





A brief proof for the existence of God

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It is by no means a meaningless historical fact that the ancient Israelites decreed that the name of the single God was to remain unspeakable, and that no graven image was to be made of the absolute. It is from the same source of deep mythological concern that drives the motivation of modern-day Muslims to object to imagistic representations of Mohammed, no matter how seemingly innocuous to the Western eye. It is in fact possible, merely from proper consideration of the fact, to derive a much more profound understanding of the question of belief or non-belief in God, a question that is paramount to many modern people, despite the fact that it is in many ways absurd.

Jewish culture bequeathed the idea to the larger Western world that reality as most broadly conceived was unitary, transcendent and unspeakable. Is this something to be believed, or not believed – or is it merely a matter of fact, in some axiomatic sense? It is beyond doubt – even self-evident – that it is possible to conceive of the unity of everything, merely as a consequence of taking abstraction to its limits. Every entity or object is composed of parts and each entity can be in turn grouped with others to produce something more general. There is in consequence a totality of being, that transcends its constituent elements – a whole

that is at least the sum of all its parts and perhaps something more.

Furthermore, that whole is clearly transcendent, in that it is in some clear sense more comprehensive than the single perceiving individual, in terms of its complexity and its spatial and temporal expanse. Is it reasonable to conceive of it as unspeakable or ineffable? It seems perfectly probable that the injunction against representation of God, imagistic or nominal, had its purpose and intent, unconscious or conscious. The Taoists warn against mistaking the finger that points to the moon with the moon. An elaboration of that idea emerged in our culture with the paintings of Magritte, who insisted that a picture of a pipe was in fact a picture and not a pipe, and with the philosophers who insist that the map is not the territory. The problem with the map, of course, is that it is easy to confuse it with the territory, and then to be blind to the territory. So it is with God. The attempt to force transcend reality into an ideological representation, no matter how grand, poses the clear danger not only of simplifying the Absolute to the point of evident ridiculousness, but of stealing the capacity for awe and terror proper to the transcendent and infusing it into the merely representative. Such minimization and inappropriate deification

deprives life of its transcendent significance, and turns vulnerable people, thus deprived, against existence. This has happened over and over in the history of man, not least in the last century, when our societies have been victimized repeatedly and murderously by their own idols.

So we can say quite straightforwardly that there exists a transcendent totality, whose essential nature is unspeakable. Now the ancient Jews made an even more radical claim – one whose truth I would argue is possible to demonstrate using the same clear and truly self-evident rationale. These ancient tribal peoples posited that it was possible to establish a personal relationship with that totality, and that the attempt to do so was the highest of moral duties and virtues. What is a clear and skeptical thinker to make of that claim? Let us first establish that a part is always a part in relationship with a whole (although certainly not always in a personal relationship). A telephone is part of the networked totality of telephones, and exists, as a telephone, only in relationship to that totality (otherwise it is a mere generic thing). A cell in the human body exists in relationship to that body. Likewise, a human being is simultaneously and by necessity part of many superordinate systems, which can be conceived of as culminating in something single and complete. This of course says nothing about whether such a relationship is personal. Perhaps it might be posited that the choice to experience the

dynamic of part to whole as something personal is in fact a choice (and could therefore also be a discovery) and that the making of such a choice determines not only whether, in fact, the relationship is personal, but also what comes of it.

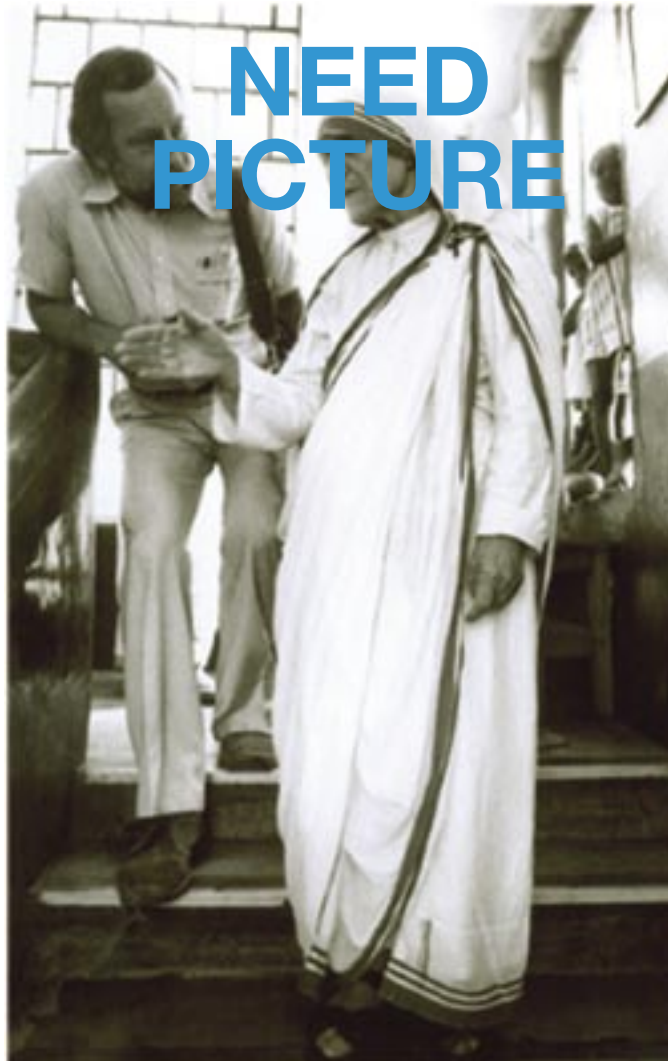
Otherwise, what are we to make of Socrates' discussion of his relationship with his daemon? This is the proper question, for the skeptic, because it may be taken for granted that Socrates existed, in some specific and evidently concrete historical sense, unlike Christ or the Buddha. It is also accepted without serious question that Socrates played a role as important to modern thought and conception as

Christ did to modern religious practice and belief (assuming for a moment that He did exist, historically or otherwise). We also have reliable data from at least two sources (Plato and Xenophon) concerning the nature of Socrates' apologia, which was in more comprehensible terms his defence, offered in his trial for heresy and the corruption of Athenian youth.

Socrates is famous to us and was most infamous to his peers for his rude and frightening habit of demonstrating to his interlocutors their complete and total ignorance regarding the foundation of their beliefs. Socrates was the first human being who awakened, as if from a dream, and realized that ambition, motivation and belief were all blind, unconscious. It is of course very disconcerting to face an adversary who is capable of demonstrating that the most cherished, fundamental and even invisible beliefs are grounded in presumption and not experience or thought, and that ignorance regarding that grounding is itself invisible. To demonstrate to a particular man that his certainty is illusory is certainly to make an enemy, and Socrates made many enemies.

Athens was a small city, in Socrates' time, and everyone knew everyone else and everyone else's business. Socrates was a gadfly, and he had made a fool of many influential people, but he was also very popular and charismatic. Eventually the power of his enemies – or their desperation and cruelty – multiplied, and they were willing to take desperate measures: Socrates was to be put on trial, and subjected, potentially, to the death penalty.

It is necessary, however, to understand this as a political maneuver, rather than as an act of homicide (potential or otherwise). Socrates was not arrested, and thrown in jail, to await his trial and certain execution. Rather, he was warned, much in advance – and his adversaries clearly expected him to banish himself, so that his problematic presence would be eliminated. This was common practice in the Athens of that time, and Socrates' friends not only expected him to accept banishment, but counseled him to do so. Indeed, even Socrates' himself expected to run. After all, he was in no hurry to die, did not believe in his own guilt, and knew that he was being unjustly persecuted, by contemptible en-



Tom interviewing Mother Teresa at the House of the Dying in Calcutta, India in November, 1979, after she won the Nobel Peace Prize.

emies. However, that is not what happened. After consulting with his “daimon,” Socrates found himself compelled to face the trumped up charges that awaited him, despite their falsity. His description of the process by which this change occurred is nothing short of remarkable.

Socrates tells his friends, after his change of heart – and, later, his persecutors – that there is a single thing that in truth distinguishes him from other men (as his followers and his enemies know him to be distinguished). It is precisely the relationship that he has established with his daimon. He says that he decided, early in his life, that he was going to make the presumption that the voice of his daimon was fact, or truth (in contradistinction to his own opinion, which is somehow distinguished from that of the daimon, or the opinions of others, or reality in some other guise, materialistic, romantic or otherwise). To point out that this daimon was the same manifestation identified by the ancient Jews as the individual relationship with the unspeakable or by Christians as the Holy Spirit or the Christ within or the Romans simply as genius. So it was Socrates’ genius that told him not to run away.

What is particularly interesting about Socrates’ account, apart from its clear historical veracity, is his insistence on his surprise at his daimon’s statement, and his subsequent mental re-organization, as he makes that statement axiomatic, despite its unexpected and surprising nature. Here we see faith at its most pure, and courage at its most extreme. Instead of denying his relationship with what has always supported him, Socrates decides instead to question his unquestioned assumption that his death must be an evil. He transforms “if my daimon opposes my own death, my daimon must be wrong” to “if my daimon opposes my own death, then my unconscious and unexamined preconceptions about my own death must be wrong.” Having done so, he is able to understand and then to explain to his friends that he has in fact been offered a gift from the Gods. As a reward for his exemplary life, he is being offered the opportunity to step cleanly and with dignity away from the ravages and degradation of old age (particularly painful, perhaps, for a clear-minded philosopher), to put his affairs in order, to say goodbye to those he loves, and to face his persecutors and to genuinely have the last word (and think of how long those words have lasted!).

At his trial, Socrates turns the table on his persecutors, and indicts them with a fury that allows us to see once and for

all time why he was so feared. Socrates, claiming the insight that only proximity to death can provide, lays out the reasons why he is wise (he is aware of the limitations of his knowledge, and he pays reverent attention to his daimon) and describes all the evidence supporting his claim to be a moral and just man. Then he reveals his own discovery of his fearlessness in the face of death, and attributes that to his voluntary adherence to truth and wisdom. Having thus defended himself, dispassionately and brilliantly, he psychologically dismembers the jurors who dared to prosecute him, revealing their moral inadequacies in a terrible penetrating flaying of character. Then he dies.

So here we have the testimony of a man admired even by rationalists and materialists. Nonetheless, he is a man who claims a relationship of some sort with the divine, and states in non-mystical language that this relationship ennobles him to the degree that he can tolerate the extremes of his own vulnerability. Socrates’ communion with his daimon (which he regards as more real, in a sense, than even his own death) makes him wise beyond measure and existentially fearless. It is a simple manner to presume that such a remarkable state of affairs, inexplicable as it clearly is, is the consequence of forging a genuine relationship with the transcendent totality of Being.

We perceive the world from without. But the world is also within. We voluntarily strive to establish a relationship, of multiple forms, with the world, without (and as good materialists, we believe that it is self-evident that such a relationship is possible). We have evidence, however, that the same can be done with the world within. So: there is a totality, and it is transcendent. As we are a part of that totality, nested within it, we are related to it. We have testimony, literally speaking, from men regarded both secularly and religiously as great that such a relationship can be personal, and, if it is made so, that the consequence is wisdom and fearlessness in the face of death. It is for such reasons that the question of belief or non-belief in God (or in His existence or non-existence) is absurd. The real question is twofold: First, what is the nature of the relationship that is established with the totality of being (given that such a relationship is inevitable)? Second, given that such a relationship is inevitable, why not make it all that it can be?

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