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There Is No Scientific Evidence That God Exists

You're right. But we don't need scientific evidence to suggest that something exists. In fact, I have no evidence that you exist, but I wrote this book anyway. OK, you could argue that I knew that *atheists* exist and, therefore, I wrote this book, hoping they would read it. Again you're right.

But think how often you make decisions without scientific evidence. The morning meteorologist says there is a 60 percent chance of rain today, so you grab your umbrella on the way out the door. "But meteorology is a branch of science," you correctly argue. Did you consider that the person reading the weather on the local news probably majored in journalism, hoping to become a famous news anchor, but got hired instead by local station KRUD and had to start his career by reading the weather report? He may not be a meteorologist at all, so why are you carrying that umbrella? And since you don't have the weather report in your hand, you lack scientific evidence for your behavior.

Or perhaps you see a flyer announcing a concert in the park on Thursday evening, so you make plans to attend. You ask a friend to join you. What scientific evidence do you have supporting the validity of the flyer? Do you know its author? Have you established a pattern that all such flyers announce real concerts?

And what about a restaurant recommendation from friends? When they say you should try the new place because the food is great, what is scientific about that process? It's completely subjective and unscientific. Every day we make decisions and choices that are without scientific bases. These often are decisions that significantly affect our lives.

In fact, there are three valid ways of looking at the world, the scientific approach being one of them. This is called *empiricism*. The empiricist says that only the things we can perceive with the senses are real. Everything else is imaginary. For example, from an empirical perspective, I use my eyes to verify that the computer in front of me is real. As I write in this coffee shop, my ears tell me there is a radio that exists. My nose tells me coffee is being brewed. I know the bran muffin I ordered really was a bran muffin because it tasted like one, and my sense of touch tells me the air conditioner is working on this warm summer day. All of these are physically real, and the empiricist would be satisfied with these evidences his senses present to him. Indeed, scientists use these observational skills to study our world.

However, I also believe that time is real, yet I cannot perceive it with my five senses. Though I can observe its effects (I don't have nearly the head of hair I used to have), I

cannot empirically sense time itself. We could also consider love, friendship, anger, fear, comfort, anxiety, insincerity, trust, and a host of other emotions that have no direct empirical evidence. And there are things other than emotions I could add to our list. What about thoughts? What about beliefs? Are they real? Few would suggest they aren't, yet we cannot observe them with our senses.

Clearly, there is more to the world than meets the eye—or ears, nose, mouth, or fingers for that matter. This is where the rationalist comes in. *Rationalism* suggests that reality exists only in the abstract. It is all in the mind. For example, the *idea* of a chair is real. The one in which I now sit is simply a physical manifestation of the concept. An empiricist would suspect a rationalist has spent too much time meditating on mountaintops, but hang with me on this.

Rationalism suggests that the *concept* of a chair is real. When we try to create a chair, it is always an imperfect model of what exists in our mind. It has flaws and limitations. This is true, of course, and explains why things like love and ideas are real. Since they exist in our minds, they are real, though often they are manifested in flawed and limited ways. Love may not attain to our mental expectations, ideas can be forgotten, and even my chair might collapse.

While the rationalists and empiricists battle it out, I'd suggest there is a third way to perceive our world. We might detect truth through our senses, like an empiricist, or through our reasoning, like a rationalist, but we can also detect truth through *faith*. In the Bible, faith is defined as “being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). That's a pretty good definition, but it will leave the rationalist and empiricist scoffing.

The empiricist can be sure of only what is seen; he can't be sure *until* he sees it. The rationalist will be fine with the *idea* of hope but will not see any physical certainty in it. But for the person who sees the world through eyes of faith, reality can exist in a promise, hope is not empty, and there is certainty long before the promise is fulfilled.

That may sound like empty words for now, but let's go back to that umbrella you're holding. Why *did* you pick it up? If you have no past history with that weather forecaster and there are no clouds currently, then you didn't base your decision on empiricism. On the other hand, the idea of rain always exists, so if you were a rationalist, you'd have to carry your umbrella with you all the time. And it wouldn't be so bad if you forgot it, because those raindrops hitting your head are only an imperfect manifestation of reality, so maybe you aren't really getting wet.

The fact is that you took your umbrella based on the faith you had in the accuracy of that weather report. Even if you knew the forecaster and he had been correct many times in the past, you still took it on faith that this report was correct. As I sat down to write this chapter, I expressed faith that the chair would hold me up; I didn't test it ahead of time. I had faith that my computer would work, or I wouldn't have brought it.

I turned over some of my hard-earned money to purchase the bran muffin that I believed I so desperately needed. Since I don't like to waste my money, I must have been “sure of the bran muffin I hoped for and certain of the pastry I did not see.”

The barista had faith that the money I gave her was real. She also has some degree of faith in the government that backs the currency. I don't know if she is a Christian, but it's clear she lives by faith in some areas of her life. The point is that we *all* practice faith

every day. It doesn't bother us that we do so, yet often people doubt that they can perceive God this way.

In fact, faith is the *only* way we can perceive Him. As we established at the beginning of this chapter, we cannot prove God's existence through science. The Bible agrees with the atheist here. Again Hebrews says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). You can't come to God on a scientific basis.

When I was in the eighth grade, our science teacher told us that Saturn had three rings. This was based on ground-based observations using telescopes. We took a test and were asked, "How many rings does Saturn have?" I said three and got the question right—but I was wrong.

In 1980, when we received pictures from the *Voyager 1* flyby, we saw that Saturn had over 500 rings. The next year, *Voyager 2* showed over 1,500 rings. Science can prove itself wrong—scientists are always negating one another's discoveries—but the rationalist and the man of faith are beyond the reach of science. Science can only verify empirical conclusions. Therefore, we cannot use science to prove God's existence.

In fact, one of the principles of the scientific approach is to study an experimental group in parallel with a control group. If you want to prove that eating bran muffins helps you live longer, you need to establish a large, bran-muffin-eating experimental group and an equally large bran-muffinless control group identical in every other way. Then you compare the results. Likewise, if you want to *prove* God exists in the universe, you will have to create an identical, God-free universe for comparison. And if you *could* create a universe, I guess you'd be God, and that would answer the question.

Just as the empiricist cannot prove God exists by empirical evidence, a rationalist can't make God real simply by having a thought about Him. He's either real or He isn't; my thoughts won't change the reality of that. In fact—and it's very important that you understand exactly what I am about to say—in *one sense, it doesn't matter what you believe about God*. Now I'm not saying that what you believe won't affect your life and all of your eternity. I'm saying it won't affect *God's* life and eternity. If you are right in your atheism that there is no God, my faith won't cause Him to exist. At the same time, if God is real, your atheism won't negate that truth. If you don't believe in platypuses, they don't just disintegrate; they exist whether you believe so or not.

In 1799, the first platypus skin was sent to England, where scientists declared it a hoax. Here was an animal that had the fur of a mammal, the bill of a bird, webbed feet like an otter, and the tail of a beaver. It was warm-blooded, laid eggs, and suckled its young. Since then we have learned that the male has a venomous foot, that the body temperature is so low as to be hypothermic if it were any other mammal species, and that it has the leg structure of a reptile. A platypus also can detect prey by a process called "electrolocation," that is, through the sensing of electrical fields. Unlike every other mammal, it has a unique skeletal structure in its shoulder, and it's a "one-holer," meaning it uses the same orifice for excretion and sexual reproduction. Unlike birds or mammals, which have two sex chromosomes, the platypus has ten.

In 1836, the first British scientist to claim a live sighting of a platypus reported, "A disbeliever in everything beyond his reason might exclaim surely two Creators must have been at work." That scientist was Charles Darwin.

Can you imagine the disbelief a platypus story might arouse today if we had no evidence of its existence? In the same way, if I told you about God, you might find the story equally implausible. Without scientific evidence, it is difficult to believe. Yet the platypus didn't start existing when the scientific community confirmed it.

Years ago I was on a missions trip in the jungles of Costa Rica. While there, I overheard a conversation between the locals, who lived in the tropics, and a missionary who had lived in Alaska. With wide eyes the locals listened as the missionary told them that it is so cold in Alaska that your breath freezes when you exhale. The locals looked at one another to see whether they should believe her or not. She went on to say that even when you talked, your words would freeze as they left your mouth. This really perplexed them. Could words freeze, or was it just the breath in the words that was freezing? Again they checked to see how their peers were taking all this. Then she told them that the springtime was especially bad, because a winter's worth of words would thaw on the first warm day, and it would get so noisy you'd have to cover your ears! At this point, they were sure she was kidding, and they discounted her entire story—even the part about Alaska being cold enough to freeze one's breath. But just because something isn't logical doesn't mean it isn't real. After all, teenagers are real.

On the other hand, a rationalist might concede that God is real for me and not real for him, but that can't be true. Platypuses are either real or they aren't. Though the British hadn't seen them, but they still were munching worms long before 1799. In the same way that British scientists thought platypus advocates had been out in the sun too long, atheists typically suspect Christians are a bit loony too. In the end, the British scientists turned out to be wrong.

To some degree, the empiricists and rationalists are arguing over terminology. The empiricists say reality is what you can sense, so they rely on the senses. The rationalists claim reality is what you can think, so they tend toward reason. However, the empiricists would not say we don't think, and neither would the rationalists say we can't see, hear, and feel. Clearly, both approaches allow us to perceive the reality of the universe in which we live.

So let's agree on some points, as we let the empiricists and rationalists split hairs. Surely we use our senses to perceive our world, and we reason and think about it too. But just as surely we have seen that we, believers and unbelievers alike, use faith throughout our day to understand our world and navigate our lives within it. Though you may not have faith that God exists, we must agree that we both have faith. It may be faith in our chairs, but it is faith nonetheless. While we disagree over some pretty significant issues, we don't disagree about everything. We both agree that bran muffins are great for digestion and that faith plays a valuable and viable role in our daily living.

OK, so maybe you don't like bran muffins. And maybe you still think I'm loony for believing in God. Maybe you think we Christians are deceived. But remember the lesson of the platypus: even if you don't think it's plausible, it's at least *possible* that we have seen something that others have not yet witnessed. Those living back in the mother country either can come along and see for themselves or accept or reject our claims based on the faith they have in our integrity. If you doubt us, it can only be for one of two reasons. Either we are wrong due to error or insanity, or we lack the credibility to be trusted.

The second case is not likely. What are the odds that all untrustworthy people in the world end up as Christians? While some might think this is true, most would admit that such an extreme view reeks of prejudice. It is not only improbable; it is unkind.

I admit that some Christians do need some rewiring done; after all, you can find loonies in every crowd. However, even when I was a staunch atheist, I met many Christians whom I admired. They were generally kind and gentle creatures and did not bite even when I provoked them. I specifically recall two believers who made an impression on me.

The first was the wife of the caretaker at a Christian camp. Even as an atheist, I attended Christian camps in high school. The reason for this was twofold. First, it was free for me. Apparently I was seen as a prime catch; if you could get Brad to come to church camp, you'd put in a good day's work. I don't know who was paying my way on these trips, but they must have thought they had scored a touchdown. The second reason I went to these camps was because half the people there were single girls my age. Though most had no interest in me, there were enough innocent gazelles to keep this hyena satisfied.

But I digress. One evening during the service, I was sitting in my customary spot in the back pew, where I was trying to entice and impress any wayfaring lasses. The speaker led us in the one Christian song I knew, "Amazing Grace." My singing has never been a way to lure the ladies, but I gave it my best. From off to my left I heard a grating screech like a box of cats being electrocuted. (Don't ask me how I know what that sounds like.) Spinning my head in the direction of the cacophony, I saw the host's wife belting out verse one with her head thrown back and her closed eyes aimed toward the rafters. What amazed me more than the fact that God wasn't striking her with lightning was the look of complete delight on her face in spite of her rasping voice. I remember thinking, "She has a joy and peace that I don't have."

The second person was a man for whom I worked. He was an imposing 6'8" tower with a crumpled, felt cowboy hat sliding off his head and a pipe permanently projecting from the side of his mouth. He was open about his belief in Christ with everyone he met, including this atheist, yet his life was a total disaster. His business was failing, he was in debt and ready to lose his house, and there was a line of people suing him; yet he was always smiling. One day he asked me to use the forklift to move some materials on a hillside. Try as I nervously might, I couldn't maneuver the lift into position without risking a rollover. Grinning as always, he said, "Let me try it." We traded places, and he launched the forklift into position like he knew what he was doing. He didn't. As the machine tilted over the embankment, two wheels lifted off the ground while the other two began to slide precariously. I was sure I was watching his final moments on earth. With a flash, he released one hand from the steering wheel and rescued his slipping cowboy hat. The forklift dropped back onto all fours, as he secured both the load and his hat. In what looked to be a disastrous moment, he had no worry for his life—he just wanted to make sure he didn't lose his hat. I witnessed again a peace of heart I had never known.

My point in describing these two people is to show that we can't suggest that all Christians are crazy, malevolent, and untrustworthy people. Some of them are pretty OK.

The other possibility is that Christians shouldn't be believed, not because of a lack of credibility, but because they are simply wrong due to insanity or error. Maybe. But there are an awful lot of them in the world. In fact, they outnumber the atheists; so if we are

crazy, the unbeliever must take the position, “I’m right, and the rest of the world is wrong.” That’s possible, but again it’s not likely.

Whether or not we can reach a consensus on this matter, you and I must agree that there is a *possibility* that either of us can be wrong. The British naturalists thought the Australian explorers were crazy in their description of the platypus. However, without proof or evidence to the contrary, they were presumptuous to doubt them.

If two strangers met in person in America, one an American citizen and one from Ireland, how silly would the following conversation sound?

“Where you from, friend?”

“I’m from America. And you? Where are you from?”

“I’m Irish.”

“I don’t believe in Ireland.”

“What?”

“I know you *think* you are from Ireland, but I don’t believe in Ireland. You’re probably mistaken.”

“But I’ve been there.”

“Well, I know you believe that Ireland is real—and for you it is real in a sense because you believe it to be so—but I’ve never seen any evidence of Ireland, so I won’t believe it until I see it.”

Obviously this is a ridiculous scenario and perhaps an unfair analogy to some degree, but we can draw some loose parallels if you will entertain it. We Christians don’t just *believe* we have Christ in us—we *know* it. We have been there. Those who have not known Christ cannot claim He doesn’t exist just because they haven’t seen Him. It’s not like we’re arguing over Santa like six-year-olds. Even when I believed in Santa, I never claimed to have seen him or talked with Him—outside of the guy at the mall with the coffee breath. I know God in a much more real way, just as I know my earthly father. I know His voice, His words, His character, His being. And I’ve seen Him—not with physical eyes but with eyes of faith that are just as real.

So I’d like you to consider two ideas. First, faith is practiced by all humans and is a valid way of interacting with and thinking about our world. Second, there is at least the possibility that God might exist, and you have not encountered Him up to this point. Even in my days of disbelief, I knew that just as no one could scientifically prove that God existed, neither could I prove He did not. As sure as I was in my atheism, I always was willing to entertain some doubt about my position. I hope you will do the same.