doctrine of predestination. The true believer holds that God causes all things and we sin not in spite of him but because of him. This is fatalism.) It follows then that God could have used chance to create the universe meaning we cannot say the creation indicates that there must be a God. We can at best say we don't know one way or the other. Even if it popped out of nothing we cannot prove he had nothing to do with it. It would follow that creation does nothing at all to help us believe or disbelieve. God explains nothing.

Berg mentions an objection that God's may still exist even if he has no value for us as an explanation for anything.

Supporters of the objection are insisting that it is like the case where a person is seen burning a house. You don't know why he did it but that is not needed to explain how the fire happened. But their argument implies that instead of believing in God we can have the opinion that he exists. There is no need for religion if opinion suffices or is all we can manage.

Christians say that Berg's argument is disproved by the fact that God's existence explains God's existence. He is the reason for his own existence. But this is not an explanation to us. God might understand it but we don't. To us it is words and mystery.

Berg mentions that believers say that Occam's Razor is right but it only applies in the material universe and not to God.

They say that God is undetectable by science and science uses the razor so it has nothing to do with God. Sounds like they are doing a Joseph Smith here! "Oh I have a magical golden book but I cannot show it to you for an angel took it away."

Berg states that the believers will hold that the argument does not render God's existence less believable. He is well aware of the intransigence of believers.

Argument 4: The 'This Is Not The Best Possible World' Argument

1. God if he exists must be omnipotent, supremely good and our ultimate creator.
2. Therefore an existent God (being supremely good and competent) would have created the best possible world (if he created anything).

3. As the world is inconsistent (between ages and people) it cannot all be the best possible world.

4. Therefore as the world is not the best possible world, God cannot exist.

MY COMMENT: The world being worse at certain times and being better at others does not prove that it is not the best possible world. The best possible world concept is a general one. It takes in the whole picture. We don't have that picture.

Pain and suffering are not exactly the same thing. You can feel your existence is worthwhile to whatever degree if you have pain. Suffering is a form of pain that makes you feel your existence is not worth it. If God can allow pain, it does not follow that he can allow suffering. Suffering would mean he has given us the faculty to feel that our lives are useless and that if he has a purpose for us it means nothing for us.

I should look at my own experience. Do I suffer? Do I suffer?

Suffering is the experience of meaningless existence - it is experiencing something that tells you you should not be happy or alive.

If a person experiences meaningless existence it is harassment to tell them their life has meaning and that God cares. It is virtually dismissing their experience. Suffering would be a stronger experience that there is no God than any alleged religious experience that seems more benevolent and desirable. What gives you the right to claim that suffering can agree with the loving care of an all-powerful God? You can't know how another person suffers so how dare you say their suffering does not refute God. If you said, "Annie was abused by her father. But she should see this does not disprove his love for her" you would rightly be seen as a do-gooder and a hypocrite. Why? Because you don't know what it was like for her. And so it is with God and suffering people. Suffering is far better at disproving God than an imperfect world is.

Argument 5: The Universal Uncertainty Argument

1. An uncertain God is a contradiction in terms.

2. Everything in the Universe must be fundamentally uncertain about its own relationship to the Universe as a whole because there is no way of attaining such certainty.

3. Therefore even an entity with all God's other qualities cannot have the final quality of certain knowledge concerning its own relationship to the Universe as a whole.

4. Therefore God cannot exist because even any potential God cannot know for sure that it is God.

MY COMMENT:

If the argument is correct, then it shows that we have the right to oppose things that God may reveal to us for we might know better or be entitled to think we might know better.

The Christian answer to the argument is that God to be God would have to be creator and a creator would know his creation completely. But that assumes that creation by God is coherent. It is in fact rubbish.

Another answer is that the argument only applies to a God who is seen as part of the universe instead of the reason it exists.

God didn't create himself we are told. We are told he just exists. I am me and even I cannot know me 100%. Does God know himself? Its doubtful.

God can know he exists 100% but he cannot equally be sure that he is God. In the same way, I know 100% that I exist now. I can't be as sure that I existed a minute ago or will exist in a moment's time. If I am an accountant I may be dreaming that I am an accountant or taking part in some experiment that simulates reality. So the only thing I can know is that I exist. When I speak of knowing other things, I don't mean I am 100% certain but have justified beliefs that may be wrong. Belief is not certainty. I am sure I exist because I experience it. I know I experience other things but I cannot know if these experiences are telling me the truth. The reason is that I am me and the experiences are not me. It is impossible for God to know anything 100% apart from that he is conscious. He cannot know that he is God. This argument was left out of Berg's book - sadly.

God has infinite knowledge. But this is impossible. If God has believes then God is not omniscient. The concept of God is incoherent.

Some insane people are convinced their experience tells them they are God. This proves that God cannot know he is God.

Mystics in Hinduism report an experience in which they "discover" that they are God. They have an experience in which they think time stops and they experience what it is like to live outside time like God does. But the fact that they are still uncertain about many things proves that if they are God then God is indeed uncertain and is not really God!

God might have to use logic to work out that he is all-powerful and so on. Why can't he implant that logic in us?

Berg on page 139 analyses what believers mean when they say God knows all things. Believers mean that God knows all that it is logically possible to know. He cannot for example know who the seventh wife of Henry VIII was for she didn't exist. He only knows what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen. He cannot know what the world would be like if $2 + 2 = 5$. They mean that he has infinite and unlimited knowledge of what is real or will be real or has been real.

I would link this doctrine of God's all-knowledge to creation. If God can make something out of nothing then surely he can know who Henry VIII's seventh wife was? Doing something with nothing is harder than knowing something that never actually happened. If he can't do one he can't do the other.

Turning a circle into a square circle is absurd. But it is not as bad as saying nothing can be turned into something. At least with the circle there is something there in the first place to change.

People prefer to court the emotional and irrational than the rational. If God really made us in his image it would be the other way around. We would be more rational and a better image of a rational God than what we are.

Note: God to be God must know all things. But no conscious being can know anything in the literal sense apart from the fact that it exists. God cannot exist because God cannot know for sure that it is God.

Argument 6: The 'Some Of God's Defining Qualities Cannot Exist' Argument

1. God must have certain characteristic qualities (such as providing purpose to life), otherwise he would not be God.
2. But it is impossible for any entity to possess some of these qualities (such as providing purpose to life since we can find no real purpose and therefore we in practice have no ultimate purpose to our lives) that are essential to God.
3. Therefore since some of God's essential qualities (such as being the purpose provider to life) cannot possibly exist in any entity, God cannot exist.

MY COMMENT: We all create our own sense of meaning in life. I believe that purpose is gained by living for pleasure up to a point, procreating and helping others.

Could God create a universe in which he does not intend to provide our lives with a sense of purpose that depends on him and belief in him? Yes because if he is infinite love then he matters not us. Our purpose is to serve him and not to be happy. If God put us here to be happy then why is it that if we try to be happy we end up feeling dissatisfied? Why is happiness something you have to let happen to you as opposed to working on it?

The fact that I know I exist 100% means I should put me first and not God. As you cannot help others unless you start with helping yourself there is nothing dangerous in this principle. It only proves that a God who claims absolute rights to tell me what to do does not have such rights at all assuming there is a God. It demands that one repudiate the view that God comes first and that religion matters.

Argument 6 is only of value for people who think its God's job to make them feel their lives are worthwhile.

OVERALL COMMENT:

Berg rejects the psychological disproofs of God because even if believers are just worshipping a projection or externalisation of their own needs there might be a God. True. But even if there is a God, he does not want to be God over us. He has left us worshipping a semblance of him that we have created ourselves.

The most important arguments are the ones that show we owe no obedience to God. I'd be happy with proofs that even if there is a God he has no rights over us or has given them up. Practical atheism, living as if there is no God, is the most important atheism of all.

Berg should have considered the definition of God a bit more. God is supposed to be an essence that is not made of parts. All books debunking God should start with this. When we see the word essence in relation in this context we think of God as being a gas that fills the universe and which has no parts.

Believers in God always work from the idea that God is an utterly simple essence. If somebody says, who made God they reply that he was so simple that he didn't need a maker.

A God that is so simple cannot be a mind. A grain of sand is more complex than God. It can't think or reason. So why should we believe that God can do it?

The Christians can't explain how God can be a mind. What they do is they work out that there must be a simple essence and because the universe is apparently designed that this essence made it and designed it. That is like reasoning that there was always one grain of sand. It made the universe and designed it therefore it is intelligent. But that logic is clearly wrong. The creation of the universe and its seeming design do not prove that the grain of sand really has those properties.

The believers are smuggling assumptions in. They are unfair and biased. Until they can explain how a simple essence can have intelligence and know all things and be conscious or do an experiment that proves it they are merely depending on opinions and guesses and dressing it up as faith. Faith is bigger and better than mere opinion or guessing.

You can't ask people to adopt the opinion that there is a God and expect them to take him seriously. That is mad not to mention unfair and bigoted.

Believers in God feel Berg failed to understand that God is transcendent - he is not a thing in the universe. His book certainly refutes the Mormon God who is merely an exalted man.

If you assert that there is a God, then it is up to you to provide evidence for it and to deal with the evidence against it if any. If you assert that there is no God, you don't have to look for evidence that there is no God. You don't look for evidence that there is no tooth fairy. You just assert she doesn't exist.

It is far easier generally to disprove a theory or doctrine than to prove it.

The book needs to say this.

The book is a little too logical. I think books defending atheism need to stir up people's emotions to make them feel revulsion for God. As long as the feelings are provoked by logic there is nothing wrong with them.

Here is an example. There is something revolting about a pampered priest or monk stating during some natural disaster that befalls other nations that God has a good purpose for it and knows what he is doing.

The humility of God believers is false. They zone in on their inner needs and feelings and imagine that these are God. They assume that prayer works when they get the things they asked for and they forget and excuse the times they did not get what they prayed for. They pretend that they have evidence that it is effective. They just care about what they want to be true not what is true!

Prayer is obnoxious.

And so is belief in God. Berg did a great job.