

For the purposes of this discussion, a Theist is defined as someone who claims that there is a God or gods with the general characteristics of omnipotence (being all-powerful) and omniscience (being all-knowing); (a God or gods without these attributes is unknown to the theist, as any god having a lesser ability would be inferior to the God of the theist); and an atheist as someone who claims that there is not a God or gods, as defined.

A man's experience of the universe is unavoidably subjective; because of the number of factors involved in each human being's experience of the world, and how the continuous build-up of experience from day-to-day life incrementally changes everyone's own worldview over time, objective knowledge is not possible. Only 'God' may attain to such. We must "recognize that the cosmos is accessible to us only through human senses and an understanding of human experience" (1), or, stated differently, our toolbox consists of our senses and our reason. These are the only tools we possess for understanding our world. It is not given to Man to know any more than these tools can provide us with: "It does not matter for man whether or not, beyond the sphere accessible to the human mind, there are other spheres in which there is something categorically different from human thinking and acting. No knowledge from such spheres penetrates to the human mind. It is idle to ask whether things-in-themselves are different from what they appear to us, and whether there are worlds which we cannot divine and ideas which we cannot comprehend. These are problems beyond the scope of human cognition. Human knowledge is conditioned by the structure of the human mind." (2) So, there may well be a demon hiding under my bed, but if I cannot sense it in any way, it may as well not be there.

Perhaps at this point we may sensibly conclude that Man may know nothing of God or the gods, even if He / they exist, and accept the counsel of Lermontov's Pechorin: "...since I make it a rule never to reject or believe in anything absolutely, I turned from metaphysical speculations to attend to the ground under my feet." (3) However, for theists and atheists, generally, the matter does not end here.

The atheist claims that there is no God, and that he can prove it. These 'proofs' typically consist of debunking the attempts of theists to prove that God exists (4), either because the atheist does not understand, or does not want to understand, that it is one of the axioms of logic that a negative cannot be proven. Since it is impossible to prove that there is no God, a leap of faith, in no way different from that of a theist, is required to believe that there is not, nor can there be, a God, or gods.

The only escape from this position for the atheist is to offer probabilistic reasons for his belief. "I cannot prove that there is no God, but it seems likely that this is the case." It is difficult to argue with such a position; extreme skepticism has been rightly ridiculed (5), and this kind of atheist differs little from the man who states that he believes that he will be alive tomorrow given his current state of health, or the improbability of a natural disaster near his home, etc., although he can, of course, not be certain. The question to ask now is 'why?' Why be an atheist? We shall return to this question later.

The theist claims conversely that there is a God, and that either he, or someone else, can prove it. Often the theist states that the fact has already been proven. It is agreed that Man may only experience the universe by means of his senses and his reason, but these are themselves sufficient to prove the existence of God. This position is found to underlie the pseudo-sciences of Creationism and Intelligent Design. Opponents of theism are strangely quiet in the face of this claim, for while they have conclusively debunked all proofs offered by the theists, they have not moved beyond to show that rational proof of the existence of God is impossible. However, such proof does exist via deductive reasoning of 'action' vs. 'contentment,' and is known as the Praxeological Critique (study of human action, or conduct). From the book *Human Action* by Ludwig von Mises, I quote at length the relevant portion below:

"The praxeological categories and concepts [of all human behavior reduced to satisfying discontentment by employing his available means, 'action', to achieve his ends, 'contentment'] are devised for the comprehension of human action. They become self-contradictory and nonsensical if one tries to apply them in dealing with conditions different from those of human life. The naive anthropomorphism [attribution of human characteristics or behavior to a god, animal, or object] of primitive religions is unpalatable to the philosophic mind. However, the endeavors of philosophers to define, by the use of praxeological concepts ['action' vs. 'contentment'], the attributes of an absolute being, free from all the limitations and frailties of human existence, are no less questionable.

"Scholastic philosophers and theologians and likewise Theists and Deists of the Age of Reason conceived an absolute and perfect being, unchangeable, omnipotent [all-powerful, almighty], and omniscient [all-knowing], and yet planning and acting, aiming at ends and employing means for the attainment of these ends. But action can only be imputed to a discontented being, and repeated action only to a being who lacks the power to remove his uneasiness once and for all at

one stroke. An acting being is discontented and therefore not almighty. If he were contented, he would not act, and if he were almighty, he would have long since radically removed his discontent. For an all-powerful being there is no pressure to choose between various states of uneasiness; he is not under the necessity of acquiescing in the lesser evil. Omnipotence [being all-powerful] would mean [having] the power to achieve everything and to enjoy full satisfaction without being restrained by any limitations. But this is incompatible with the very concept of action. For an almighty being, the categories of ends and means do not exist. He is above all human comprehension, concepts, and understanding. For the almighty being, every "means" renders unlimited services, he can apply every "means" for the attainment of any ends, he can achieve every end without the employment of any means. It is beyond the faculties of the human mind to think the concept of almightiness consistently to its ultimate logical consequences. The paradoxes are insoluble. Has the almighty being the power to achieve something which is immune to his later interference? If he has this power, then there are limits to his might and he is no longer almighty; if he lacks this power, he is by virtue of this fact alone not almighty.

"Are omnipotence [all-powerful] and omniscience [all-knowing] compatible? Omniscience [Being all-knowing] presupposes that all future happenings are already unalterably determined. If there is omniscience [all-knowing], omnipotence [all-powerful] is inconceivable. Impotence [Being unable] to change anything in the predetermined course of events would restrict the power of any agent [including the all-powerful]. Action is a display of potency [having ability] and control that are limited. It [The idea of an all-powerful and all-knowing being] is a manifestation of man who is restrained by the circumscribed [limited] powers of his mind, the physiological nature of his body, the vicissitudes [changes in circumstances or fortunes] of his environment, and the scarcity of the [or 'his inability to change the'] external factors on which his welfare depends. It is vain [having hubris, human arrogance] to refer to the imperfections and weaknesses of human life if one aims at depicting something absolutely perfect. The very idea of absolute perfection is in every way self-contradictory. The state of absolute perfection must be conceived as complete, final, and not exposed [open] to any change. Change could only impair its perfection and transform it into a less perfect state; the mere possibility that a change can occur is incompatible with the concept of absolute perfection. But the absence of change - i.e., perfect immutability [absence of change], rigidity and immobility [absence of movement] - is tantamount to the absence of life. Life and perfection are incompatible, but so are death and perfection.

"The living is not perfect because it is liable to change; the dead is not perfect because it does not live. The language of living and acting men can form comparatives and superlatives in comparing degrees [or 'comparisons of what qualifies as 'excellence' in varying degrees.'] But absoluteness is not a degree; it is a limiting notion. The absolute is indeterminable, unthinkable and ineffable [too great or extreme to be described in words]. It is a chimerical conception [existing only as the product of unchecked imagination]. There are no such things as perfect happiness, perfect men, eternal bliss. Every attempt to describe the conditions of a land of Cockaigne [Arcadia, Utopia, Paradise], or the life off the Angels, results in paradoxes. Where there are conditions, there are limitations and not perfection; there are endeavors to conquer obstacles, there are frustration and discontent." (6)

We submit that this Praxeological Critique, as it applies to all-powerful and all-knowing beings, is unanswerable.

We may thus summarize the position at which we have arrived:

- Man experiences the universe and his place in it by means of his senses and his reason. Anything beyond the scope of these tools is by definition not within his grasp, and is hence irrelevant.

- Man cannot prove by means of these tools the non-existence of God.

- Man cannot prove by means of these tools the existence of God.

We may therefore conclude that we do not know whether or not there is a God / gods, and, further, that we cannot know; the position of the Agnostic. What now of the inevitable response of both the theist and the atheist, that it may well be true that we cannot know, but it seems likely nonetheless that there is / is not a God / gods? To where does this continuing argument lead? Why should one care?

We may answer that we need not care, after the fashion of the ancient Greek and Roman Stoics. The essence of Stoicism was for the practitioner not to concern himself with problems beyond his control. By this means it was hoped that he would avoid unnecessary stress and allow more time to concentrate his efforts on those things that were within his powers. Epictetus described his reasoning thus:

"If you try to act a part beyond your powers, you not only disgrace yourself in it, but you neglect a part [of your life] which you could have filled with success."(8)

And Aurelius thus:

"For the greatest part of what we say and do being unnecessary, if a man take this [unnecessary assumptions, and thus, unnecessary action thereafter] away, he will have more leisure and less uneasiness."(9)

Certain modern thinkers have concluded similarly:

"To take what there is, and use it, without waiting forever in vain for the preconceived [idea or opinion formed before having the evidence for its truth or usefulness] - to dig deep into the actual and get something out of that - this doubtless is the right way to live." (10)

"To know oneself as well as one can; to avoid self-deception and foster no illusions; to learn what one can about the plain natural truth of things, and make one's valuations accordingly; to waste no time speculating upon vain subtleties [hair-splitting], upon 'things which are not and work nor'; - this perhaps is hardly the aim of an academic philosophy, but it is what a practical philosophy keeps steadily in view." (11)

Since a proof of the existence or otherwise of God will always be beyond us, it is as ridiculous and as pointless to strive for such [to know one way or the other] as it is to curse the sky when we have bad weather. To discover one of our limitations in this way leaves us with more time to devote to other questions. Or, to put it another way, when we close this one door a hundred thousand others open before us. By becoming Apathetic Agnostics we may experience the same sensation as Tennyson's Ulysses when he declared:

"... all experience is an arch wherethrough gleams that untraveled world, whose margin fades for ever and for ever when I move."(12)

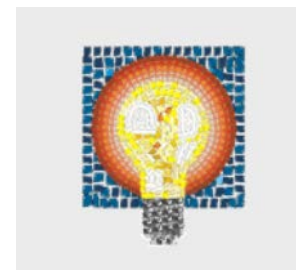
Is there, or is there not, a God or gods?

Nesciamus, non attingamus

(we don't know, and we don't care)

Notes: (1). Arnold, "The Corrupted Sciences" (2). Ludwig von Mises, "Human Action" (3). Lermontov, "A Hero of Our Time" (4). See, for instance, Smith, "Atheism" (5). The late David Stove was especially scathing (6). Ludwig von Mises, "Human Action" (7). Thomas Henry Huxley, coined "agnosticism" (8). Epictetus, Discourses (9). Marcus Aurelius, Meditations (10). Henry James (11). Albert Jay Nock, "Memoirs of a Superfluous Man" (12). Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"

*The Universal Church Triumphant
of the Apathetic Agnostic
"We don't know and we don't care"*



The Universal Church Triumphant of the Apathetic Agnostic Welcomes You.

Have you ever asked yourself: "Does God really exist?"

You are not alone.

A presentation of Meditation 24
on Apathetic Agnosticism by Reverend Paul.