

Views from the Pews – What are the rational grounds of faith?

All of us sitting here week by week have presumably debated this question, back and forth at various stages throughout our lives. We are not alone in these debates: two (at least) possible arguments have been widely discussed over time.

Medieval scholars reasoned *upwards* from objectively defined fundamental processes. They recognised four levels of reality: (1) material things you can touch, (2) information, an immaterial thing you can't touch but is definitely real, (3) universal realities like mathematics, all leading to (4) the ultimate reality of God. They distinguished between these different but interacting realities on the way to the inescapable conclusion that God really does exist. This irrefutable logic was the universally acceptable understanding of the world until Galileo.

The much more recent Intelligent Design Theory (IDT) reasons *downwards* from observable outcomes. It infers the existence of a higher agency from the complexity of creation and the cosmic science of fine tuning. Its supporters misunderstand Darwinian logic, hence their approach leads them to favour creation over evolution as explanations of how things are and which things matter.

What is the difference between these two approaches, if both conclude that God must exist? First, proof of the existence of God is not the issue. Even Satan believes that God exists, but that does not save him. All that matters is whether belief leads to love and obedience. Second, medieval logic is an example of reasoning from the particular to the general, assuming that God gifted **unconditional freedom** to all creatures to be themselves, good or bad, as evolutionary history demonstrates.

Third, the alternative logic of IDT argues from the general to the particular. They assert that God created everything **directly**, and apply that conclusion to any particular case. It is open to the inescapable challenge of theodicy, because it implies that God is responsible for the creation of creatures capable of evil. But IDT is an invalid inference from a completely different set of observations on (among other things) the fine tuning of the cosmos, each valid in their own right but with no internal implications for biological history.

The grounds for debate vary across the whole range of human experience, but for those of us here today, it always ends in some sort of decision. We find that, on balance, God's constant, patient love digs us out of more dilemmas than can variable human reason.

Kim King