

Atheism: No Evidence for God's Existence

LDS Apologetics Research

ABSTRACT

1. Introduction

The atheist challenge is foundational: there is no evidence for God's existence, and belief in God is therefore irrational — a species of wishful thinking, cultural inheritance, or psychological coping mechanism masquerading as knowledge. This objection differs from most anti-LDS critiques because it challenges theism itself, not merely Latter-day Saint claims. Engaging it requires moving beyond scriptural proof-texting (which presupposes theism) and into the domains of philosophy, natural theology, and epistemology. This document presents the strongest version of the atheist case, offers multiple lines of evidence and argument for God's existence, and situates the Latter-day Saint position within the broader theistic tradition.

2. The Criticism (Steelmanned)

The atheist case, at its strongest, includes:

1. **The evidential claim:** There is no empirical, repeatable, publicly verifiable evidence for God's existence. God cannot be observed, measured, or tested. Any claim that cannot meet scientific standards of evidence is not warranted belief.
2. **The problem of divine hiddenness:** If God exists and desires a relationship with humanity, His existence should be obvious. The fact that billions of sincere, intelligent people do not believe in God suggests either that God does not exist or does not care to be known.
3. **The problem of evil:** The existence of gratuitous suffering — childhood cancer, natural disasters, animal predation — is incompatible with an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God. The quantity and distribution of suffering in the world is better explained by indifferent natural processes than by divine governance.
4. **Naturalistic explanations suffice:** Evolution explains biological complexity. Cosmology explains the universe's origin and structure. Neuroscience explains consciousness and religious experience. There is no explanatory gap that requires the God hypothesis.
5. **The sociology of belief:** Religious belief correlates overwhelmingly with geography and upbringing. People believe the religion of their parents and culture. This suggests religion is a sociological phenomenon, not a response to truth.
6. **The burden of proof:** The person making the positive claim (God exists) bears the burden of proof. The default epistemic position is non-belief until evidence is provided.

This is a serious intellectual position held by many thoughtful people. It deserves engagement on its own terms.

3. Biblical Response

The Bible's Own Claims About Evidence for God

Scripture does not treat God's existence as a blind leap but asserts that evidence is available to those willing to perceive it:

- **Romans 1:19-20** — "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse." Paul argues that creation itself constitutes evidence for God — evidence so clear that disbelief is culpable.
- **Psalms 19:1-4** — "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard."
- **Acts 14:17** — "Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."
- **Alma 30:44** — "All things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator."

The Bible Addresses the Problem of Evil

Scripture does not ignore suffering but engages it directly:

- **The Book of Job**: The most sustained biblical treatment of undeserved suffering. Job receives no explanation for his suffering but encounters God directly (Job 38-42). The answer is not philosophical resolution but relational encounter.
- **Romans 8:28** — "All things work together for good to them that love God."
- **2 Corinthians 4:17** — "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."
- **Revelation 21:4** — "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying."

The Bible Anticipates Skepticism

- **Psalms 14:1** — "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."
- **2 Peter 3:3-4** — "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming?"
- **1 Corinthians 1:18-25** — Paul acknowledges that the gospel appears as "foolishness" to Greek philosophical culture but argues it represents a deeper wisdom.

4. Early Christian/Historical Evidence

The Classical Arguments for God's Existence

The theistic tradition has produced multiple philosophical arguments that have been debated for centuries and remain active in contemporary analytic philosophy:

The Cosmological Argument (the Kalam version):

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause.

The second premise is supported by Big Bang cosmology (the universe had a temporal beginning), the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem (any universe that has been expanding must have a past boundary), and the philosophical impossibility of an actual infinite past. The cause of all matter, energy, space, and time must itself be immaterial, spaceless, timeless, and enormously powerful — attributes traditionally associated with God. This argument has been defended by contemporary philosophers including William Lane Craig and Alexander Pruss.

The Teleological Argument (fine-tuning):

The fundamental constants of physics — the gravitational constant, the strong nuclear force, the cosmological constant, the ratio of electromagnetic to gravitational force — are fine-tuned to an extraordinary degree. Alter any of these constants by infinitesimal amounts, and the universe becomes incapable of supporting life. The cosmological constant alone is fine-tuned to approximately 1 part in 10^{120} .

Three explanations are typically offered: physical necessity (the constants could not have been otherwise), chance, or design. Physical necessity lacks theoretical support — no known law requires these specific values. Chance faces enormous improbability. Design remains a live and rational option. Prominent physicists including Paul Davies and John Barrow have acknowledged the explanatory force of fine-tuning.

The Moral Argument:

1. If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists.

The first premise reflects the widely recognized difficulty of grounding objective morality in a purely naturalistic framework. If moral values are merely evolutionary adaptations or social conventions, they have no binding authority. The second premise reflects the near-universal moral intuition that some things (torturing children for amusement, genocide) are objectively wrong, not merely culturally disfavored. If objective morality is real, it requires a transcendent ground — which theism provides.

The Argument from Consciousness:

Consciousness — subjective, first-person experience — remains unexplained by any purely physical theory. The "hard problem of consciousness" (David Chalmers) is the question of why physical processes give rise to subjective experience at all. Materialism can explain neural correlates of consciousness but cannot explain why there is "something it is like" to be a conscious being. Theism,

which posits a fundamental Mind behind reality, offers a more natural explanation for the existence of consciousness than materialism does.

The Argument from Contingency (Leibniz):

1. Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence (either in the necessity of its own nature or in an external cause).
2. The universe exists.
3. The universe does not exist necessarily (it is contingent — it might not have existed).
4. Therefore, the universe has an external cause — a necessary being whose existence is grounded in the necessity of its own nature.

Early Christian Engagement with Skepticism

The earliest Christian thinkers engaged the same fundamental questions:

- **Justin Martyr** (*First Apology; Dialogue with Trypho*): Argued that Greek philosophy, at its best, pointed toward the same truths that Christianity revealed. The *logos* (reason) that Greek philosophers sought was the same Logos incarnate in Christ (John 1:1).
- **Augustine** (*Confessions; City of God*): Engaged deeply with skepticism, materialism, and the problem of evil. Argued that evil is a privation of good (*privatio boni*), not a positive substance — and therefore does not require a co-equal evil creator.
- **Thomas Aquinas** (*Summa Theologica* I, Q.2): Presented five arguments (*quinque viae*) for God's existence from motion, causation, contingency, degrees of perfection, and teleology. These remain foundational in natural theology.

Contemporary Philosophy of Religion

The claim that belief in God is irrational does not reflect the state of academic philosophy:

- Alvin Plantinga's evolutionary argument against naturalism argues that if naturalism and evolution are both true, there is no reason to trust human cognitive faculties — including the reasoning that leads to naturalism. Naturalism is self-defeating.
- Plantinga's reformed epistemology argues that belief in God can be "properly basic" — warranted without requiring arguments or evidence, just as belief in other minds, the reality of the past, and the reliability of memory are properly basic.
- A 2014 PhilPapers survey of professional philosophers found that approximately 15% accept or lean toward theism. While a minority position in academic philosophy, theism is not a fringe view and is defended by scholars at major research universities worldwide.

5. LDS Doctrinal Position

The LDS Solution to the Problem of Evil

Latter-day Saint theology offers distinctive resources for addressing the problem of evil that classical theism lacks:

- **The premortal existence:** Souls existed before mortality and chose to come to earth knowing it would involve suffering (Abraham 3:24-26; D&C 138:55-56). Suffering is not imposed on unwilling subjects but is part of an experience knowingly chosen.
- **The purpose of mortality:** Earth life is a "probationary state" (Alma 12:24) designed for growth, learning, and the development of godlike character. Opposition is essential to this process: "For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things" (2 Nephi 2:11).
- **God is embodied and temporal:** Unlike classical theism, LDS theology does not posit God as timeless, impassible, and metaphysically simple. God is an embodied being who exists within time and is genuinely affected by human suffering. This avoids many of the philosophical tensions inherent in classical theism's treatment of evil.
- **Eternal progression:** Suffering is temporary within an eternal framework. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Corinthians 4:17). In LDS theology, the proportion of suffering to eternal existence approaches zero.

Latter-day Saint Epistemology Is Not Purely Fideistic

Latter-day Saint theology does not rely solely on blind faith:

- **Alma 32:26-43** — Alma's epistemological treatise describes a process of experimentation: plant the seed (the word), observe its effects ("it beginneth to enlarge my soul... it beginneth to be delicious to me"), and draw conclusions from the evidence. This is an empirical, experiential process — not blind faith.
- **D&C 9:8** — "You must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right." Revelation in LDS theology involves rational analysis *and* spiritual inquiry.
- **Moroni 10:3-5** — The invitation to "ask God" is an invitation to conduct an experiment with a promised outcome. It is a testable claim.

The Light of Christ

Latter-day Saint theology teaches that every person has access to divine light:

- **D&C 93:2** — "And that I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world."
- **Moroni 7:16** — "The Spirit of Christ is given to every man, that he may know good from evil."
- This means the atheist's own moral intuitions, sense of wonder, and capacity for reason are, in LDS theology, evidence of God — the Light of Christ operating within them.

6. Key Scriptures

- **Romans 1:19-20** — Creation reveals God's "eternal power and Godhead"
- **Psalms 19:1-4** — "The heavens declare the glory of God"
- **Alma 30:44** — "All things denote there is a God"

- **Alma 32:26-43** — Experiential epistemology: plant the seed and observe
- **2 Nephi 2:11** — "There is an opposition in all things"
- **Abraham 3:24-26** — Premortal choice to come to earth
- **D&C 93:2** — "The true light that lighteth every man"
- **Moroni 7:16** — The Spirit of Christ given to every person
- **Hebrews 11:1** — "Faith is the substance of things hoped for"
- **Job 38-42** — God's response to suffering: encounter, not explanation
- **Acts 17:22-28** — Paul's engagement with Greek philosophers at Athens

7. Responses to Common Objections

"There is no empirical evidence for God."

This objection assumes that empirical, scientific evidence is the only valid form of evidence — a position known as scientism, which is self-refuting (the claim that "only scientific evidence counts" is itself not a scientific claim and cannot be verified scientifically). Valid evidence includes logical arguments, mathematical proofs, moral intuitions, testimony, and personal experience. The cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments constitute rational evidence for God's existence. Additionally, the demand for empirical evidence of an immaterial being is a category error — like demanding to hear the color blue.

"The problem of evil disproves God."

The logical problem of evil (the claim that God and evil are logically incompatible) has been widely recognized as solved in contemporary philosophy, largely through Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defense. What remains is the evidential problem — the argument that the quantity and distribution of suffering makes God's existence improbable. However, this argument depends on the assumption that God would have no morally sufficient reason for permitting suffering — an assumption that is difficult to establish, especially given the limitations of human perspective. Latter-day Saint theology adds the premortal existence, the growth-through-opposition framework, and an eternal perspective that classical theism lacks.

"Science explains everything without God."

Science explains *how* natural processes work. It does not explain *why* there is something rather than nothing, why the laws of physics exist, why those laws are fine-tuned for life, why consciousness exists, or why there are objective moral values. Science operates within the framework of natural law; it cannot explain the existence of that framework. God is not a "god of the gaps" inserted where science has not yet reached — God is the ground of the intelligibility that makes science possible.

"Religious belief is just a product of culture and upbringing."

This is the genetic fallacy — dismissing a belief based on how it was acquired rather than evaluating whether it is true. Mathematical beliefs also correlate with culture and education. No one argues that calculus is false because it is only believed by those who were taught it. The relevant question is not *how* people come to believe in God but whether *the belief is true*. Additionally, atheism also correlates with geography and culture (Western Europe, academic environments) — the same argument, if valid, would undermine atheism equally.

"Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence."

This maxim (attributed to Carl Sagan) is often applied selectively. The claim that the entire universe arose from nothing, by nothing, for nothing — that consciousness emerged from unconscious matter, that objective moral values exist in a purposeless universe — is itself an extraordinary claim. If the theist bears a burden of proof, so does the naturalist. Furthermore, the theist does offer evidence: the cosmological, teleological, moral, and consciousness arguments; the testimony of billions of people across all cultures and centuries; and the experiential evidence of transformed lives.

"Belief in God is just faith without evidence."

This mischaracterizes both the theistic tradition and the biblical/LDS concept of faith. Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" — faith is a form of evidence, not the absence of it. Alma 32 describes a process of experimentation and observation that produces knowledge. The great theistic philosophers — Aquinas, Leibniz, Plantinga — have offered rigorous arguments for God's existence. To dismiss all of this as "faith without evidence" is to ignore 2,500 years of philosophical discourse.

8. Conclusion

The claim that there is no evidence for God's existence does not withstand scrutiny. The cosmological argument demonstrates that the universe requires a transcendent cause. The fine-tuning of physical constants points to design. The existence of objective moral values requires a moral lawgiver. The hard problem of consciousness finds a more natural explanation in theism than in materialism. The earliest Christian thinkers engaged these questions with philosophical sophistication, and contemporary philosophy of religion continues to produce rigorous defenses of theism. Latter-day Saint theology adds distinctive resources: an experiential epistemology (Alma 32), a premortal existence that addresses the problem of evil, a God who is genuinely personal and embodied, and the doctrine that the Light of Christ is given to every person (D&C 93:2). The atheist position is intellectually respectable, but the claim that it alone is rational while theism is mere superstition does not reflect the actual state of the evidence or the philosophical arguments. Belief in God is warranted, evidence-based, and rationally defensible.

Further Reading:

- [FairLatterdaySaints: Existence of God](#)
- [God's Existence — ChurchofJesusChrist.org](#)
- William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (3rd ed.)
- Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*
- David Bentley Hart, *The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*