

THE Record

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News Digest



Prince's role challenged

PRINCE CHARLES should be defender of the 'faith' rather than 'faiths', the Evangelical Alliance has demanded in a new report. *Page 1*

Archbishops defend veils and crosses

THE ARCHBISHOP of Canterbury has weighed in on the Muslim veil issue offering a qualified defence of the practice, while the Archbishop of York defended the right of Christians to wear a cross. *Page 3*

Church 'must listen to young people'

A FORMER Bishop and current chair of two national youth agencies has called for churches to listen to young people and make it easier for them to engage in dialogue. The Rt Rev Roger Sainsbury was speaking after research by a leading think tank found the majority of adults in the UK were scared of young people today. *Page 4*

Sinn Féin urged to change

THE BISHOPS of the Church of Ireland have asked Sinn Féin to change its policies on policing and support the rule of law in Northern Ireland. *Page 5*

Pope hears from Muslim scholars

A GROUP of 38 Muslim scholars has written a positive open letter to Pope Benedict XVI responding to his concerns over religion, reason and violence raised in his September lecture at Regensburg University. *Page 6*

New Presiding Bishop visits Lambeth

Archbishop Rowan Williams will hold his first meeting with the newly elected Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, Katharine Schori, this weekend. But the meeting at Lambeth Palace will be overshadowed with continuing news that the Anglican Communion is fragmenting over divisions in doctrine and discipline over the issue of homosexuality. *Page 7*

Also in this week's edition of The Church of England Newspaper

Stephen Bates on discrimination

David Gillett on Halloween

Rod Thomas outlines his agenda for Reform

Gordon Fyles on a spiritual approach to obesity

Paul Richardson on China the superpower

Reasons to believe



By David Roemer

In his review for *The New York Times*, Leon Wieseltier said *Breaking the Spell* (by Daniel C Dennett, *Viking*) is a sorry example of scientism, which he regards as a contemporary superstition. Mr Wieseltier knows nonsense when he sees it. I'll be identifying and discussing the more egregious errors and omissions in Mr Dennett's book.

Discussing the meaning of the word "materialism," Professor Dennett says: "In its scientific or philosophical sense, it refers to a theory that aspires to explain all the phenomena without recourse to anything immaterial — like a Cartesian soul, or 'ectoplasm' — or God. The standard negation of materialistic in the scientific sense is dualistic,

which maintains that there are two entirely different kinds of substance, matter and ...whatever minds are supposedly made of," (p 302).

Dennett is right not to think we have an immaterial substance inside our brains. Dualism is indeed irrational. However, it was abandoned by philosophers a thousand years ago and replaced with a rational view of man. Of course, many people think of man in dualistic terms. You hear it when people speak of "keeping body and soul together" or "Mother's soul is in heaven." Advocates of laws against abortion frequently argue that life begins at conception, the idea being that God infuses

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BREAKING THE SPELL

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babies at this point in time with an immaterial substance.

The modern metaphysical view of man is that man is a being, man is one. It is not an entirely modern concept, since Plato discussed the problem of the "one and the many." According to Thomas Aquinas, man is a metaphysical composition of two incomplete beings: a material incomplete being and an immaterial incomplete being.

I understand this to mean we can comprehend man because we know everything that happens to man and everything that man does. However, we can't define man because we can't define knowledge and free will. Saying that man is a rational animal or that which evolved from animals sheds no light on the question: What is man?

The philosophy that God does not exist is not materialism, it is naturalism. Materialism (sometimes called physicalism to avoid hedonistic connotations) is the view that all that exists is matter. Materialists frequently say that free will is an illusion and that the experience of the existence of oneself is some kind of epiphenomena. (In a quote below, you will see that Dennett puts free will in a list of things people believe in.) Materialists deny that man is a being in a metaphysical sense, which can be construed as denying that man exists. Presumably, this is what materialists mean when they say all that exists is matter.

It is not clear from his book whether Dennett is a materialist, but he is certainly a naturalist. Concerning the proof of God's existence, he says: "The Cosmological Argument, which in its simplest form states that since everything must have a cause the universe must have a cause — namely, God — doesn't stay simple for long. Some deny the premise, since quantum physics teaches us (doesn't it?) that not everything that happens needs to have a cause."

Others prefer to accept the premise and then ask: What caused God? The reply that God is self-caused (somehow) then raises the rebuttal: If something can be self-caused, why can't the universe as a whole be the thing that is self-caused. (p. 242)

Not to be left out I have my own version of the Cosmological Argument. Professor Dennett got his rebuttal from David Hume who misunderstood the proof. The principle of causality is not that everything needs a cause but that every contingent being needs a cause. An example of a contingent being is ourselves. We are contingent because we are finite, that is, we are different beings from one another.

Since a finite being needs a cause, there must be at least one being which is not finite. Such a being is infinite and supernatural.

The following quote comes at the beginning of a chapter Belief in Belief: "At the end of Chapter 1, I promised to return to Hume's question in his Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, the question of whether we have good reasons for believing in God, and in this chapter, I will keep that promise," (p. 200).

We know God exists, as I argue above, as a matter of reason. God's existence gives rise to the possibility of revelation which means there are two kinds of knowledge: faith and reason. In reason, we know a proposition is true because we can see the truth of it. We can see it is true that $E=mc^2$ squared, to use one of Dennett's ill-conceived examples of

faith. In faith, we know something is true, not because we can see it is true, but because God is telling us.

Faith is a positive response to revelation. Jewish people living in the first century (BC and AD), responding in faith to the Bible, believed that God would deliver them from death, just as he delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Dennett's phrase "believing in God" refers not only to the knowledge of God's existence, but to the belief that God will not abandon us in our hour of need.

To explain what he means by "good reasons" I can quote Mr Dennett quoting an orthodox Christian: "According to Avery Cardinal Dulles, apologetics is 'the rational defence of faith,' and in the past it was often supposed to prove rigorously that God exists, and Jesus was divine, was born of a virgin, and so forth, but it fell into disrepute.

"Apologetics fell under suspicion for promising more than it could deliver and for manipulating the evidence to support the desired conclusions. It did not always escape the vice that Paul Tillich labelled 'sacred dishonesty,'" [p. 19]. Recognising this problem, many of the devout have retreated to a less aggressive avowal of their creed, but Cardinal Dulles regrets this development, and calls for a renewal and reformation of apologetics, (p. 363).

Mr Dennett imagines that he is giving reasons not to believe in religion. Let's look at some of his reasons. The first quote is at the end of the chapter 'Belief in Belief' and the second quote at the beginning of the chapter 'Morality and Religion': "So much for the belief in God. What about belief in belief in God? We still haven't inquired about the grounds for this belief in belief. Isn't it true? That is, isn't it true that, whether or not God exists, religious belief is at least as important as the belief in democracy, in the rule of law, in free will? The very widespread (but far from universal) opinion is that religion is the bulwark of morality and meaning," (p. 245).

"Religion plays its most important role in supporting morality, many think, by giving people an unbeatable reason to do good: the promise of an infinite reward in heaven, and (depending on tastes) the threat of an infinite punishment in hell if they don't. Without the divine carrot and stick, goes this reasoning, people would loll about aimlessly or indulge their basest desires, break their promises, cheat on their spouses, neglect their duties, and so on. There are two well-known problems with this reasoning: (1) it doesn't seem to be true, which is good news, since (2) it is such a demeaning view of human nature," (p. 279).

In the first quote, he mentions "bulwark of morality" and "meaning." But in the second quote, he drops out "meaning." To understand why Mr Dennett sidesteps the question of the meaning of life or the purpose of life, it may help to quote a nonbeliever who tackled the question.

Susan Jacoby in her book *Free-thinkers: A History of American Secularism* on page 169 attributes to Robert Green Ingersoll (1833-1899) the following statement: "While I am opposed to all orthodox creeds, I have a creed myself; and my creed is this. Happiness is the only good. The time to be happy is now. The place to be happy is here. The way to be happy is to make others so. This creed is somewhat short, but it is long enough for this life, strong enough for this world. If there is another world,

when we get there we can make another creed."

The Great Agnostic (as he was called) mentions the great mystery of life: people who devote themselves to their own happiness will not be happy and those who devote themselves to the happiness of others will be happy. If he left this out, it would sound like his creed was hedonism.

It is to be expected that someone prone to, if not guilty of, scientism would avoid the question of what our purpose in life is if it is not to get to heaven because there is no experiment that sheds light on this question. However, whether religion supports morality can be determined by correlating moral conduct with religious belief. Mr Dennett does this to the detriment of religion by citing the high divorce rate of fundamentalist Christians.

There are worse things than divorcing your spouse. Disingenuousness can be worse and can take the form of leaving unsaid what should have been said. Mr Dennett should have explained why he did not discuss the idea that religion gives meaning to life.

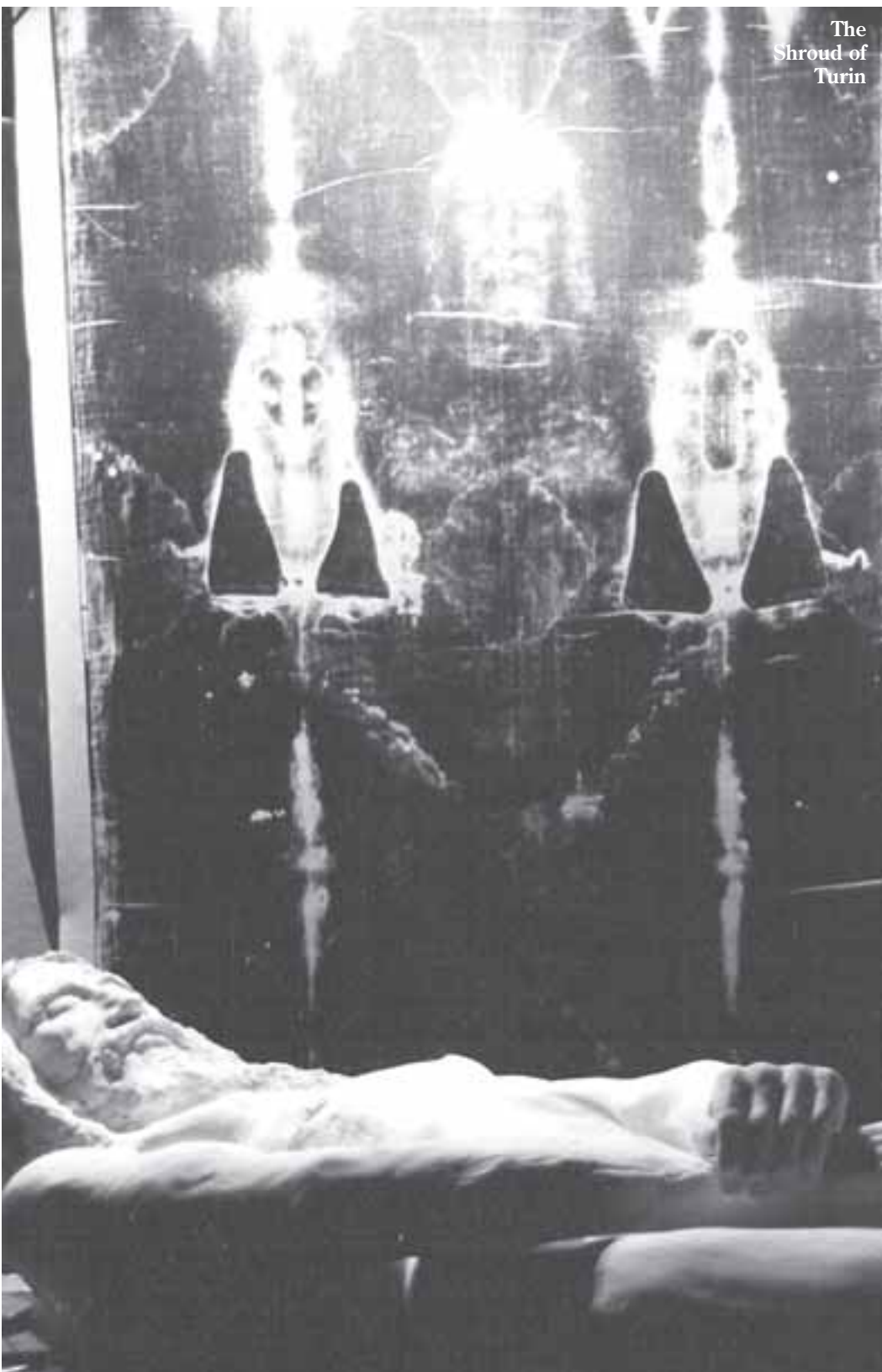
Apologetics includes reference to miraculous historical events, such as

the parting of the Red Sea. The only miracle mentioned in Mr Dennett's book is the Shroud of Turin: "Even the Roman Catholic Church, with its unfortunate legacy of persecution of its own scientists, has recently been eager to see scientific confirmation — and accept the risk of disconfirmation — of its traditional claims about the Shroud of Turin, for example," (p 274).

The Shroud of Turin has on it a mysterious image of a crucified man. Since no one claims to know how the image got there, it can be called a miracle. The footnote does not give more information about the shroud and what scientists think about it, but discusses evolution. (<http://www.shroud.com>). The Shroud website has further information for those interested in this relic.

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THE RECORD

Answering the sceptics

**Letters to Doubting Thomas:
A Case for the Existence of God**

by **C Stephen Layman**

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Like most American intellectuals, Professor Layman doesn't have a rational concept of God and doesn't understand the proof of God's existence. I feel lucky because I was not educated by American intellectuals but by the Roman Catholic Church at a college it ran in New York City in the early 1960s. I'll be comparing his ideas about God with those of Karen Armstrong (Armstrong, *A History of God*).

They both remind me of a story Howard Gardner, famous for his work on the different kinds of intelligence, told at a conference of educators I once attended. One day his daughter, frustrated to the point of tears, complained to him about the difficulty she was having understanding a college course she was taking in physics. Describing himself as the perfect father, he related how he listened patiently while she spoke, praised her industriousness, and tactfully suggested that she discuss the matter with her physics teacher. His daughter said, "You don't get it, Dad. I get top marks on all my tests."

His point was that students succeed by repeating on tests exactly what the teacher said in the classroom, regardless of whether or not they understand what they were taught. The more successful students become professors themselves and pass on their so-called knowledge to succeeding generations.

I'll begin my critique of Layman's book is with the following quote:

"Just as a contingent truth is true but might have been false, so a contingent being is one that does exist but might not have. And suppose we claim, with regard to any contingent being, that it exists, eg, 'I (Zach) exist' or 'You (Thomas) exist.' Such propositions are contingent truths, not necessary ones. More generally, we can state the relationship between contingent beings and contingent truths as follows: A being is contingent if (and only if) every proposition affirming its existence is a contingent truth," (p. 85).

Not in the above quote, nor anywhere else in the book, does he say that humans are finite beings and that God is an infinite being. I agree that humans are contingent beings, but this is not as clear and unmistakably true as

the proposition that humans are finite beings: Zach exists and Thomas exists, but Zach is not Thomas and Thomas is not Zach. Zach and Thomas are different beings, that is, finite beings. God is a being that is not finite. A finite being needs a cause outside of itself whereas an infinite being can be the reason for its own existence. Since the universe would be unintelligible if every being needed a cause, there must be at least one infinite being. QED.

Like Layman, Armstrong does not understand the concept of the infinity of God. She recalls memorising, at the age of eight, the following question and answer:

"What is God?": "God is the Supreme Spirit, Who alone exists of Himself and is infinite in all perfections." (p. xvii of A History of God)

Ms Armstrong's recollections about what she was taught is quite accurate. The second of the 499 points of the Baltimore Catechism is

2. Who is God?

God is the Supreme Being, infinitely perfect, who made all things and keeps them in existence. In him we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:28)

Ms Armstrong's comment on this is: *"Not surprisingly, it meant little to me, and I am bound to say that it still leaves me cold. It has always seemed a singularly arid, pompous and arrogant definition. Since writing this book, however, I have come to believe that it is also incorrect," (p. xvii of A History of God).*

Layman jumps from his underdeveloped idea that man is contingent to his necessarily underdeveloped idea that God is necessary. This is Layman's "theistic hypothesis": "(1) There is exactly one entity that is (2) perfectly morally good and (3) almighty and that (4) exists of necessity," (p. 12).

This book is written in the form of a letter to an imaginary 'Thomas', who doubts God's existence. 'Layman' (Zach) expatiates upon these four points in letters to Thomas. He supports points (1) and (2) by referring to revelation, but his explanations of points (3) and (4) are hopelessly circular. "Almighty" means "maximal power" and "exists of necessity" means "cannot fail to exist under any possible circumstances." In short, he fails to explain that the infinity of God is a reference to the finitude of man.

Professor Layman rejects the

proof of God's existence I outlined above: "Many people become disappointed with philosophy because they demand proofs. By a "proof" I mean an argument with these two features: (1) Its premises are acceptable to all rational people, and (2) its conclusion follows logically from its premises. Proofs in this sense are rare or nonexistent in philosophy. The defence of virtually any major philosophical position will involve controversial premises at some point, ie, premises not acceptable to all rational people," (p. 1).

Professor Layman uses another type of argument: "In an argument-to-the-best-explanation, there is a description of a phenomena or fact to be explained. *The argument proceeds by giving reasons for supposing that one hypothesis explains the phenomenon better than rival hypotheses do,*" (p. 3).

Concerning the proof of God's existence, Ms Armstrong says: "The argument that we are 'contingent' or 'defective' beings proves nothing, since there could always be an explanation that is ultimate but not supernatural," (p. 379 of *A History of God*).

Both are butting heads with the Roman Catholic Church and St Paul:

22. Can we know by our natural reason that there is a God?

We can know by our natural reason that there is a God, for natural reason tells us that the world we see about us could have been made only by a self-existing Being, all-wise and almighty.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and injustice of those men that detain the truth of God in injustice; because that which is known of God is manifest in them. For God hath manifested it unto them. (Romans 1:18-19)

The use of the word "know" and the phrase "wrath of God" constitutes a criticism of the character of naturalists, atheists, and agnostics. Armstrong thinks God's existence is only a possible explanation for the existence of man and not a good one at that. Layman says it's the best explanation without criticising those who disagree.

Explanations play a role in our daily lives and are part of common sense and reason. Scientists propose theories that explain observations, and juries render verdicts that explain the evidence. We also come across them in our relations with other people: "Lucy, you have some explaining to do."

In my opinion, the proof of God's existence is not an

explanation, it is logical deduction from the fact that finite beings exist. The proof doesn't say what man is or what the direct cause of man is. The proof only says that there is an infinite being that causes all finite beings. Nor does the proof try to explain what would motivate an infinite being to create finite beings. Rejecting the "supernatural explanation" for man and preferring a "natural explanation" does not refute the proof because a "natural explanation" would only include finite beings.

One of Layman's arguments is that the "theistic hypothesis" gives a better explanation for the fact than humans have free will than naturalism, the philosophy that there is no supernatural being. Layman begins his argument by attempting to define free will: "Free will is traditionally characterised as the power to do otherwise than one in fact does. Let's say you recently voted in a meeting by raising your right arm. If you performed this action freely, then you had the power to do otherwise, to refrain from raising your right arm. If you have free will, then when you face a decision between incompatible courses of action (such as speaking and refraining from speaking), although you cannot take more than one of them, each of them is within your power. Another way to put it: If you have free will, then when you are confronted with mutually exclusive courses of action, which one you take is genuinely up to you," (p. 139).

All he is saying here is that free will is free will. It is another example of circular reasoning. Undaunted by or unaware of his inability to define free will, he goes on to discuss related concepts at great length: mechanism, determinism, compatibilism, and incompatibilism. I agree, however, with the following statement he makes about naturalists: "Many naturalists deny free will altogether because they see it as incompatible with a world governed by natural law," (p. 162).

I think I can do a better job than Layman of explaining why naturalists deny humans beings have free will. A "world governed by natural law" is a world in which there are no persons exercising their freedom. All Layman is saying is that naturalists deny free will because they don't think there is such a thing.

People who deny humans have free will in philosophical arguments act as if they had free will in the day-to-day living of their lives. They have the same experience we all have of existing, being aware of our existence, and acting through

time. If they do something wrong they feel guilty, apologise, and promise not to do it again. If they work hard on a project for a few hours or a few days, they take pride in what they did. Their denial of free will is not only irrational, it raises questions about their sincerity and motives.

We can comprehend ourselves and recognise that we are finite beings, but we cannot otherwise define ourselves since we cannot define free will. This leads rational philosophers to say man is an indefinability or an embodied spirit, or that man possesses a spiritual soul as well as a body. Thomas Aquinas's formulation was that man is a composition of two incomplete beings: a material incomplete being and an immaterial incomplete being that are metaphysically combined to form one being.

By denying free will, naturalists are really admitting, however perversely, that they agree with the logic of the proof of God's existence: If humans have free will, then they are finite beings. If finite beings exist, then an infinite being exists. If their motive for denying free will is not to refute the proof of God's existence, what is it?

I did not invent the proof of God's existence which is sometimes called the "cosmological argument." It can be found, for example, in the Baltimore Catechism:

10. What do we mean when we say that God is self-existing?

When we say that God is self-existing we mean that he does not owe his existence to any other being.

I am who am. (Exodus 3:14)

While the answer to the question is as vague and circular as Layman's "theistic hypothesis," the use of Exodus 3:14 as a proof-text shows the authors understand the proof, which is based on Aquinas's analysis of finite beings. According to Aquinas, a finite being has two principles operating within it: an essence and an existence. To quote from the glossary of a textbook on metaphysics (N. Clarke, *One and the Many*):

Essence = that in a being which makes it to be what it is, this being and not some other.

Existence = that is a being which makes it a real being.

An infinite being can be thought of as a being which does not have a separate essence and existence. In other words, an infinite being's essence is the same as its existence. Its essence is to exist. Just as God told Moses.