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Is It Possible There's a Being That's Greater Than God?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether it's possible there's a being that's greater than God and that's outside of God's comprehension and omniscience, and how to explain to people who don't believe in the spiritual realm or the existence of God that we have eternal souls.

* Is it possible there's a being that's greater than God and that's outside of God's comprehension and omniscience?

* How do I explain to relatives who don't believe in the existence of God or the spiritual realm that we all have an eternal soul? They say that if they see God do a miracle, then they'll believe, but isn't that why it's faith?

Transcript

You're listening to Greg and Amy on the hashtag-STRask podcast. So today, Greg, we have some questions about kind of objections to maybe from people who aren't Christians or, you know, some of these people are Christians, but they're the kinds of things you would get from people who aren't Christians. So this first one comes from Maggie.

Hi there. I'm a Christian wrestling with this. Is there a possibility that there is a being outside of God's comprehension that is greater than God? I know the Bible says that God is infinite and omniscient, but could there be a being outside of his omniscience? I don't think so, but this is, I'm curious what you have to say about this, but sometimes these are solved by thinking about the nature of something, and what you end up with is what philosophers call an analytic statement.

That is something true by definition. It's not true because you've discovered something out there. It's an apriori, not a posteriori.

It's before looking at things, and it's rather before you kind of look at the physical universe to see. So an example of that would be, is it possible there could be any unmarried bachelors? I mean, any married bachelors? Well, no, because a bachelor just is somebody who's not

married, and if the person was married, he wouldn't be a bachelor. But that has to do with how the meanings of words, right? And consequently, that's why they call analytic statements.

They're true by definition. So when you come to the nature of God, God is a being of full perfection, moral perfection, perfection in power, perfection in knowledge. And et cetera, all right? Now, somebody who's a philosopher, I mean, a really clever one who thinks about these, I think William and Craig, or JP Morlin, or some of the people that were mentors to me who had a big influence on me over in the past, they will unpack these things better than I can unpack them.

But the whole idea of God is somebody who's maximally perfect. So there can't be an imperfection of some sort, imperfection of knowledge, for example, in a maximally perfect being, which as an expression of that perfection knows everything that there is to know. So knows and believes all true propositions.

That's the, I guess, the standard way of philosophical way of putting it. So the answer to the question is no, that can't be possible, but it's not possible because we know there's nothing in virtue of searching and finding nothing. And we know there's nothing outside of God's knowledge that would be all posteriorly.

No, we know by the nature of God's perfections that there's nothing outside of him like that. In order for some, for there to be a God greater than our God, there would have to be something that wasn't perfect in our God, which then he wouldn't be God. So this is the problem.

There can only be one maximally great being. And think about it. If, let's say God has lied about who he is.

Well, now he's not even good. So he's not even worth worshipping. If he's not actually the maximally great being, and there's a better being out there that he doesn't know about, then he's not God.

He's an imposter. But because we know the nature of the universe and we know the nature of the standard of morality and all these things, we know that God is good. Therefore, if the God we're worshipping is not perfect, then he's just not God.

He's not God. He's married. He's not a bachelor.

We're back to that same simple equation. These are called analytic statements, true by definition, the nature of the thing. And we have had questions before about how do we know God's not tricking us and that sort of thing.

So you can go back and find that. But I think that works for this question. And I remember something JP Moreland said a long time ago.

I was just somebody who had questions like this, and he was pressing him. Is it possible for us

to be mistaken about something? And his response was great. He said, yeah, it's possible we're mistaken about a lot of things, not this one because of the nature of the thing itself.

It's possible, but there's no reason to think we are mistaken unless we have a reason to think we are mistaken is the point. And I think it was another philosopher, a British philosopher, still alive, but I always have a struggle with his name. He wrote the evolution of the soul and some other things like that.

But he had the principle of credulity. And he says, basically, you're justified in believing something you have good reason to believe in. If there's no contrary disqualifying reason for it.

You know, so it's just the, this is meant to kind of head off at the pass, an unjustified skepticism. You could say, well, what if we're wrong? What if we're wrong? What if we're wrong? Maybe it's not that way. Is it possible this, that the other thing? You can't work with those kinds of possibilities.

You have to work with the information you have in front of you. And is the information good? I mean, sometimes you're going to sit on the fence and be agnostic regarding some things, but much of the time you're going to have very good reasons to believe something in particular. Until some mitigating reason comes along, you're justified in believing that that particular thing is so.

It's true. And that's a general thing. If we have no good reason to believe otherwise, or maybe that we're mistaken, we might be.

But if we have no good reason to think that we are mistaken, well, then we shouldn't be fussing about it and fretting about it. Here's a question from Luke. How do I explain to unbelieving relatives that we all have an eternal soul? They would want proof of the spiritual realm and God existing, saying, if I see God do a miracle, then I will believe in Him.

But that's why it's faith. Touching on conviction and conscience would be helpful too. Okay, we're not going to be able to prove that our souls are eternal.

What we know about the, in a sense, the durability of the soul, is what God has told us about that. And God has told us that, in my view at least, everyone lives forever. All right, there's a resurrection and all live either in a place of perfect satisfaction, happiness and bliss, if you will, before God, or eternal conscious torment.

Now, there's some debate about the second thing, different people have different ideas on that. But nevertheless, and I don't hold, I don't think there's any good reason to think that the nature of human souls is that souls are natural. This is why people don't believe in eternal hell.

Talk about conditional immortality. Well, I think all that immortality is conditional, that is God sustains those He wants to sustain for as long as He wants to sustain them, not because they're self-sustaining. They are not natively or naturally immortal, but God will sustain them forever.

And so that's one piece of this. Can you read that question one more time to me? How do I explain to unbelieving relatives that we all have an eternal soul? So the eternal part, I would worry about that. I think that what you can do is demonstrate that we have a soul.

And there's a very simple illustration that I've used with audiences that I got from J.P. Moreland, I think. And because that's his strength, my body problem, and he's written a lot about it. And I actually, in the solid ground that I think is coming out beginning of March, I think I talk about that.

I get these mixed up because we have these series of solid grounds that have these short vignettes in them, and it's called rapid fire. But there's one about this question, about the soul. And the fact is that we are sentient creatures, and that means that the question isn't consciousness and illusion.

Well, everybody knows there's consciousness because we're conscious. You can't know something without being a conscious knower. Rocks don't know anything because rocks aren't conscious.

Knowledge is always held by conscious beings. So human beings know things. They think things.

They feel things. They have acts of will, volition. All of these things are features of consciousness.

So the question is what possesses those features? Purely physical things don't possess those features. None of those features extend in space. None of those features have weight.

None of those features are influenced by the laws of physics and chemistry like physical things would be. So ironic that one needs to make an argument for the soul because it's the thing that we are most in touch with every waking moment of our life and some of the non-waking moments. Yeah, this is what people want to deny.

So the little illustration that I think I got from JP or exercise is I invite the audience to close their eyes. And picture their mother will say doing some tasks. I used to say washing dishes at the sink, but that's so sexist now.

So I can't use that as an illustrate. So picture your mom changing the oil in the car. So I don't know.

We're doing something. Working at a computer. Okay.

Now do you see that? Okay, what color shirt is she wearing? That's the question. Okay, open your eyes. Okay, what color did you see? And then people are saying from the audience the different colors, right? Yellow, red, blue, chartreuse, whatever.

So you saw that? Yes. Where was it? Where was what you saw? You saw something so vividly

you could give me the details of the circumstance, even the color of the shirt. Where was that thing? I'll tell you one place it wasn't, it wasn't in your brain.

Because if that was in your brain, that means you could crack open your brain and see your mom there working on the computer with a yellow shirt on. But that's not in your brain. It's somewhere else.

Okay, it is in an image. It's an image that is being experienced by yourself in an immaterial realm, which means yourself is immaterial. It is your soul, maybe call it your mind, if you will, that is experiencing all of these sensations.

And this is just one simple one. Seems like a trek, you know, because everybody imagines things. The fact is you can have an image, you could, every one of your senses, you can repeat in your mind.

There's one sight, which shows, by the way, the color is in a wavelength because you can see color without any sight, without any light. In your mind, you can smell a rose, you can feel fur, you can hear Beethoven's fifth. Okay, how many people just heard that? You know, right.

And it's not anything that that theme from Beethoven is not going to be picked up by any instrument as a sound because the experience of the sound is a soulless experience. So those are the ways I would talk with them. I even start with that illustration.

Now, that's a good one to start with because it gets them active and now they can think about it. Where was that? Well, it's in your brain. Oh, so if I would have cracked open your brain, would I see your mom in there? No, well, then it's not in your brain.

There's nothing in your brain but cells. Well, the neurons are firing. Yes.

Did you see neurons firing? No. What did you see? My mom. Okay, then what you didn't see, what you saw wasn't neurons firing, though they were.

You can't reduce any feature of consciousness to something physical. And this is the problem. And we actually know better.

This isn't tricky. You don't have to have a degree in philosophy. Everybody knows they were conscious self.

This is why were you born on your birthday? You can ask them that because your body you got now wasn't the body you had then. What is it that sustains your identity, your self through time, even though your body is radically changing? So these are ways that he might pursue a conversation with them. So what if, okay, so then he says they would want proof of the spiritual realm and God existing, saying, if I see God do a miracle, then I will believe in him.

And then he says, but that's why it's faith. Okay. Oh, well, that's a whole nother problem.

And that's not why it's faith. That is a sub, pardon me, a sub standard definition of faith. And by the way, I do deal with that in one of the rapid fire things too.

The implication that faith and knowledge are opposites. And so if you have evidence for believing something, then you're not exercising faith. If you're absolutely certain, it's unmistakable.

There's no faith at all on this view. But biblical faith is the word pieces or some form of that word, pistero, that it means trust. It means active trust.

Now people usually actively trust things for reasons. And so having the kind of active trust the Bible is calling for is not inconsistent with the reasons that we have that lead to knowledge. So it's not knowledge on one side of faith on the other.

And that was the last part of this of this question. Oh, well, that's why we have faith. We just believe in God.

Why? Because you have no good reason to believe in God? Well, that wasn't any biblical authors understanding even Jesus. And when Jesus in what John five was confronting the Jewish leaders, he says, you don't believe me because I said so. And I'm just one witness.

What about Moses? What about John the Baptist? What about the Scriptures? What about my miracles? So he's giving all of these lines of evidence, even Jesus. Give me lines of evidence why they should believe that he is the Messiah. So this is a substandard.

That's not even a substandard. It's mistaken understanding of faith to say that there's no reason. I can't give you any good reason to believe in God.

That's why you have faith. That's not a biblical approach to that issue. Okay.

I think I left out something in the middle. If I see God do a miracle, then I will believe in him. Oh, yeah.

Yeah. Well, this is all being dealt with there. And one wag put it this way.

He said, he said, yeah, if God, if they experience God doing this dramatic thing right in front of them, they wouldn't go to God. They go to a psychiatrist. And the best illustration biblically I have is the racing of Lazarus.

So this is John chapter 11, and Jesus raised his Lazarus. He's been dead for three days. He's not like, you know, Talitha Kumi, a little girl, a rise, you know, whatever.

She's just sleeping. No, Lazarus stinks. And that's what what Mary or Martha said.

Hey, he stinks. Nope. Roll away the two.

Stone. And then he calls him fourth. Well, this is an incredible miracle validating his claim to be

a Messiah.

And because that he rose raised, would this satisfy the critics standard requirement if he just worked a miracle? No. Because then the unbelievers that Jesus confronted most often with the Pharisees of religious leaders, they said, oh my gosh, he's done an amazing miracle. We have to kill Jesus.

Huh? And next chapter, we have to kill Lazarus too, because he's the evidence. So one of my early teachers said the sun softens butter, but it hardens clay. And there is no guarantee that if people see a miracle that they're going to come to Christ, there is plenty of evidence for God.

And in fact, atheism is the most vacuous worldview available. It answers virtually no question or it answers every important question in the negative. Nothing, nothing, no, no, nothing, nothing, never, no.

That's it. Human value doesn't exist. Morality gone.

Purpose, nope, meaning, no, no significance, absolutely not. Nihilism, nothingism, that's atheism. But that conflicts with virtually every single deep intuition we have about the nature of reality.

It is an odd thing to say, if I see God do a miracle, then I will believe in him. That's kind of like saying, I don't believe in the King of England. But you don't believe in the King of England? Well, what can I do to convince you? I can show you all these, all these evidences of him.

I can show you people who have talked with him. I can show you things that he's done. I can show you reasons why you can think he's real.

No, sorry. Unless he writes me a letter, I will not believe in the King of England. Oh, I never met him.

So they are. So you're asking for something personal to be done for you by the King of England before you believe in him. I mean, that's just completely unreasonable.

And the same is true of God. A lot of us don't have special miracles that God does for us, but that doesn't mean we can't figure out that he's there. We've got the evidence of design.

We've got the evidence from the beginning of the universe, the evidence of the existence of morality. There are so many different ways to argue for God. There's the contingency argument.

There's Jesus. There's Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. There's so many different ways to argue.

So I think if you can just maybe clarify and say, look, what you're saying is unreasonable because you're talking about demanding that someone do something personally for you in

order to prove the exist. That's just dumb. That's not how things work.

Rather, you have to look at what the evidence actually is. And they might not be aware that there's any evidence. So that's certainly available out there.

You can learn. One place you can go is to the reasonable faith videos. They created a whole series of short five minute graphic videos that talk about evidence for God in different lines of evidence for God.

And those are really simple. I have them posted on our website also so you can find them there. But I think the problem is, and this might be another thing to bring up with them, just for your own clarity so you know what you're arguing and why you're arguing it.

And just say, look, if I were to convince you that God exists, let's say God does do a miracle in front of you or you're convinced by other evidence, would you then love him and follow him? And see what they say. If they say yes, then it sounds like they're open to evidence. If they say no, then you can see right away that their problem is a spiritual one.

They don't want to follow God. And it would be helpful for them to see that. And you can just say, okay, so then your real problem is you don't want to follow him even if he does exist.

So if I convince you, is it even worth like, do you want me to do you want to hear the evidence? Or maybe you just don't want to hear the evidence. So anyway, that's another way to kind of figure out where they are and what their real objection is. By the way, I think one of the best books that gives kind of a full range of evidences for God is one that Jay Warner Wallace wrote called God's crime scene.

Now it's clever because he uses the cop motif and the murder motif and all of that stuff. So it's fun to, but he looks at all of these different elements and we just, that require an explanation outside of the box, so to speak. You cannot explain these things in materialistic, naturalistic terms, but they are real things that we discovered.

It's the origin of the universe, the design of the universe, acts of will, problem of evil, human consciousness, a whole range of things. So it's really a great way, I think, of cataloging in a very persuasive fashion, the different evidences for God. All right, thank you.

Look, that was a lot of questions in there. Great question for us. And thank you, Maggie.

And we'd love to hear from you if you have a question that you haven't sent in yet. Go to X, use the hashtag SCR, or just go to our website at SCR.org. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.