

# The Web of Faith

It is to be borne in mind ... that the inferior sciences neither prove their principles nor dispute with those who deny them, but leave this to a higher science; whereas the highest of them, viz. metaphysics, can dispute with one who denies its principles, if only the opponent will make some concession; but if he concede nothing, it can have no dispute with him, though it can answer his objections. Hence Sacred Scripture, since it has no science above itself, can dispute with one who denies its principles only if the opponent admits some ... of the truths obtained through divine revelation ... If our opponent believes nothing of divine revelation, there is no longer any means of proving the articles of faith by reasoning.

-*Summa Theologica*, the sixth edition, First Part, Question 1: "The Nature and Extent of sacred Doctrine," 8th Article, Saint Thomas Aquinas

I find it interesting that so many skeptics who attack my faith in Christianity seem to assume that the smallest attack on my beliefs will cause it all to come crumbling down. When this invariably fails, they conclude that I am suffering from cognitive dissonance (although "delusional" seems to be the word of choice). It is a sad thing to see, actually. They don't understand that some apparent, insignificant contradiction in what *they* think Christianity is about simply isn't going to work on me. What they think Christianity is turns out to be very much different than what I think it is, so any attacks they make are meaningless as we are talking about different things. It's like telling someone in California to vacate their home because a hurricane is going to hit Florida. Maybe there are good reasons to leave California, but a hurricane in Florida is not one of them. And even if what they say does bear some resemblance to what I believe, simply telling me they *think* they found a contradiction means nothing. They need to *prove* it is a contradiction. If someone in ragged blue jeans and a well worn t-shirt tells me he works on Wall Street, I'm not going to call him a liar because of his choice of clothes alone. I can come up with many legitimate reasons why his current attire does not preclude him working on Wall Street (weekend yard work, for example). Their inability to see how poor their arguments really are is worthy of my pity, not scorn.

What is so sad about the skeptic's situation is that he is not *seeking* information. He is assuming that it must be *me* that is wrong because *he* is incapable of understanding more than he does. To assume that just because one cannot understand something *must* mean that anyone else who claims to understand it is automatically wrong is a very wretched state in which to exist. Such people desperately need our prayers, and as Christians we must both find ways to stop this type of thinking from forming in our schools, and to come up with ways to try to redeem those who have already been so infected.

What they are failing to understand is that my metaphysical belief (what one might call "worldview") is different than theirs. As such, unless they can agree with at least some aspects of my worldview, they are unable to dispute anything I believe in. In all fairness, too many Christians do the same thing, making it difficult for apologists like myself to be able talk to skeptics on terms they can understand and accept. As I hope to demonstrate in this paper, there is a lot I am willing to concede to the skeptic in order to debate. This is not abdicating to the skeptic, as one would have to be completely insane to have a worldview so far removed from mine that *no* concession is possible. As pointed out by Saint Aquinas, it is only through these concessions that one can object to the others worldview. Nor was Saint Aquinas suggesting this concession needs to be complete or absolute. Indeed, *Summa*

*Theologica* can be seen as a collection of his works identifying what concessions he was willing to make and which ones he was not. All that needs to happen is for the Christian to say, "I am willing to accept that there might be answers to my questions that do not ultimately need God to answer them, if you [the skeptic] are willing to accept that the God Theory is a possible solution to at least some of your questions." Far from giving everything away in doing this, the Christian may very well get the skeptic to think about his own worldviews for the first time, and discover his own cognitive dissonance. While Gregory Koukl never spoke of Saint Aquinas, nor the quote I led this paper off with, his masterful book *Tactics* (which I think is a must-read for Christians) is (knowingly or unknowingly) founded on this very premise. With all that said, let us get to the meat of my worldview, and the kind of things the skeptic must address for me to change it.

Now, some people find Jehovah in a sunset. Some people do so with music. Some people in the Eucharist. This list could go on *ad infinitum*, but I find Jehovah in my mind. When I make connections between all things that I hold to be true, from the works of great apologists to the fact I have a dog for a pet, I find that they intersect, support, and enrich each other in a web of ever growing fascination and beauty. The lyrics to the song "How Great Thou Art" (my favorite Christian song) only scratches the surface of what I see with my mind's eye.

For a skeptic to get me to disbelieve in God, Jehovah to be specific, he has a hard row to hoe. The gentle reader might be surprised how effective calling God "Jehovah" or "Yahweh" is in forcing the skeptic to address the Christian's idea of God instead of his own distorted concept. Many skeptics think my faith is like a chain, remove one link and the whole thing falls apart (such as using an insignificant, apparent biblical contradiction). I've heard some Christians claim their faith is like a rope -- one can cut a few cords and the rope remains strong. But for me, faith is like the aforementioned web. The strands interconnect with each other. Not only do they support one another, but each strand is made stronger by the connections it has with the others. In fact, when a strand *is* severed, it usually allows me to reconnect it elsewhere, with the result of a yet stronger and more beautiful web than before. For one to destroy my faith, it is not enough to cut one or more of the anchor strands. As long as even one anchor strand remains, the whole web remains up. To destroy my faith, *every* anchor strand needs to be cut. This is my worldview, and the flexibility it gives me in granting concessions cannot be overstated.

And they began to discover that they were all meditating different aspects of the same thing; and they brought together their various discoveries, and recognized the likeness between them; and the one thing often explained the other, and combining with it helped to a third. ... so that every now and then one turned to another and said, as in surprise, "Why, you are my brother!" -- "Why, you are my sister!" And yet they had always known it.

--George MacDonald, *Adela Cathcart*, Volume III, Chapter VII

I don't think most skeptics (or even Christians, for that matter) really understand just how many anchor strands exist in this web. I don't even care to count them myself, although I can name many that constantly come up in my efforts to defend the faith. But there is one thing that is *not* an anchor strand, and I think that it will come as a tremendous shock to both the typical skeptic and the Christian alike: the Bible. This does not contradict Saint Aquinas, as to believe in divine revelation implies belief in the divine (the next question he addressed in the book is "The Existence of God.") This is a concession I readily agree to: that the Bible was indeed penned by man. In contrast, for one to believe in Jehovah because the Bible says He exists is a classic example of a circular argument -- I believe in God because the Bible tells me He is real, and I believe the Bible is correct because God inspired it. Circular beliefs as they pertain to the divine are pagan concepts. This is most obvious in the pagan view of time --

existence is a circle that the gods maintain, and humans make sacrifices to the gods so they have the energy to maintain the circle of existence that humans live in. Norse, Egyptian and Mesoamerican myths are quite explicit in promoting this belief, but it can be found in virtually every other pagan religion as well. Jews are the ones who first introduced the idea of linear time for existence ("In the beginning," Genesis 1:1). Christians naturally inherited this belief, and incorporated it in the education centers that they set up (which are now called colleges and universities). One of several things that allowed Christianity to be the father of science is that science is only possible with a linear understanding of time. But getting back to the aforementioned circular argument, it becomes clear why one should not believe in Jehovah because of the Bible. Jehovah exists *outside* of time, whereas the Bible exists *in* time. Unlike the circular pagan beliefs, Christians have to accept that God's existence is a prerequisite for God's revelation. The Jewish and Christian understanding of linear existence as opposed to circular existence leaves us no choice. We ought to believe that God exists *before* we believe that the Bible is "right." I have covered this argument in great detail with another paper, so I won't add to it here.

I bring all this up only because of the overwhelming use of various apparent biblical contradictions that atheists use to try to convince me to disbelieve in God. They simply could not be more wrong in taking that approach with me. If God is real (which I believe), and if the Bible is inspired by Him (which I also believe), then I *have* to assume the Bible is "correct" in some sense of the word. I do my best to explain the apparent contradictions. If I fail to do so, then I have to humble myself and admit that there are some things I do not know. But I can turn this line of thought back on the skeptic. If God does not exist, then why are they so interested in finding contradictions in the Bible (remember this point when we get to Jean-Paul Sartre later)? If they are right, then the Bible is just a collection of sad and horrible fairy tales, and anything of meaning in it is only meaningful by accident. For a skeptic to use the Bible as evidence against the existence of God is at the same time declaring his own evidence as being unreliable. One has to destroy my belief in Jehovah before I disbelieve the Bible, not the other way around. However, the reverse is also true -- one has to convince the skeptic that God exists (or is at least a valid theory) for them to believe what the Bible says.

Unfortunately for the skeptic who does try to get me to disbelieve in Jehovah, it's only slightly better than impossible to do this. *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am, René Descartes) sums it up rather nicely for me. Why do I exist? Unless I believe I am infinite (which I do not believe), then it follows that something must have created me. Science does a great job in explaining *how* my existence came to be (I was born of parents), but it cannot explain the ultimate question of *why* my existence is possible (why is there a reality in which anything can exist at all?). Indeed, science has created the most airtight argument possible for the existence of an intelligent creator of the universe. For the rational mind, the evidence from science means the question is not whether or not a creator god or gods exist, but whether or not Jehovah is that creator god. But science is by no means the only anchor strand (although many skeptics seem to think science is proof against a god). There is also history, anthropology (another point I'll address here), theory of evolution, free will, reason, beauty, mathematics, and many other transcendental concepts. But what I think will shock both the Christian and the skeptic alike is that atheism and paganism both point to the existence of Jehovah. I'll get to explaining those matters shortly.

While my list of anchor strands must always be woefully incomplete, some, like I said, are more important than others. I've talked at length on several of them in other articles I've written, so I won't elaborate on them here. But I will talk on the three that are perhaps the most shocking: transcendental concepts, atheism, and paganism. I believe that neither the typical skeptic nor the Christian has any clue as to how strongly they support the idea that Jehovah is real. This is because neither is usually

willing to make a concession to the other, or to really understand the opposing point of view. I am going to make concessions that there are things both truthful and valuable from the skeptic's point of view, but also show how they create their own problems that cannot be resolved without Jehovah.

The first anchor strand I will talk about is transcendental concepts. As the pursuit of scientific knowledge involves a materialistic view of reality, and an infinite dance of causes and effects, it was inevitable that mental processes would be analyzed in a similar manner. After all, science was extremely successful in showing how matter (atoms and molecules) behaves in a predictable manner. If one knows all the forces acting on a piece of matter (the cause), then what the piece of matter does next (the effect) will be known with an extremely high degree of certainty. The practical application of all these predictions is that, if one knows a certain cause will lead to a certain effect, and if one can control the causes, then it follows that one can likewise control the effects.

It is reasonable to wonder if the brain, which is made of cells (which are in turn are made of molecules), is likewise subject to predictable behavior. And since thought is clearly related to the brain, it is likewise reasonable to wonder if thoughts can be predicted by knowing all the motives. The logical conclusion of this line of reasoning is that we don't think certain thoughts, feel certain emotions, have certain beliefs, etc., because we are free to engage in them, but rather because the dance of atoms over 14 billion years forces us to experience these things. This is called determinism, and it means any willful mental activity or interpretation of an experience is an illusion.

While this is likely a terrifying thought to the common person, it was welcomed with delight by those dissatisfied with Christianity. There is no need for a god (who would be transcendental), as any understanding of him would be an illusion anyway. One can therefore act as one *wants* because the Christian teachings (including ethics and morality) are illusions. Note the irony here, as this is a classic case of the same cognitive dissonance so many skeptics accuse Christians of. If God cannot exist because there is no free will, then one cannot choose to do something different simply because God does not exist. If they truly believed in determinism, then they would acknowledge that *not* believing in God is just as much an illusion as believing *in* Him. They would also refrain from using words that imply choice, such as "ought," "should," "want," "believe," etc. And the fathers of atheism, to their credit on this matter, were mostly agnostics and didn't fall into this trap. It was the later generations of skeptical philosophers who assumed that "not knowing" must mean "non-existent" (a fallacy known as *non-sequitur*).

This method of using the transcendental to deny the transcendental is a fallacy known as logic parricide (the killing of one's parents). The greatest weakness determinists have is that they need to use transcendental concepts to "prove" the lack of the transcendence (hence the term parricide). It has, so far, been impossible for them to explain their beliefs without relying on transcendental realities, or to talk as if free will does not exist. In determinism, things do what they *must*, not what they *ought* or *want*. And the problems with determinism are not only theoretical, as there is scientific evidence to support the idea that the brain (material) is related to, but not the same as, the mind (transcendental).

One such test is to tell the subject to *not* move his right hand, while the experimenter stimulates the part of the brain that controls the right hand with mild electric currents. The subject usually responds by using his left hand in an attempt to hold the right hand down. Again, science is able to explain "how" things happen (which part of the brain controls the right hand) through materialism, but they are still at a loss for the ultimate "why" (the will remained unchanged despite its inability to influence events). While the will is limited in how much it can affect the material, this experiment seems to suggest that the will is still independent from the material. The subject may or may not have

been able to stop the right hand from moving, but the will still took actions in an attempt to assert itself over the material. Even the electric shock causing the right hand to move was not really deterministic, as the experiment itself came from the imagination (a transcendental concept) of someone who had the means and the will to execute it. Far from explaining the "why," it actually pushed the "why" back a level and raised even more questions concerning the "how."

This is where Immanuel Kant comes in (and I will continue this line of thought when we get to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel). He created what is commonly called German Idealism, and greatly influenced all the great atheistic philosophers since his time (I'll be addressing three such philosophers in detail soon). Kant himself was not an atheist, and actually tried to prove that the transcendental was real (which would allow for the existence of God). Kant set out to show that it is impossible to understand anything material with absolute certainty, unless one can see the infinite. Since humans are finite, it is impossible to completely know with certainty what anything is. This caused massive problems with the determinism the skeptics were seeking, as they wanted to know with absolute certainty how things worked so they could control everything (notice again the idea of free will embedded in deterministic thought). But for Kant, the transcendental was essential to be able to claim any knowledge of the material. And I think there is much merit to this. Shapes, numbers, time and honesty are all transcendental concepts, and the scientific method is simply not possible without them. And note that all these transcendental concepts that are necessary for science also implies that there is a hierarchy of value (some things are greater than other things). So, not only did Kant show that transcendental concepts exist, therefore allowing God the possibility to exist, but he even made it plain that only God (who is infinite) can have what the scientists and philosophers wanted: absolute knowledge of something. This raises a very interesting question: do skeptics really want there to be no God, or do they simply envy what God has? Remember this question when we talk about Friedrich Nietzsche shortly, as his own observations and reflections echo this.

Seeking to discredit the works of Kant, we have the greatest skeptical minds try to prove Kant was wrong and therefore God would not exist. Yet they all wound up pointing right back to Jehovah despite themselves. I'm not talking about the typical skeptic today who denies God because he found something in the Bible he doesn't like (as alluded to in the beginning of the paper). I'm talking about those who really looked at the facts and other forms of evidence, and attempted to make a coherent theory on how our culture could be like it is without the assistance of God. Without exception, they all either built a case that leads to Jehovah, or stopped developing their theory when it became obvious that it was building a case for Jehovah. Some, like C.S. Lewis, Sartre, and Dr. Jordan Peterson, eventually accepted where their theories were going, and became believers. But most of them simply stopped where they were at, and held on to their original bias (such as Nietzsche and Carl Sagan). Generally speaking, the smarter the philosopher, the further he went before he was forced to either accept God or stop, but they all reached this crisis point once they pursued their lines of thought far enough. People like Sagan and Richard Dawkins never really developed their theories very far, and just insist that they are right without evidence or thought to support their claims. Indeed, the typical skeptical solution to their cognitive dissonance is to ask the Christian to prove God exists, and then deny any evidence the Christian presents as being sufficient. However, when *they* are asked if there is any evidence for the *non*-existence of God, they gaslight the Christian and claim that the Christian is at fault for "trying to prove a negative." Christopher Hitchens, in his famous debate against William Lane Craig at Biola University, attempted this gambit and failed. These types of skeptics commonly refer to themselves as "agnostic-atheists." They use the atheist side to attack Christian beliefs as being founded without evidence, but then cower behind agnosticism to justify their own lack of evidence for their own beliefs.

This is a clear case of gaslighting, as they are trying to make the Christian feel guilty (or at least ignorant) in order to hide the fact that they have nothing themselves. This is a fallacy in its own right, as their claim is irrelevant. For the Christian to "prove a negative" means the Christian is trying to prove an argument. But the argument against God is the skeptic's argument, not the Christian's. Therefore, the Christian is not trying to prove anything here, he is only seeking to understand the skeptic's point of view. So gaslighting is used to distract the Christian from the fact that the skeptic has no evidence. In truth, the skeptic's argument is what is known as an "argument from ignorance." Now, the Christian usually has some evidence, no matter how weak it might be, and is therefore making an "argument from knowledge." No matter how weak the Christian's argument may be, it is, by default, stronger than the skeptic's.

But my anchor strand of faith is not founded on the fact that even global celebrity atheists don't have an argument. If it is founded on what the greatest atheist minds the world has ever seen have come up with -- atheists who would freely criticize people such as Hitchens, Dawkins and Sagan for their "arguments from ignorance" (Sartre, in particular, was well known for calling out those types of atheists). With that being said, I will now focus on the three most influential atheistic thinkers in history: Hegel, Nietzsche and Sartre.

We begin with Hegel, and I already mentioned how he resisted Kant's ideas of the transcendental. Specifically, Hegel disagreed that it was impossible to understand the infinite, although he did limit his deterministic beliefs to history. So we see two contradictions in Hegel's thoughts right from the beginning. History is a transcendental concept, as is the ability to understand something. But Hegel had no problems with contradictions. The Western idea that contradictions cannot exist at the same time and in the same place comes from Aristotle, but Hegel actually claimed that his ideas superseded those of Aristotle. Without having to worry about contradictions, Hegel's solution to the "Kantian problem" is essentially to use the transcendental to create a deterministic theory, and once the deterministic theory is formed the transcendental can be discarded and the contradiction is removed -- the very definition of the parricide fallacy. Once the "child" existed (in this case, that infinite knowledge of history exists), Hegel was free to kill the "parent" (infinity is not a material reality). This is not the cognitive dissonance that affects most atheists; this is a flat out and deliberate denial that cognitive dissonance exists at all.

Hegel, like Kant, is difficult to classify as an atheist or agnostic. He professed to believe in something like the Christian God, yet perverted Him in such a way that no one would want to worship Him, and made Him so unnecessary that no one needed to. Hegel looked at gods in general as one might view culture in general: basically a good thing that helps people function with each other at a local level, but still a man-made contrivance. And such a god is only as good as he is useful. But if a "god" can be described as an idea of supreme importance, to which no sacrifice is too great, then without a doubt the true god for Hegel was history. By placing history above all else, he embraced the transcendental concept of value while at the same time denying it exists. No one, not even Jehovah (in Hegel's point of view) could see the future, as all that exists is the past. Even the present does not really exist for Hegel, what we call the present is just an impression of the most recent past moment.

Unfortunately for the world at large, Hegel's ideas actually do work with what is truly material (at least as long as one accepts the Jewish/Christian idea that time is linear and not circular). All material is made of matter, and all known matter is ultimately made of subatomic particles called "quanta." Although Hegel would not have been familiar with quanta, he did believe that atoms served the same purpose that scientists today claim quanta does. What this means is that, within reality as is understood by man, one can look deeper and deeper and ultimately find that everything is the same. An

apple and a lemon both come from trees, therefore they are both fruits. The "contradiction" that the apple and lemon are different is therefore resolved. Fruits and vegetables both rely on photosynthesis to exist, so we can call them plants. Again, the contradiction is resolved. This example, I hope, helps point out why Hegelian thought is so convincing. Within certain limits, it does indeed work, and it works very well. Most people don't have a problem with saying that a carrot, an apple and a lemon all come from plants. That is until one wants a sweet drink, in which case the differences between the three are very important. The problem with Hegelian thought is that it only recognizes "similar" as a clue to actual "sameness." Therefore, one can only find enlightenment by moving past similar *to* sameness. For Hegel, there is no difference between an apple, carrot, lemon, or (for that matter) the person wanting a sweet drink. His fascination with history means he is not concerned with the apparent differences between them, but rather why the quanta identified as a person has the impression it wants a sweet drink. To him, all of the universe's history led to a specific point in time and space when this collection of quanta had the illusion of being upset that it interacted with a certain other set of quanta (lemon juice) instead of a third set of quanta (apple juice).

One may very well want to argue with me on this example, claiming I am talking about absurdities. Without limits, Hegelian thought is indeed absurd. What I am really trying to do is make it understandable. It's easy to dismiss Hegel's conclusions when discussing something as silly as what type of juice one wants to drink as being irrelevant, but the results of Hegelian thought become much less amusing when unlimited theory is applied to more important transcendental matters. For example, Hegelian logic says there is no difference between consensual sex and rape, only that the universe conspired to give the woman an illusion of an unpleasant experience while engaging in sexual intercourse. But perhaps the greatest real world example today (2023) that Hegelian thought is affecting our culture is when schools are teaching our children that there is no difference between a boy and a girl, or, for that matter, a child and some type of animal. By using Hegelian thought, a child is not only free to choose his gender, but his species as well. A five-year-old girl is a mammal, and a kitten is a mammal. Therefore, the two are the same. And since they are the same, why not let the child choose for herself which species to be? Note that, once again, we see free will (the choice of the child) appearing in the practical application of a deterministic theory.

And I am not the only one who calls this insanity. The atheistic philosophical greats after Hegel did not so much build on or deny Hegel, but rather tried to come to grips with how horrible the Hegelian world actually is -- a world they nonetheless believed in (I'll be using Nietzsche and Sartre to demonstrate this claim). By being willing to concede that Hegel's worldview had some good aspects to it, I placed myself in position to discuss the problems with it as well. Most skeptics don't realize this aspect of their worldview. Many, knowingly or unknowingly, have turned to Hegelian thought and saw (and continue to see) that the world was still good despite its departure from God. They are overlooking the fact that they still live in a culture that is deeply ingrained in Christian values. One may not believe in God or Christianity, but for the 200 years since the time of Hegel, Westerners have lived in and abided by Christian values and morals. The next two atheist greats I will address had specifically focused on this dynamic.

Nietzsche is the most famous of the nihilistic philosophers, and perhaps his most quoted line is "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him." (*The Gay Science*). What most people don't seem to understand is that Nietzsche, while he believed in what he said, did not consider this a good thing. If one reads the actual text, it continues with:

"How shall we, the murderers of all murderers, comfort ourselves? What was *holiest and most powerful of all the world has yet owned* has bled to death under

our knives. Who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? *Must not we ourselves become gods simply to appear worthy of it?*" (translated by Walter Kaufmann, italics mine)

Let's face it, this sounds more like Isaiah scolding the unfaithful in Babylonian captivity than the angels announcing the coming of the Kingdom of God. Nietzsche realized that as long as western culture was guided by Christian values, then life was generally good. Not perfect by any means, but better than under the pagan gods or, even worse, no god at all (notice how he specifically calls for mankind to become gods). He also recognized that atheism was riding the coattails of science, and that science was eroding the impact Christianity was having on culture, including virtue and morals. In Nietzsche's theory, the general goodness that still prevailed was not because atheism had equal (or better) morals than Christianity, but because Christian values still lingered within the culture after God's death. "God is dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown." (ibid) While outside the scope of this paper, the wokism and other cultural upheavals that exploded in 2020 suggest that the number of remaining "caves" is getting low. He predicted this, of course, when he asked, "Must not we ourselves become gods simply to appear worthy of it?" And he did not seem too happy with what would come out of us becoming gods, as he noted that, without God, everything is in vain (which, by the way, King Solomon already noted in Ecclesiastes). Since everything is vanity, all that is left for man is despair. This reinvention of Ecclesiastes is what led him to be the leader of nihilistic thought.

Unlike Kant and Hegel (who could be described as agnostics), Nietzsche was an atheist, but he never made any attempt to justify his position. He actually admitted such an effort was futile. Therefore, anyone using Nietzsche's reputation to justify atheism is an "argument from ignorance." Despite his atheism, Nietzsche admitted that God is a necessity; if not Jehovah, then something else must replace Him. But this opens up two questions. The first is, why does man have a need for something that does not exist? The second is, how can something non-God ever fill a God-sized need?

The first question is clearly contradictory to a materialistic [only] reality, as no other need exists in any living being (plant or animal) that can't be satisfied. Indeed, if one said that a plant or animal is going without having its needs met, then it would generally be accepted that the plant or animal is dying. If an animal needs air, it will die when no air is available. Same thing with food, water, certain temperature ranges, etc. Why is God the one and only need in all of the universe that does not exist? If man has a legitimate need for God, but God does not exist, then how can we survive as a species? No Christian should consider nihilism as a legitimate alternative to God without a good answer to this question. And the skeptic cannot call on Nietzsche to answer the question, because Nietzsche explicitly defaulted on this matter when he said some type of god needs to exist, even if it is ourselves. Let us consider what Saint John Henry cardinal Newman has to say on this matter:

But almost all men, whether they are thereby moved to return to God or not, will on experience feel, and confess, and that in no long time, that the world is not enough for their happiness. And they accordingly seek means to supply their need, though they do not go to religion for it. Though they will not accept God's remedy, yet they confess that a remedy is needed, and have recourse to what they think will prove such. Though they may not love God and his holy heaven, yet they find they cannot take up with the world, or cast their lot with it wholly, much as they may wish it. This leads me to the subject which I propose to consider: they need which mankind lies under of some shelter, refuge, rest, home, or sanctuary from the outward world, and the shelter or secret place which



God has provided for them in Christ.

--*The Church a Home for the Lonely*, edited by Christopher O. Blum and collected in *Waiting for Christ*

Now I'll address the second point, on what will fill a God-sized hole if no God exists. This is where my final atheist philosopher, Sartre, comes into play. And I think he did more to justify belief in God than any other philosopher, all the while trying to do exactly the opposite. He is most famous for discussing how one's essence (he called it "being-in-itself") is in opposition to one's characteristics, wants or beliefs ("being-for-itself"). It has parallels with Kant: two concepts that can only exist when considered as a single entity, yet they can never be truly united without the existence of a transcendental infinity. But while Kant always stopped short of declaring this obvious conclusion, Sartre explicitly claimed it: "The ideal of a consciousness which would be the foundation of its own being-in-itself by the pure consciousness which it would have of itself. It is this ideal which can be called God." (*Being and Nothingness*, Part 4, Chapter 2.I, pg 723-724) But since God does not exist, he reasons, the in-itself and the for-itself are forever separated from each other. And, like Nietzsche, Sartre believed that this was a bad thing. Specifically, that the misery that existed in the world was because the in-itself and the for-itself constantly struggled to close this gap, but never could. Note how this also has obvious parallels with Nietzsche's lamenting that God was disappearing from modern culture.

Sartre tried to answer nihilism with existentialism, claiming that the despair that comes from not having a value system was not inevitable. Sartre claimed that we could choose for ourselves what value we placed on our lives. But Sartre really missed the point here. Assigning value to our own lives is as old as reason (again, Ecclesiastes comes to mind), so this is not a new discovery. The point is that anything we do or accomplish will die with us. Perhaps a few select may do something significant enough to be remembered for a time, but eventually everything one does will be gone. Man is incapable of making a lasting impression on the universe. These are the lessons of Ecclesiastes and Nietzsche, and the skeptic will have a tough time trying to show how Sartre could be right otherwise. Indeed, even Sartre questioned his own former conclusions at the end of his life. He gravitated towards Messianic Judaism shortly before he died. According to Pierre Victor, Sartre admitted, "I do not feel that I am the product of chance, a speck of dust in the universe, but someone who was expected, prepared, prefigured. In short, a being whom only a Creator could put here; and this idea of a creating hand refers to God."

I do want to point out that existentialism itself is not against Christian teachings, as the word means to find one's purpose in life. The difference in what Christianity teaches and what Sartre said (before his conversion), of course, is whether one lets God reveal this purpose, or if one determines it for oneself. Sadly, many Christians have been, in practice, using Sartre's ideas of existentialism since the religion began 2,000 years ago. No doubt this helped his ideas infiltrate Christian culture. Both Christianity and Sartre will tell a student that how he feels about failing a test is up to the student. But while Christianity, in pursuing a "be the best one can be" attitude, encourages constant improvement for oneself, Sartre will accept a student deciding that academics are just not for him, and then go on with life no different than before the test. And this is just an everyday example. In a work by Albert Camus (a longtime close friend to Sartre and fellow existentialist), the protagonist acts disrespectfully at his mother's funeral, agrees to lure a girl to a friend's house so the friend can abuse her, kills a man, and finally faces his own execution with the same indifference as walking down the street (*The Stranger*). Lest anyone think I am misinterpreting Camus' work, his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" ends by telling us that we must imagine Sisyphus as being happy having to roll the boulder up a mountain for all eternity. And lest one think the influence of Camus is meaningless to existentialists, after Camus' death Sartre claimed that "Camus could never cease to be one of the principal forces in our cultural domain." (1960,

before Sartre's conversion). So while atheistic existentialism sounds good when the philosophy professors teach sanitized examples of it in the classroom, this is what Sartre's idea of existentialism really is.

But if the only thing Sartre's works did was to simply give up and accept the absurdity of reality, then I would not have included him here. I already had Nietzsche to show man's real need for God. Instead, I want to point out how Sartre gives positive reasons to believe in God. Even here, though, Sartre builds on Nietzsche. From Nietzsche's work, *Twilight of the Idols*, we get, "When one gives up the Christian faith, *one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet*. This morality is by no means self-evident... Christianity is a system, a whole view of things thought out together. *By breaking one main concept out of it, the faith in God, one breaks the whole.*" (quoted from bigthink.com, italics mine). This lays the groundwork for what I have to say next concerning Sartre, about "good faith" and "bad faith."

Sartre, unlike most skeptics today, understood that absolute knowledge was almost impossible to have. *Cogito, ergo sum* is the only true *a priori*, and one can't build on it without making at least one assumption. For Sartre, almost everything we consider "knowledge" is really a *belief* of something being true. As such, one can either have this belief based on credible evidence (good faith) or on little or no evidence (bad faith). While this is fairly uncontroversial by itself (although there is widespread cognitive dissonance as to how people normally apply it to themselves), Sartre extended it to actions as well. Self-proclaimed Christians who act in unchristian-like manners are often called out by skeptics as "proof" Christianity is not real, but atheists who act with unatheistic charity are disgracing their alleged beliefs in the exact same manner. Both are acting on what Sartre would call "bad faith." And to his credit, Sartre was every bit as harsh on bad faith atheists as he was to bad faith Christians:

"It is indeed obvious that the atheism of M. Naville or Madame Angrand is not "the expression of a progressive discovery." It is a clear and *a priori* stand on a problem which infinitely transcends our experience. This is also my stand, but I did not consider myself to be any the less a metaphysician in refusing existence to God than Leibnitz was in granting it to him." (*Materialism and Revolution*, originally published in *Les Temps Modernes* in 1946)

Naturally, he managed to infuriate everyone. Being faithful to his conclusions meant he called out the vast majority of Christians, pagans and skeptics alike, because most people don't really consider, much less act on, what their faiths mean. So, for Sartre, every skeptic who claims he is a "good person," when "being good" is based on Christian standards, is a hypocrite. If one believes Christian virtues and morals are important, then one is a practicing Christian regardless of professed belief. Likewise, a professed Christian who acts in an unchristian-like manner is a practicing atheist.

By giving concessions to Sartre, I have opened up perhaps the single greatest resource a Christian can have in combating atheism. Indeed, I would rather have Sartre against me than most Christians helping me. He admits that life without Jehovah is absurd. He not only admits that man has a need for God, but actually created a spot in the human psyche where God would exist if He did exist. Like Nietzsche, his conclusions echo that of the wisest man in Jewish/Christian beliefs (King Solomon). But Sartre's gifts extend to the practical as well as the theoretical. Sartre has provided an answer to perhaps the most annoying question a skeptic can ask: "If Christianity works, why do so many Christians do bad things?" For Sartre, the answer is, "because they are not really Christians." Not only that, but now the Christian can throw the question back at the skeptic (especially if the skeptic considers himself a "good man"): "If you don't believe in God, why do you act like God exists?" The typical response is "because I want to." This is a deflection method, as they really didn't answer the question, but rather restated it. How far the gentle reader wants to pursue this, I leave up to him. I

would recommend not pushing too far, as the goal is to get them to recognize their own cognitive dissonance, not build a wall of spiteful anger around their cognitive dissonance.

So I find that, even in the highest level of atheistic thought, there has never been a rational and reasonable argument made against Jehovah. Indeed, many (like Kant and Nietzsche) explicitly admit that to do so is impossible. It is the utter failure, actually the giving up of even trying to disprove God, that makes atheism such a strong support strand in my web of Christian faith. No rational and reasonable alternative for God exists. Furthermore, the fact that they actually have both identified a need and created a place for the God they deny exists speaks volumes concerning the futility of the effort. Their conclusion is that, "Sadly, God does not exist. As a result, your life is either going to be depressingly nihilistic, or you have to will yourself into the insanity of the absurd." I'm sure many skeptics will claim I am strawmanning their point of view with this last statement. I accept this criticism, but I will only take it back if they can show me where I am inaccurate. Until such a time, the struggle for skeptics to come up with a better theory than God, as well as their own admittance as to how much better life would be if God actually did exist, makes atheism perhaps the strongest anchor strand in my web of belief in God.

This leaves us with just the pagan support strand to discuss. But, unlike my earlier examples, where I went forward in time, we must look backwards in time with paganism. Paganism is generally believed to have developed in an evolutionary manner, and I'm not aware of any pagan disagreeing with this assessment. I also fully agree with this theory, so I'm actually going beyond "conceding" some points here. The idea of gods begetting gods with slightly different powers than the parents is core to every pagan religion worth talking about, and it is a classic example of evolutionary theory. The only thing I don't agree with is the arbitrary (although well defined) point where the evolutionary theorists like to discuss the beginning of their hypotheses. This point is always a creator god that somehow came into being, and existed in some type of material reality that is different from the world and/or other gods it created (quick note -- Jehovah was not created, He exists outside of time and space, so suggesting He could be "created" is meaningless). Most people are familiar enough with the Greek and Norse mythologies to see this, and the Egyptian and Native American mythologies are fairly well known as well. Eastern religions also start off the same way. But the question that I feel needs to be answered is, what came before that? Where did this creator god who was itself created come from, and where did the reality he lived in come from? The answers to these questions actually exist, but are not commonly discussed in public forums, nor are they taught in schools. One has to go to original source materials to learn this.

What I am going to propose is slightly different than the evolutionary theory discussed in the paragraph above suggests, but it is not in conflict with it either. Anthropologists have discovered that in the most primitive cultures that still exist today (as well in the oldest legends that are recorded), a deity existed even before this creator god. I like to call these primordial gods "Shadow Gods," as almost nothing is known about them. If called upon at all, the vaguest of terms are used (such as the Norse "All Father," the Greek "Unknown God," and Native American "Great Spirit,") and no physical description is made. It is like they know it is there, unspoken of but not quite forgotten. Meanwhile, all the attention is given to the gods who are closer to the worshipers. There is evidence that all the ancient religions began when each village gave a name and shape to this Shadow God (creating idols) to facilitate worship. I call these "diminutive gods," because having a name meant humans had some control over them, and having a shape limited their abilities. The legends of Brahman actually demonstrate this theory quite well. As neighboring communities began trading with each other, these diminutive gods formed the nucleus for the nascent pantheons we read about today. If a need for something came up that the existing gods did not have dominion over, then a new god could either be

imported from a neighboring community (like the Greeks often did) or "born" of two existing gods. Thus, we see a clear evolution in pagan mythology that is not publicly talked about, but is not in conflict with popular understanding. Again, this is not me talking, but that of anthropologists who have dug deep into the matter.

It is from this point where I begin to build my theory. What if one culture never did turn this Shadow God into a diminutive god? If such a god exists (and remember that science presents conclusive evidence that there is a creator god of some type), then would it not be rational for Him to favor this culture above the others? Not the favoritism commonly understood today, but rather that this culture benefited the most because it did not create artificial barriers in communicating with Him. Would not this culture be the only one which took His message in the most fully because they had no preconceived ideas to corrupt the message? I think the rational and reasonable answer is yes, this culture would benefit the most from this Shadow God. And when we read the Old Testament, especially Genesis 1-4 and the stories of Abraham and Moses, we see behavior that would be expected if this theory were correct. And I don't need to rely on the Bible to prove that the Hebrews refused to give a name or image to this Shadow God. They are the only culture we know of from pre-history who did not make idols because they took this command so seriously they produced almost no art at all. The only reason we know the Hebrews existed back then is because they are still around to tell us about it today. If their culture disappeared in any of the many diasporas they went through, we would know nothing of them. And while Moses was said to have been told God's name (Exodus 3:13-15), it was not written down in its entirety lest the Hebrews think they could have power over Him. Even this abbreviated name was held too sacred to be spoken out loud, and the term "Lord" was used instead.

I have no intention to debate just how much different the message the Hebrews received might have been from the other cultures, but the impact on the Hebrews was phenomenal. While pagans performed human sacrifice (often live children), worshiped animals, and *idolized* inert material, Jews saw human life as sacred, sacrificed animals, and *built things* with inert material. While several non-Hebrew ancient cultures created laws that are similar to the Ten Commandments, the Jews are the only such culture from this time that are still around. And Jewish survival has nothing to do with chance, as they survived captivity in the most brutal cultures the world has ever known: the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Romans, the Nazis, and Socialist Russia. I am unaware of any alternative theory that can account for this amazing survival of the Jews. The only thing we know for certain that they did differently was that they never made the Shadow God a diminutive god. I find one can concede much to real paganism, as the romantic images most people have today of them have nothing to do with historical fact. And when one does take the time to truly understand paganism, one actually has a deeper appreciation and understanding of the God of the Jews.

In summary, I believe in Christianity because I believe it is true. The relentless efforts made to show Christianity is false have all fallen short at best, and often backfired on the atheist. Pagans have tried to destroy Judaism for 3,400 years and Christianity for 2,000 years -- and failed. Science is providing more and more evidence for the Intelligent Design Theory. The greatest philosophers have given up trying to disprove God, and simply assume his non-existence as *a priori*. Most skeptics only assume that there are good reasons to not believe in God, yet have no clue as to what they are. This can be made obvious with even the simplest of questions. A knowledgeable Christian should not be afraid to make concessions to a skeptic, as these concessions allow the Christian to dispute the skeptic's worldview. This can be scary, I admit. But if we are so sure their worldview is wrong while ours is right, then what is there to fear? If our worldview *is* right, and if we are willing to work through the problem, then we will never be contradicted at the end.

"To some minds the argument for immortality drawn from the apparently universal shrinking from annihilation must be ineffectual, seeing they themselves do not shrink from it. ... If there is no God, annihilation is the one thing to be longed for, with all that might of longing which is the mainspring of human action. In a word, it is not immortality the human heart cries out after, but that immortal, eternal thought whose life is its life, whose wisdom is its wisdom. ... Dissociate immortality from the living Immortality, and it is not a thing to be desired."

--George MacDonald, *Wilfred Cumbermede*, chapter 58

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