

Why I Believe in God

Alan Steinle

Prologue

Doubts
obscure
received lore.
I'd rather find
that I do not know
than stubbornly grow
falsely aligned.
Don't abhor
all your
doubts.

Doubt is an uncomfortable condition,
but certainty is a ridiculous one.
—Voltaire

Shades of grey wherever I go
The more I find out, the less that I know
—Billy Joel, "Shades of Grey"

I recently became interested in learning about fallacies. I found a long list of them at Wikipedia, and I selected the fallacies that might relate to the belief in God. Although I played the devil's advocate when replying to each of these so-called fallacies in the poem below, that doesn't mean that I do not believe any of the views expressed by them. For example, I do believe that the world was created by some kind of intelligence and that God is like a father to us. However, these are not my main reasons for believing in God. In addition, fallacies don't disprove our conclusions (which could be true), but they can make our arguments weaker. I am not an expert in fallacies, so you might find that my reasoning was sloppy or that I have sacrificed precise statements for the sake of a rhyme. In any case, I hope you find the poem entertaining and thought-provoking. In regard to the statements above this paragraph, I do believe that certainty is possible, but I have not yet achieved a state of complete certainty.

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In recent days, I've thought about
the fact that everyone will doubt
the strongest of his own beliefs,
and, of them all, the main motifs
that keep arising will contain
the thoughts of happiness and pain,
of pleasure, heaven, peace, and God.
Although our thinking may be flawed,
we have our reasons to believe.
Sometimes, as children, we receive
the thoughts that we react against
when later they do not make sense.

And as I sorted out my mind
about beliefs, I thought I'd find
some common fallacies and try
to see if they would nullify
the reasons for my present views.
I found some pages I could use
and listed all the fallacies
that might destroy my certainties.
I played the devil's advocate
(in verse-forms he is literate)
and answered all the evidence
that God exists with truculence.

Let's see how things evolved when I
gave to each "proof" a fit reply.
Though you might feel the proofs were lame,
that all my efforts were a game,
that I was shooting down straw men,
you may be right, but then again
we need to have some reasons for
our notions, and I won't ignore
the slightest reasons to believe
in God, although they seem naive.

The Greatest One is greater than
all that I know—both beast and man.
*You haven't proved that he is great.
Another could have greater weight.*

God cannot be surpassed in aught.
He's greater than my highest thought.
*Your definition could apply
to any whom you deify.*

There are not many gods or none,
but, in the middle, only one.
*The golden mean does not apply
to what might be up in the sky.*

The thought of God is in my head.
The thought's alive and isn't dead.
*Although your thought refers to him,
your thought could still be just a whim.*

A God exists because I find
he's put this thought into my mind.
*Do not assume that he exists,
although belief in him persists.*

A God of love has made me start
to feel this love inside my heart.
*You have projected onto "God"
the love that you would spread abroad.*

I heard a person tell my friend:
A man saw God before his end.
*You do not even know his name.
Don't cite a rumor for your claim.*

The thought of God is right and fair,
so God exists and must be there.
*Your moralistic view is not
enough to prove what you've been taught.*

Since all our gadgets were designed,
this world has come from someone's mind.
*We do not have to generalize—
both time and chance could organize.*

But do you really think it's true?
Blind time and chance will never do!
Your ridicule avoids the point.
Your rationale is out of joint.

But don't you wish that God was there?
He could reply to every prayer!
My wishes don't create what's real.
Don't make appeals to what I feel.

A God of goodness must be there.
There's goodness here and everywhere.
You've overlooked the pain and strife
that people feel throughout their life.

As father is to his own son,
so God relates to everyone.
Analogies don't always hold,
and that one's getting very old.

It's obvious that unbelief
is quite absurd and causes grief.
Support your claims of the absurd
with concrete reasons in your words.

No one can prove that God's not there.
He must exist somehow, somewhere.
Our ignorance does not provide
a reason that he must abide.

Belief in God has good effects—
like hospitals a saint erects.
Though good may come from some belief,
this argument is not the chief.

Religion is the strongest force
for worldly good—a great resource.
Your claim does not address the theme
of your belief in God supreme.

Without belief, the people would
regress to ill, forget what's good.
Your statement is a slippery slope
and doesn't prove a God of hope.

The atheists do not agree
on life or values, as you see.
This conflict doesn't prove you're right
or show that there's a God of light.

The atheists dismiss belief,
so guilty minds can find relief.
The psychological does not
give to your claims a valid shot.

A noble person just like you—
believe is what you ought to do!
Your flattery will never move
me to believe what you would prove.

My pastor said I must believe
and be baptized, or I should leave.
Authorities aren't always right.
They may not know a God of light.

Tradition says that God exists.
Why do you think this view persists?
Though history might say it's true,
we should examine every view.

There is a God, there is, there is!
And all should know God is, God is!
Repeating what you think is true
will not win over me or you.

A mighty fortress is our God!
A mighty fortress is our God!
Cliches that have the greatest pull
can later on become quite dull.

To my opinion, I've a right,
and this belief gives me delight.
Opinions still are not the truth,
and they belong to fickle youth.

It's either God controls it all,
or into chaos earth would fall.
Your false dilemma doesn't show
that other options could be so.

If God exists, he may require
our firm belief—or endless fire!
Appeals to fear are not enough,
and they deny a God of love.

So why do I believe in God?
The former reasons I have trod
for being weak or insecure.
Do I have reasons to be sure?
Like old Descartes, I think and am,
and if my reasons aren't a sham,
I must begin with something firm
that won't allow my mind to squirm.

I feel a link to something more
than this small world and can't ignore
that when I don't know what to do
I often feel some help come through.
To Someone higher, there's a link.
It helps me when I cannot think
of decent answers on my own.
It doesn't leave me all alone
to guess about what I should do,
to try to find a helpful clue
from lessons of the distant past,
which I experienced and classed
among successes in my life.
It shows me how to deal with strife
when problems come and I don't know
what I should say or where to go.

So I have more than faith that's blind—
I feel connected to a Mind
that gives me notions every day,
and if I sometimes lose my way
it is because I'm stubborn and
I want to take back full command
of my own thinking, all alone.
I'd rather have a tiny throne
for my own ego than to hear
the inspirations that are clear.

My reasons for belief are plain.
I do not trust my finite brain

to give me all I need to know.
The future will not cease to flow
into the present, and I must
rely on One I've learned to trust,
if I would find my way in life
and deal with all the present strife.

I do not know when I will leave
this world, but I don't think I'll grieve
when that day comes, for I have hope.
Though logic doesn't help me cope,
I feel I live, and Someone great
sustains and helps me lift the weight.
Sometimes I feel I can't endure,
but then a gentle voice that's sure
reminds me that I'm not alone:
there is a solid Cornerstone.

What would I do without this link?
Like others, I would try to think
all on my own and I would fear
that change would make the world unclear.
I would be scared of everything
that threatened me, and I would cling
to habits that brought comfort to
my life, and I would always do
what I had learned in former times.
I would adhere to paradigms
from books and learning of the past,
but that old learning doesn't last
when everything is strange and new:
I wouldn't know just what to do.

So this concludes my journey through
the many reasons and the slew
of fallacies that don't support
my own beliefs, but come up short.
I do not know about your mind,
but maybe someday you will find
that you need Someone's help when you
cannot discern the best way through.