Why Should Anyone Believe Anything At All?

People almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive.

—BLAISE PASCAL

AUTHOR AND SPEAKER James Sire conducts an eye-opening interactive seminar for students at colleges and universities across the country. The seminar is called Why Should Anyone Believe Anything At All?

With such an intriguing title, the event usually attracts a large audience. Sire begins by asking those in attendance this question: “Why do people believe what they believe?” Despite the wide variety of answers, Sire shows that each answer he gets fits into one of these four categories: sociological, psychological, religious, and philosophical.¹

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Table 2.1

Beginning on the left, Sire goes through the reasons in each category by asking students, “Is that a good reason to believe something?” If he gets sharp students (like he would at Southern Evangelical Seminary!), the dialog might go something like this:

Sire: I see that many of you cited sociological factors. For example, many people have beliefs because their parents have those same beliefs. Do you think that alone is a good enough reason to believe something?

Students: No, parents can sometimes be wrong!

Sire: Okay, what about cultural influences? Do you think people ought to believe something just because it’s accepted culturally?

Students: No, not necessarily. The Nazis had a culture that accepted the murder of all Jews. That sure didn’t make it right!

Sire: Good. Now, some of you mentioned psychological factors such as comfort. Is that a good enough reason to believe something?

Students: No, we’re not ‘comfortable’ with that! Seriously, comfort is not a test for truth. We might be comforted by the belief that there’s a God out there who cares for us, but that doesn’t necessarily mean he really exists. Likewise, a junkie might be temporarily comforted by a certain type of drug, but that drug might actually kill him.

Sire: So you’re saying that truth is important because there can be consequences when you’re wrong?

Students: Yes, if someone is wrong about a drug, they might take too much and die. Likewise, if someone is wrong about the thickness of the ice, they might fall in and
freeze to death.

Sire: So for pragmatic reasons it makes sense that we should only believe things that are true.

Students: Of course. Over the long run, truth protects and error harms.

Sire: Okay, so sociological and psychological reasons alone are not adequate grounds to believe something. What about religious reasons? Some mentioned the Bible; others mentioned the Qur’an; still others got their beliefs from priests or gurus. Should you believe something just because some religious source or holy book says so?

Students: No, because the question arises, “Whose scripture or whose source should we believe?” After all, they teach contradictory things.

Sire: Can you give me an example?

Students: Well, the Bible and the Qur’an, for example, can’t both be true because they contradict one another. The Bible says that Jesus died on the cross and rose three days later (1 Cor. 15:1-8), while the Qur’an says he existed but didn’t die on the cross (Sura 4:157). If one’s right, the other one is wrong. Then again, if Jesus never existed, both of them are wrong.

Sire: So how could we adjudicate between, say, the Bible and the Qur’an?

Students: We need some proofs outside those so-called scriptures to help us discover which, if either, is true.

Sire: From which category could we derive such proofs?

Students: All we have left is the philosophical category.

Sire: But how can someone’s philosophy be a proof? Isn’t that just someone’s opinion?

Students: No, we don’t mean philosophy in that sense of the word, but in the classic sense of the word where philosophy means finding truth through logic, evidence, and science.

Sire: Excellent! So with that definition in mind, let’s ask the same question of the philosophical category. Is something worth believing if it’s rational, if it’s supported by evidence, and if it best explains all the data?

Students: That certainly seems right to us!

By exposing inadequate justifications for beliefs, the way is cleared for the seeker of truth to find adequate justifications. This is what an apologist does. An apologist is someone who shows how good reason and evidence support or contradict a particular belief. That’s what we’re attempting to do in this book, and it’s what Sire sets up in his seminar.

Sire’s Socratic approach helps students realize at least three things. First, any teaching—religious or otherwise—is worth trusting only if it points to the truth. Apathy about truth can be dangerous. In fact, believing error can have deadly consequences, both temporally and—if any one of a number of religious teachings are true—eternally as well.

Second, many beliefs that people hold today are not supported by evidence, but only by the subjective preferences of those holding them. As Pascal said, people almost invariably arrive at their beliefs not on the basis of proof but on the basis of what they find attractive. But truth is not a subjective matter of taste—it’s an objective matter of fact.

Finally, in order to find truth, one must be ready to give up those subjective
preferences in favor of objective facts. And facts are best discovered through logic, evidence, and science.

While using logic, evidence, and science seems the best way to get at truth, there are some who still have an objection. That objection concerns logic—namely, whose logic should we use, Eastern or Western? Ravi Zacharias tells a humorous anecdote that will reveal the answer.

**WESTERN LOGIC VS. EASTERN LOGIC?**

As a Christian apologist, author, and native of India, Ravi Zacharias travels the world giving evidence for the Christian faith. He has an incisive intellect and an engaging personality, which makes him a favorite on college and university campuses.

Following a recent presentation on an American campus regarding the uniqueness of Christ, Ravi was assailed by one of the university’s professors for not understanding Eastern logic. During the Q&A period the professor charged, “Dr. Zacharias, your presentation about Christ claiming and proving to be the only way to salvation is wrong for people in India because you’re using ‘either-or’ logic. In the East we don’t use ‘either-or’ logic—that’s Western. In the East we use ‘both-and’ logic. So salvation is not either through Christ or nothing else, but both Christ and other ways.”

Ravi found this very ironic because, after all, he grew up in India. Yet here was a Western-born, American professor telling Ravi that he didn’t understand how things really worked in India! This was so intriguing that Ravi accepted the professor’s invitation to lunch in order to discuss it further.

One of the professor’s colleagues joined them for lunch, and as he and Ravi ate, the professor used every napkin and place mat on the table to make his point about the two types of logic—one Western and one Eastern.

“There are two types of logic,” the professor kept insisting.

“No, you don’t mean that,” Ravi kept replying.

“I absolutely do!” maintained the professor.

This went on for better than thirty minutes: the professor lecturing, writing, and diagramming. He became so engrossed in making his points that he forgot to eat his meal, which was slowly congealing on his plate.

Upon finishing his own meal, Ravi decided to unleash the Road Runner tactic to rebut the confused but insistent professor. He interrupted, “Professor, I think we can resolve this debate very quickly with just one question.”

Looking up from his furious drawing, the professor paused and said, “Okay, go ahead.”

Ravi leaned forward, looked directly at the professor, and asked, “Are you saying that when I’m in India, I must use either the ‘both-and logic’ or nothing else?”

The professor looked blankly at Ravi, who then repeated his question with emphasis: “Are you saying that when I’m in India, I must use either,” Ravi paused for effect, “the ‘both-and logic’ or,” another pause, “nothing else?”

Ravi later commented to us that the next words out of the professor’s mouth were worth the time listening to his incoherent ramblings. After glancing sheepishly at his colleague, the professor looked down at his congealed meal and mumbled, “The either-or does seem to emerge, doesn’t it.” Ravi added, “Yes, even in India we look both ways
before we cross the street because it is either me or the bus, not both of us!”

Indeed, the either-or does seem to emerge. The professor was using the either-or logic to try and prove the both-and logic, which is the same problem everyone experiences who tries to argue against the first principles of logic. They wind up sawing off the very limb upon which they sit.

Imagine if the professor had said, “Ravi, your math calculations are wrong in India because you’re using Western math rather than Eastern math.” Or suppose he had declared, “Ravi, your physics calculations don’t apply to India because you’re using Western gravity rather than Eastern gravity.” We would immediately see the folly of the professor’s reasoning.

In fact, despite what the relativists believe, things work in the East just like they work everywhere else. In India, just like in the United States, buses hurt when they hit you, 2+2=4, and the same gravity keeps everyone on the ground. Likewise, murder is wrong there just as it is here. Truth is truth no matter what country you come from. And truth is truth no matter what you believe about it. Just as the same gravity keeps all people on the ground whether they believe in it or not, the same logic applies to all people whether they believe it or not.

So what’s the point? The point is that there’s only one type of logic that helps us discover truth. It’s the one built into the nature of reality that we can’t avoid using. Despite this, people will try to tell you that logic doesn’t apply to reality, or logic doesn’t apply to God, or there are different types of logic, and so on. But as they say such things, they use the very logic they are denying. This is like using the laws of arithmetic to prove that arithmetic cannot be trusted.

It’s important to note that we are not simply engaging in word games here. The Road Runner tactic uses the undeniable laws of logic to expose that much of what our common culture believes about truth, religion, and morality is undeniably false. That which is self-defeating cannot be true, but many Americans believe it anyway. We contradict ourselves at our own peril.

**TO BE BURNED OR NOT TO BE BURNED, THAT IS THE QUESTION**

The Road Runner tactic is so effective because it utilizes the Law of Noncontradiction. The Law of Noncontradiction is a self-evident first principle of thought that says contradictory claims cannot both be true at the same time in the same sense. In short, it says that the opposite of true is false. We all know this law intuitively, and use it every day.

Suppose you see a married couple on the street one day—friends of yours—and you ask the wife if it’s true that she’s expecting a baby. If she says “yes” and her husband says “no,” you don’t say, “Thanks a lot, that really helps me!” You think, “Maybe she hasn’t told him, or maybe they misunderstood the question (or maybe something worse!).” There’s one thing you know for sure: they can’t both be right! The Law of Noncontradiction makes that self-evident to you.

When investigating any question of fact, including the question of God, the same Law of Noncontradiction applies. Either the theists are right—God exists—or the atheists are right—God doesn’t exist. Both can’t be correct. Likewise, either Jesus died and rose
from the dead as the Bible claims, or he did not as the Qur’an claims. One is right, and
the other is wrong.

In fact, a medieval Muslim philosopher by the name of Avicenna suggested a
surefire way to correct someone who denies the Law of Noncontradiction. He said that
anyone who denies the Law of Noncontradiction should be beaten and burned until he
admits that to be beaten is not the same as not to be beaten, and to be burned is not the
same as not to be burned! (A bit extreme, but you get the point!)

While reasonable people have no problem with the Law of Noncontradiction,
some very influential philosophers have denied it implicitly in their teachings. Perhaps
the two most influential of these are David Hume and Immanuel Kant. Many people have
never heard of Hume and Kant, but their teachings have affected the modern mind
greatly. That’s why it’s important that we take a brief look at each one of them. We’ll
start with Hume.

HUME’S SKEPTICISM: SHOULD WE BE SKEPTICAL
ABOUT IT?

Perhaps more than any other person, David Hume is responsible for the
skepticism prevalent today. As an empiricist, Hume believed that all meaningful ideas
were either true by definition or must be based on sense experience. Since, according to
Hume, there are no sense experiences for concepts beyond the physical, any metaphysical
claims (those about concepts beyond the physical, including God) should not be
believed—because they are meaningless. In fact, Hume asserted that propositions can be
meaningful only if they meet one of the following two conditions:

- the truth claim is abstract reasoning such as a mathematical equation or a
definition (e.g., “2+2=4” or “all triangles have three sides”); or
- the truth claim can be verified empirically through one or more of the five
senses.

While he claimed to be a skeptic, Hume certainly wasn’t skeptical about these two
conditions—he was absolutely convinced he had the truth. In fact, he concludes his
Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding with this emphatic assertion: “If we take in
our hand any volume—of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance—let us ask, ‘Does
it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?’ No. ‘Does it contain
any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?’ No. Commit it then
to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.”

Do you see the implications of Hume’s two conditions? If he’s correct, then any
book talking about God is meaningless. You might as well use all religious writings for
kindling!

Nearly two hundred years later, Hume’s two conditions were converted into the
“principle of empirical verifiability” by twentieth-century philosopher A. J. Ayer. The
principle of empirical verifiability claims that a proposition can be meaningful only if it’s
tru by definition or if it’s empirically verifiable.

By the mid-1960s this view had become the rage in university philosophy
departments across the country, including the University of Detroit where I (Norm) was a
student. In fact, I took an entire class on Logical Positivism, which was another name for
the brand of philosophy espoused by Ayer. The professor of that class, a Logical
Positivist, was a strange breed. Though he claimed to be a Catholic, he refused to believe it was meaningful to speak about the existence of reality beyond the physical (i.e., metaphysics, God). In other words, he was an admitted atheist who told us that he wanted to convert the entire class to his brand of semantical atheism. (I once asked him, “How can you be both a Catholic and an atheist?” Ignoring two millennia of official Catholic teaching, he replied, “You don’t have to believe in God to be a Catholic—you just have to keep the rules!”)

On the first day of that class, this professor gave the class the task of giving presentations based on chapters in Ayer’s book *Logic, Truth, and Language*. I volunteered to do the chapter titled “The Principle of Empirical Verifiability.” Now keep in mind, this principle was the very foundation of Logical Positivism and thus of the entire course.

At the beginning of the next class, the professor said, “Mr. Geisler, we’ll hear from you first. Keep it to no more than twenty minutes so we can have ample time for discussion.”

Well, since I was using the lightning-fast Road Runner tactic, I had absolutely no trouble with the time constraints. I stood up and simply said, “The principle of empirical verifiability states that there are only two kinds of meaningful propositions: 1) those that are true by definition and 2) those that are empirically verifiable. Since the principle of empirical verifiability itself is neither true by definition nor empirically verifiable, it cannot be meaningful.”

That was it, and I sat down.

There was a stunned silence in the room. Most of the students could see the Coyote dangling in midair. They recognized that the principle of empirical verifiability could not be meaningful based on its own standard. It self-destructed in midair! In just the second class period, the foundation of that entire class had been destroyed! What was the professor going to talk about for the next fourteen weeks?

I’ll tell you what he was going to talk about. Instead of admitting that his class and his entire philosophical outlook was self-defeating and thus false, the professor suppressed that truth, hemmed and hawed, and then went on to suspect that I was behind everything that went wrong for him the rest of the semester. His allegiance to the principle of empirical verifiability—despite its obvious fatal flaw—was clearly a matter of the will, not of the mind.

There’s a lot more to Hume, particularly his anti-miracle arguments, which we’ll address when we get to chapter 8. But for now the point is this: Hume’s hard empiricism, and that of his devotee A. J. Ayer, is self-defeating. The claim that “something can only be meaningful if it’s empirically verifiable or true by definition” excludes itself because that statement is neither empirically verifiable nor true by definition. In other words, Hume and Ayer try to prove too much because their method of discovering meaningful propositions excludes too much. Certainly claims that are empirically verifiable or true by definition are meaningful. However, such claims don’t comprise all meaningful statements as Hume and Ayer contend. So instead of committing all books about God “to the flames” as Hume suggests, you may want to consider using Hume’s books to get your fire going.

**KANT’S AGNOSTICISM: SHOULD WE BE AGNOSTIC ABOUT IT?**
Immanuel Kant’s impact has been even more devastating to the Christian worldview than David Hume’s. For if Kant’s philosophy is right, then there is no way to know anything about the real world, even empirically verifiable things! Why? Because according to Kant the structure of your senses and your mind forms all sense data, so you never really know the thing in itself. You only know the thing to you after your mind and senses form it.

To get a handle on this, look for a second out the window at a tree. Kant is saying that the tree you think you are looking at appears the way it does because your mind is forming the sense data you’re getting from the tree. You really don’t know the tree in itself; you only know the phenomena your mind categorizes about the tree. In short, you “kant” know the real tree in itself, only the tree as it appears to you.

Whew! Why is it that the average person on the street doesn’t doubt what he sees with his own two eyes, but supposedly brilliant philosophers do? The more we study philosophy, the more we are convinced of this: if you want to make the obvious seem obscure, just let a philosopher get ahold of it!

Nevertheless, we can’t avoid studying philosophy because, as C. S. Lewis said, “good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered.” Kant’s philosophy is bad philosophy, yet it has convinced many people that there is an unbridgeable gulf between them and the real world; that there’s no way you can get any reliable knowledge about what the world is really like, much less what God is really like. According to Kant, we are locked in complete agnosticism about the real world.

Thankfully, there’s a simple answer to all of this—the Road Runner tactic. Kant commits the same error as Hume—he violates the Law of Noncontradiction. He contradicts his own premise by saying that no one can know the real world while he claims to know something about it, namely that the real world is unknowable! In effect, Kant says the truth about the real world is that there are no truths about the real world.

Since these self-defeating statements can stump even the sharpest minds, let’s look at Kant’s error another way. Kant is also making a logical fallacy called the “nothing-but” fallacy. This is a fallacy because “nothing-but” statements imply “more than” knowledge. Kant says he knows the data that gets to his brain is nothing but phenomena. But in order to know this, he would have to be able to see more than just the phenomena. In other words, in order to differentiate one thing from another thing, you have to be able to perceive where one ends and the other begins. For example, if you put a white piece of paper on a black desk, the only way you can tell where the paper ends is by seeing some of the desk that borders it. The contrast between the paper and the desk allows you to see the boundaries of the paper. Likewise, in order for Kant to differentiate the thing in the real world from that which his mind perceives, he would have to be able to see both. But this is exactly what he says can’t be done! He says only the phenomena of the mind can be known, not the noumena (his term for the real world).

If there’s no way to distinguish between the phenomena and noumena, then you can’t see how they might differ. And if you can’t see how they might differ, then it makes much more sense to assume that they are the same—in other words, that the idea in your mind accurately represents the thing in the real world.
What we are saying is that you really do know the thing in itself. You really do know the tree you are seeing because it is being impressed on your mind through your senses. In other words, Kant was wrong: your mind doesn’t mold the tree, the tree molds your mind. (Just think about a wax seal: it’s not the wax that impresses the seal; it’s the seal that impresses the wax.) There’s no gulf between your mind and the real world. In fact, your senses are your windows to the world. And senses, like windows, are that through which we look at the outside world. They are not that at which we are looking.

In a philosophy class I (Norm) was teaching, I pointed out the flaws in Kant’s philosophy this way. I said, “First, if Kant claims that he can’t know anything about the real world (the thing in itself) then how does he know the real world is there? And second, his view is self-defeating because he claims that you can’t know anything about the real world while asserting that he knows that the real world is unknowable!”

One student blurted out, “No! It can’t be that easy, Dr. Geisler. You can’t destroy the central tenet of the last hundred-plus years of philosophical thought in just a couple of simple sentences!”

Quoting my favorite source—The Reader’s Digest—I responded, “‘That’s what happens when a beautiful theory meets a brutal gang of facts.’ Besides, whoever said that a refutation has to be complex? If someone makes a simple mistake, it only takes a simple correction to point it out.” There’s nothing complex about the Road Runner; he’s simply fast and effective.

**HUME AND KANT ARE WRONG. SO WHAT?**

Since Hume and Kant violate the Law of Noncontradiction, their attempts to destroy all “religious” truths fail. However, just because Hume and Kant are wrong, that doesn’t necessarily mean that we have positive evidence for, say, the existence of God. The Road Runner tactic can only reveal that a proposition is false. It does not provide positive evidence that any particular claim is true.

So is it true that a theistic God exists? Is there any knowable evidence that will give us reasonable certainty one way or the other? Is there such a thing as knowable evidence for an unseen God? To answer those questions, we need to investigate how truth itself can be known.

**HOW IS TRUTH KNOWN?**

Let’s sum up what we’ve seen so far: truth exists, and it is absolute and undeniable. To say “truth cannot be known” is self-defeating because that very statement claims to be a known, absolute truth. In fact, anytime we say anything, we are implying that we know at least some truth because any position on any subject implies some degree of knowledge. If you say that someone’s position is wrong, you must know what is right in order to say that (you can’t know what is wrong unless you know what is right). Even if you say, “I don’t know,” you are admitting that you know something; namely, you know you don’t know something else about the topic in question, not that you don’t know anything at all.

But just how does one know truth? In other words, by what process do we discover truths about the world? The process of discovering truth begins with the self-
evident laws of logic called first principles. They are called first principles because there is nothing behind them. They are not proved by other principles; they are simply inherent in the nature of reality and are thus self-evident. So you don’t learn these first principles; you just know them. Everyone intuitively knows these principles even if they haven't thought about them explicitly.

Two of these principles are the Law of Noncontradiction and the Law of the Excluded Middle. We’ve already seen the reality and value of the Law of Noncontradiction. The Law of the Excluded Middle tells us that something either is or is not. For example, either God exists or he does not. Either Jesus rose from the dead or he did not. There are no third alternatives.

These first principles are the tools we use to discover all other truths. In fact, without them you couldn’t learn anything else. First principles are to learning what your eyes are to seeing. Just as your eyes must be built into your body for you to see anything, first principles must be built into your mind for you to learn anything. It is from these first principles that we can learn about reality and ultimately discover the box top to this puzzle we call life.

Although we use these first principles to help us discover truth, they alone cannot tell us whether or not a particular proposition is true. To see what we mean, consider the following logical argument:

1. All men are mortal.
2. Spencer is a man.
3. Therefore Spencer is mortal.

The self-evident laws of logic tell us that the conclusion, Spencer is mortal, is a valid conclusion. In other words, the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises. If all men are mortal and if Spencer is a man, then Spencer is mortal. However, the laws of logic do not tell us whether those premises, and thus the conclusion, is true. Maybe all men are not mortal; maybe Spencer is not a man. Logic by itself can’t tell us one way or the other.

This point is more easily seen by looking at a valid argument that isn’t true. Consider the following:

1. All men are four-legged reptiles.
2. Zachary is a man.
3. Therefore Zachary is a four-legged reptile.

Logically, this argument is valid, but we all know it isn’t true. The argument is valid because the conclusion follows from the premises. But the conclusion is false because the first premise is false. In other words, an argument can be logically sound but still be false because the premises of the argument do not correspond to reality. So logic only gets us so far. Logic can tell us that an argument is false, but it cannot tell us by itself which premises are true. How do we know that Zachary is a man? How do we know that men are not four-legged reptiles? We need some more information to discover those truths.

We get that information from observing the world around us and then drawing general conclusions from those observations. When you observe something over and over again, you may conclude that some general principle is true. For example, when you repeatedly drop an object off a table, you naturally observe that the object always falls to the floor. If you do that enough, you finally realize that there must be some general
principle in place known as gravity.

This method of drawing general conclusions from specific observations is called induction (which is commonly equated with the scientific method). In order to be clear, we need to distinguish induction from deduction. The process of lining up premises in an argument and arriving at a valid conclusion is called deduction. That’s what we did in the arguments above. But the process of discovering whether the premises in an argument are true usually requires induction.

Much of what you know, you know by induction. In fact, you’ve already used induction intuitively to investigate the truth of the premises in the arguments above. Namely, you determined that since every man you’ve observed has been a two-legged mammal, the man Zachary cannot be a four-legged reptile. You did the same thing with the question of Spencer’s mortality. Since all men you’ve heard about ultimately die, you made the general conclusion that all men are mortal including a specific individual man named Spencer. These conclusions—two-legged men, gravity, and human mortality—are all inductive conclusions.

Most conclusions based on induction cannot be considered absolutely certain but only highly probable. For example, are you absolutely, 100 percent certain that gravity makes all objects drop? No, because you haven’t observed all objects being dropped. Likewise, are you absolutely certain that all men are mortal? No, because you haven’t observed all men die. Perhaps there’s someone somewhere who hasn’t died or will not die in the future.

So if inductive conclusions are not certain, can they be trusted? Yes, but to varying degrees of certainty. As we have said before, since no human being possesses infinite knowledge, most of our inductive conclusions can be wrong. (There is one important exception. It’s called the “perfect induction,” where all the particulars are known. For example, “all the letters on this page are black.” This perfect induction yields certainty about the conclusion because you can observe and verify that every letter is indeed black.)

But even when we don’t have complete or perfect information, we often have enough information to make reasonably certain conclusions on most questions in life. For example, since virtually everyone has been observed to die, your conclusion that all men are mortal is considered true beyond a reasonable doubt; it’s 99-plus percent sure, but it’s not beyond any doubt. It takes some faith—albeit a very small amount—to believe it.

The same can be said for concluding that gravity affects all objects, not just some. The conclusion is practically certain but not absolutely certain. In other words, we can be sure beyond a reasonable doubt, but not sure beyond all doubt.

**HOW ARE TRUTHS ABOUT GOD KNOWN?**

So what does observation and induction have to do with discovering the existence of God? Everything. In fact, observation and induction help us investigate the ultimate religious question: “Does God exist?”

You say, “Wait a minute! How can we use observation to investigate an unobservable being called God? After all, if God is invisible and immaterial as most Christians, Jews, and Muslims claim, then how can our senses help us gather information about him?”
The answer: we use induction to investigate God the same way we use it to investigate other things we can’t see—by observing their effects. For example, we can’t observe gravity directly; we can only observe its effects. Likewise, we can’t observe the human mind directly, but only its effects. From those effects we make a rational inference to the existence of a cause.

In fact, the book you are now reading is a case in point. Why do you assume that this book is an effect of a human mind? Because all your observational experience tells you that a book is an effect that results only from some preexisting intelligence (i.e., an author). You’ve never seen the wind, the rain, or other natural forces produce a book; you’ve only seen people do so. So despite the fact that you didn’t see anyone writing this book, you’ve concluded that it must have at least one author.

By reasoning that this book has an author, you are naturally putting observation, induction, and deduction together. If we were to write out your thoughts in logical form, they would look like this deductive argument:

1. All books have at least one author (premise based on inductive investigation).
2. *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* is a book (premise based on observation).
3. Therefore, *I Don’t Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist* has at least one author (conclusion).

You know the argument is valid because of deduction, and you know the argument is true because the premises are true (which you have verified through observation and induction).

Now here’s the big question: Just as a book requires preexisting human intelligence, are there any observable effects that seem to require some kind of preexisting supernatural intelligence? In other words, are there effects that we can observe that point to God? The answer is yes, and the first effect is the universe itself. An investigation of its beginning is the next step on our journey to discover the box top.

But before we look at that evidence for the beginning of the universe, we need to address one more objection to truth. And that is, “So what? Who cares about truth?”

**SO WHAT? WHO CARES ABOUT TRUTH?**

We sometimes ask our students, “What’s the greatest problem in America today? Is it ignorance or is it apathy?” One time a student answered, “I don’t know, and I don’t care!”

That sums up the problem in America today. Many of us are ignorant and apathetic about truth—but not when it comes to money, medicine, or the other tangible items we mentioned earlier. We care passionately about those things. But many people are ignorant and apathetic about truth in morality and religion (we know you’re not, because you’re taking the time to read this book). Are the people who have adopted the “whatever” theme of the culture right, or does truth in morality and religion really matter?

It really matters. How do we know? First, even though people may claim that truth in morality doesn’t matter, they don’t really believe that when someone treats them immorally. For example, they might claim that lying isn’t wrong, but just watch how morally outraged they get when you lie to them (especially if it’s about their money!).
We often hear that “it’s the economy, Stupid!” But just think about how much better the economy would be if everyone told the truth. There would be no Enrons or Tycos. There would be no scandals or scams. There would be no burdensome government regulations. Of course the economy is important, but it’s directly affected by morality! Morality undergirds virtually everything we do. It not only affects us financially, but, in certain circumstances, it also affects us socially, psychologically, spiritually, and even physically.

A second reason truth in morality matters is because success in life is often dependent on the moral choices a person makes. These include choices regarding sex, marriage, children, drugs, money, business dealings, and so on. Some choices bring prosperity, others result in ruin.

Third, as we pointed out in a previous book, *Legislating Morality,* all laws legislate morality. The only question is, “Whose morality will be legislated?” Think about it. Every law declares one behavior right and its opposite wrong—that’s morality. Whose morality should be legislated on issues such as abortion or euthanasia? These are issues that directly impact the lives and health of real people. If it’s morally wrong to kill innocent people, shouldn’t that truth be legislated? Likewise, whose morality should be legislated on other issues of public policy that may affect your life, health, or finances? The answers we legislate can dramatically affect every citizen’s life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

There’s no doubt that what we believe to be true about morality directly impacts lives. Did it matter that the United States Supreme Court (as reflected in the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision) believed that blacks were not citizens but the property of their slave owners? Did it matter that the Nazis believed the Jews were inferior to the Aryan race? Does it matter today what we think about the moral status of people in other racial or religious categories? Of course! Truth in morality matters.

What about truth in religion? That truth can impact us even more profoundly than truth in morality. A fellow naval officer helped me (Frank) realize this back in 1988 when I was a new Christian.

At that time, we were deployed with a U.S. Navy flight crew to a Persian Gulf country. It was near the end of the Iran-Iraq war, and tensions were still high. When you’re in a foreign and dangerous place, you tend to ponder your life and your mortality more seriously and frequently.

One day we were doing just that—talking about God and the afterlife. During our conversation my friend made a comment that has stuck with me to this day. Referring to the Bible, he said, “I don’t believe the Bible. But if it *is* true, then I’ll be in big trouble.”

Of course he was right. If the Bible is *true,* then my friend has chosen an unpleasant eternal destiny. In fact, if the Bible is true, then everyone’s eternal destiny can be read from its pages. On the other hand, if the Bible is not true, then many Christians are unwittingly wasting a lot of time, money, and, in some cases, even their lives by preaching Christianity in hostile territories. Either way, truth in religion matters.

It also matters if some other religion is true. For example, if the Qur’an is true, then I’m in just as much eternal trouble as my non-Christian Navy friend. On the other hand, if the atheists are right, then we might as well lie, cheat, and steal to get what we want because this life is all there is, and there are no consequences in eternity.

But forget eternity for a minute. Consider the temporal implications of religious
teachings around the world. In Saudi Arabia, some schoolchildren are being taught that Jews are pigs and that non-Muslims (infidels) should be killed (while, thankfully, a majority of Muslims do not believe that non-Muslims should be killed, militant Muslims teach that type of Jihad straight from the Qur’an). Is it really true that there’s a God up there by the name of Allah who wants Muslims to kill all non-Muslims (which probably includes you)? Does this religious “truth” matter? It does when those kids grow up to fly planes into buildings and blow themselves up in populated areas. Wouldn’t it be better to teach them the religious truth that God wants them to love their neighbor?

The Saudis may be teaching that Jews are pigs, but in our country, by means of a one-sided biology curriculum, we teach kids that there’s really no difference between any human being and a pig. After all, if we’re merely the product of blind naturalistic forces—if no deity created us with any special significance—then we are nothing more than pigs with big brains. Does this religious (atheistic) “truth” matter? It does when kids carry out its implications. Instead of good citizens who see people made in the image of God, we are producing criminals who see no meaning or value in human life. Ideas have consequences.

On the positive side, Mother Teresa helped improve conditions in India by challenging the religious beliefs of many in the Hindu culture. The Hindu belief in karma and reincarnation leads many Hindus to ignore the cries of the suffering. Why? Because they believe that those who suffer deserve their plight for doing something wrong in a previous life. So, if you help suffering people, you are interfering with their karma. Mother Teresa taught Hindus in India the Christian principles of caring for the poor and suffering. Does that religious idea matter? Ask the millions whose lives she touched. Does the religious teaching of karma matter? Ask the millions still suffering.

The bottom line is this: regardless of what the real truth is concerning religion and morality, our lives are greatly affected by it today and perhaps even in eternity. Those who cavalierly say, “So what? Who cares about truth in morality and religion?” are ignoring reality and are blindly skating on thin ice. We owe it to ourselves and others to find the real truth, and then act on it. So let’s get started with the question, “Does God exist?”

SUMMARY

1. People often get their beliefs from their parents, friends, childhood religion, or culture. Sometimes they simply formulate their beliefs on the basis of their feelings alone. While such beliefs could be true, it’s also possible they may not be. The only way to be reasonably certain is to test beliefs by the evidence. And that is done by utilizing sound philosophical principles including those found in logic and science.

2. Logic tells us that opposites cannot be true at the same time in the same sense. Logic is part of reality itself, and is thus the same in America, India, and everywhere in the universe.

3. By use of the Road Runner tactic, we can see that Hume is not skeptical about skepticism, and Kant is not agnostic about agnosticism. Therefore, their views defeat themselves. It is possible to know truths about God.

4. Many truths about God can be known by his effects, which we can observe. Through many observations (induction) we can draw reasonable conclusions (deductions)
about the existence and nature of God (which we will do in subsequent chapters).

5. Truth in morality and religion has temporal and maybe even eternal consequences. Apathy and ignorance can be fatal. What you don’t know, or don’t care to know, can hurt you.

6. So why should anyone believe anything at all? Because they have evidence to support those beliefs, and because beliefs have consequences.