

DOES GOD EXIST?

To be a discussion and not an exchange of opinions, first we must deem one or more propositions to be true, or false. They are the subject of the discussion. From those propositions, we determine by means of logical deductions which other propositions are true or false.

To discuss “God Exists” or “God Does Not Exist”, we must first agree either that God does, or does not exist. The cardinal rule of all discussions is that the propositions already deemed to be true, or false, cannot be challenged. To do so is to change the subject.

When a logically derived proposition is false, we learn something useful. When a discussion ends in true propositions, we may ask ‘Why’.

If we always ask ‘Why’ after each answer, the ultimate answer is “because something made it that way,” Which is the universal and fundamental meaning of the word ‘God.’ As God is the subject of all subjects, we cannot discuss the existence of God.

WORLDVIEWS

Every human has a unique worldview in their mind (brain, psyche, etc., you pick it). What a person believes is nobody else’s business. How a person behaves, regardless of justification, is the business of every person affected by the consequences.

Worldviews, which include religious beliefs, are the way believers select actions in response to stimuli. The benefit or harm of every such action depends on its context of time, place, and physical circumstances. There are two kinds of worldviews.

Literal Some worldviews rely on events that must be believed to have occurred in fact. When two such events cannot both be true, literal believers still must believe that both propositions - a contradiction – are true. This accommodation is supported by the un-logical premise “If you cannot prove a belief to be false, you are free to believe it.” True as far as it goes, but not always free to act on it.

Literal beliefs, rigidly applied, may eventually doom the actor when the context of the action changes.

Flexible Some worldviews are defined by the meanings of stories. The stories may be true, or not true, possible, or not possible. The forms and contents of stories are not their meanings. The meaning of a story is the teller’s reason for telling it. Even when the stories are unbelievable or unrealistic, their meanings still may be understood in the context of time, place, and circumstances of the telling.

Flexible beliefs allow adaptation when the context of the action is different.

References to the Jewish Bible, The Tanach, which includes the Torah, was published by the Jewish Publication Society in 1985. It is described as “a new translation of the Holy Scriptures according to the traditional Hebrew text.” For the misassignment of content, or meaning, blame me.

MY STORY of JUDAISM

My Story of Judaism is not about religion or rituals. Jews are generations of people in voluntary association with a common history and a similar worldview – a Nation. This Story of Judaism is about the civilization of the nation of Jews and how it got that way.

My Story of Judaism begins with Exodus, true to fact or not. Moses delivers some slaves from bondage in Egypt into the desert. The slaves have never been free and don't know how to be free. Moses sets about creating a social structure in which humans can be free.

Moses asserts that God is One. God created the heavens and the earth and all life thereon. God's creation is perfect. The laws of God are comprehensive and internally consistent.

Moses does not make himself king. Moses introduces ten basic laws plus many statutes governing rituals and all other aspects of human life which apply equally to all, including Moses. He appoints independent judges to decide the law in more detail. Eventually, a legislature, called the Sanhedrin, was created. Originally, only violation of the Sabbath was punishable by death. By the time of Jesus there was no death penalty for any violation. Failures to perform religious rituals also are not punished.

Consider: No man is above the law, an independent judiciary, a legislature, and freedom of religion. The very definition of an Open Society, the first ever, and the model for the United States of America.

Scriptures The fundamental belief of Judaism is “Hear O, Israel our god has no name. God is one.” IMHO, ‘one’ means comprehensive and internally consistent, without contradiction, co-extensive with my view of reality.

My advice is to read the scriptures’ stories as open-minded and open-ended disputes, refutations, and agreements, all devoted to understanding the nature of reality and of the behaviors of human existence.

Every theory is founded upon one or more propositions, often called necessary fictions, which are deemed to be true for the purposes of the theory. For example:

Euclid’s axioms for geometry, Infinity for mathematics, and “We hold these truths to be self-evident”.

My propositions deemed to be true are:

1. God is the fundamental idea that explains whatever we cannot explain in any other way.
2. Our task is to consider and discover why God made things as they are. – Spinoza
3. Obeying a commandment or performing a ritual, without knowing why, is idolatry. – Maimonides
4. To be human is to act in a moral way. “Do not do unto others what is hateful to you”. – Hillel
5. Hebrew prayers do not ask for change. They thank God for the way things are.

That is all I know, and all I need to know, to be as Jewish as I care to be.

What else did the Jews learn from these beliefs, and how did they learn? From Moses’ fundamental beliefs many ideas were drawn, some as life lessons based on events purported to be true to fact, others by stories conveying metaphors or analogies. My Favorites are . . .

In the beginning, after creating the Heavens and the Earth, God created Adam & Eve, who become self-aware. They know and evaluate the good and bad effects of their actions, which is the definition of morality. Humans are the (only) moral animal.

God exiled Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden not because they ate of Tree of knowledge, but because they might eat of the Tree of Life and live forever, which God says is unacceptable.

For eating of the Tree of Knowledge, God said, "Someday you will know as much as I do." God punishes Adam and Eve for their breach of God's Commandant not to eat of the forbidden fruit. The punishment is that man shall earn his keep by the sweat of his brow and women shall feel great pain in childbirth. Both are simply the reality at the time of the writing.

In this bible, humans are not born evil. The priests of the Temple were not intermediaries to forgive sins between God and humans. They were the administrators of the Temple with no powers to forgive sins. As said at the end of Yom Kippur services, "Sins against God's laws are between the sinner and God. Sins against other humans obligate the sinner to apologize and redress the harm s/he caused".

Hillel. Each human has a personal sense of morality. "Do not do unto others what is hateful to you." The saying is both personal and universal. The process of selecting 'hateful' is the same for everyone.

King David. The prophet Nathan confronts King David about the way King David acquired the wife of Uriah for his own use. Nathan prophesies that, as punishment for his immoral behavior, David will suffer four tragedies, all of which come to pass. No one is above the law, not even the most exemplary person, not even the most exemplary King.

Job does everything right. Yet, he loses everything, wives, livestock, and land. Job is puzzled by such unfair treatment. His friends debate what Job must have done wrong to deserve such a severe punishment. Job reproaches God. I have done everything right, yet you deprive me of all. Is that justice?

God replies, ". . . and where were you, when I created the Heavens and the Earth? Could you do what I have done?" God lists many others of God's achievements. For each one, asking Job, "Could you do that?". God's reply asserts that the way of the world, reality, is not constrained by human value systems.

Jonah and the Fish. An angel tells Jonah "Go to Nineveh, where they are not obeying the Law. Tell them God will smite them". Jonah fears if he does as God commands, he will be killed in Nineveh.

Jonah runs off to sea. A great storm arises, so great as never before seen. Jonah admits that he is the cause, owing to his failure to obey the will of God. The crew threw Jonah overboard. Jonah is swallowed by a huge fish, which dislodges him on a strange shore. Try as one might, there is nothing one can do to avoid a solemn duty, not even being swallowed by a fish.

Jonah in Nineveh. Despite his fears, Jonah goes to Nineveh and does as God commanded. The people do not kill Jonah. The people promise to obey the law. God does not smite them. Jonah upbraids God for sending him on a life-threatening fool's errand and then failing to smite the people of Nineveh. God gives Jonah examples of his kindness. "Did you not know that I would not smite so many people who repent? Is that why you ran off to sea?" Sins of people who repent need not fear the wrath of God.

Judaism is a civilization of ideas, flexible thought, stimulating discussions, and productive behaviors that made it possible for the Jews to keep the faith under difficult circumstances for 3,000 years, so far.