

THE ALEPH COURSE.

4 : EVIDENCE.

EVIDENCE is important to us. What's the evidence for Christianity ?

Unfortunately, we've already demonstrated that, logically speaking, THERE ISN'T ANY.
- any more than there is for ATOMS.
- so why are we worse off for Christianity ?

Perhaps there's ANOTHER LEVEL OF EVIDENCE ?

Laplace, on science : "We have NO NEED OF GOD in our philosophy".
True, but all you get is science,
- which isn't much use for anything important. (Remember importance ?)

For important things - VALUES - WE NEEDED GOD.

(Compare "We have NO NEED OF STEAM POWER in our philosophy of sailing ships".
Perfectly true.)

But what about HISTORICAL EVIDENCE ?

Christians claim that certain events happened around two millennia ago in Palestine. Where's the evidence ?

I can only answer, "Ask a historian". The evidence at our disposal is necessarily limited, and it is clear that different people choose to interpret it in different ways. Unfortunately, or perhaps not, we can't go back and look.

I suggest that other Christian claims are more important, and certainly more accessible for testing. We claim that GOD IS ACTIVE IN THE WORLD NOW -

- so we need EVIDENCE OF GOD IN ACTION NOW.
If there isn't any, there doesn't seem to be much point worrying about the 2000-year old account.

THERE IS A LOT OF EVIDENCE. BUT.

There's no unambiguous evidence : we discussed that last time.
You can't do the sorts of experiment you might try in a scientific investigation; if God doesn't want it to work, then it won't.
Consider burglarology; that's the scientific study of burglars.

- 1 : I want to study burglars in action.
- 2 : I plan an experiment. I place a valuable jewel on a table in a room, with a window visible from outside. I train a television camera on the table, and record its output on a video recorder.
- 3 : Being a responsible scientist, I publish my plan for peer review.
- 4 : I try the experiment.
- 5 : The jewel disappears - but unfortunately there is no record for analysis, for the power to the camera was mysteriously switched off before the jewel was touched.
- 6 : I design a new experiment, using two battery-powered camera-recorder combinations and a new jewel.
- 7 : Still being a responsible scientist, I again publish my plan for peer review.
- 8 : I try the experiment.
- 9 : The jewel disappears - but there is still no record, because the camera-recorders disappear too.

I could go on. But if you try to do experiments on an intelligent being who knows your plans and is determined to thwart them, your experiments will fail.

WHAT SORT OF EVIDENCE IS THERE ?

Quite a lot, if you want it. After all, you can infer the existence of burglars from the evidence of the experiments, even though you can't prove anything specific and you don't have the record you wanted.

Some of the best evidence I know is that of changed lives and personal testimonies of people who have encountered God. The continuing existence of the church despite our worst efforts over the centuries isn't too bad either.

Absolutely the best evidence I know is that of MY changed life when I encountered God - but that's evidence which isn't accessible to anyone else.

If my hypothesis about FAITH is correct, there will always be an alternative interpretation of the evidence. You are NEVER FORCED to accept the religious answer.

So why should you ?

Why shouldn't you ? It is true that I want to believe it, but that doesn't make it wrong. (I want to believe in atoms.)

Given the right equipment, it's more convincing. How many people are really in a position to experiment on high-energy particle physics ? A few hundred ? But the whole world believes their interpretation of their experiments - which are a lot more bizarre than supposing that God exists !

What's the right equipment for observing God ? We've known that for well over 2000 years too : "a broken and a contrite heart" (*Psalms* 51.17).

"Well", they say, "that's cheating - you're obviously conditioned to believe in God."

I used to work in gas kinetics. It doesn't matter what that is, but it's something to do with the study of chemical reactions in gases. In some sorts of experiment, if you used a new glass reaction vessel, or tried to clean a dirty one, you would not be able to get any satisfactory results. You had to do several dummy experiments to condition the equipment before the experiments would work reproducibly.

So what's wrong with conditioning ? It's just a matter of getting the equipment into a state where the experiments will work reproducibly.

In the experiments, a coating was built up on the reaction vessel's surface. This coating stopped confusing interference from reactions which were catalysed by the glass surface. In people, perhaps the contrite heart stops confusing interference from selfishness and pride. Why not ?

And the experiments with a broken and a contrite heart have been working pretty reproducibly now for over 2000 years. Only God knows how many million experiments there have been. What sort of evidence do you want ?