

# How to Disprove the Existence of God

*[Both my friend Kirby and I have for many years struggled against the belief in God and against religion in general. In February 2010 I forwarded to Kirby an article by Susan Jacoby on "[Five Myths about Atheism](#)" together with some criticisms of her for failing to use the best method in proving that God does not exist. Kirby responded with the note below, and then I responded to Kirby. -S.H.]*

## **Kirby wrote on Feb. 7, 2010:**

Victor Stenger has written several books, among them

[http://www.amazon.com/God-Failed-Hypothesis-Science-Shows/dp/1591026520/ref=sr\\_1\\_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1265559874&sr=8-2](http://www.amazon.com/God-Failed-Hypothesis-Science-Shows/dp/1591026520/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1265559874&sr=8-2)

If you want to read it I'll bring it to the next book club and you can borrow it. I know you like to stick to the primary argument of "mind" in your disproof of God. When I get the occasional really serious person, who wants to really understand what atheism is, or why I don't believe in a God or gods, I ask them to define God....any god....and then explain to them why that particular god, as they have defined/understood it, cannot exist. Usually it comes down to logical inconsistencies....God cannot "know" everything, past present and future and logically be able to change his mind....or answer a prayer for that matter. I'm pretty confident I can find the holes in any God definition...mostly because I haven't failed yet. They don't always buy the arguments...they can always fall back on "faith", but it leaves them something to think about. My fundamentalist cousin has come a long way from believing in the Bible as literally true and claiming to not believe in science(!?!?) to a somewhat more "middle of the road" view. Of course, it's taken me about 20 years to get him there!

Let me know if you interested in Stenger...and thanks for forwarding this.

---

*"What if all the gods we know are fiction but the one real god has no believers?!" - Guy Harrison*

## **Scott replied on Feb. 7, 2010:**

Subject: Re: Jacoby's article and proofs of God's nonexistence

Hi Kirby,

I've got one of Stenger's books around here somewhere and have read large sections of it. Basically I think he's on the wrong track with using *physics* to try to disprove the existence of gods, just as others are on the wrong track (in this specific regard!) in focusing on evolution and

biology. If you allow the possibility of the existence of a disembodied mind, then *some sort of* god might exist no matter what (the rest of) physics or biology might demonstrate.

Sara was raised in the Jehovah's Witnesses milieu and when in high school was faced with the stark choice of believing in evolution or God—and to her great credit she chose evolution! But more sophisticated (wishy-washy!) religions, including even the Catholic Church evidently, now say that God created human beings *through the mechanism* of evolution. Because of that sort of dodge, evolution doesn't work as a general refutation of the existence of God. The same goes for the other laws of physics and biology, *except* for those relating specifically to mind and consciousness. The reason for this is that all the other aspects of what God is supposed to be can at least conceivably be rejected.

To really prove or disprove something you have to use the appropriate science!

I think your heuristic approach of raising questions in the minds of believers by having them first define *what they mean by God*, and then exposing the virtually inevitable logical contradictions and conflicts with their other beliefs, is a very good one. And for most people it is probably far more effective than my “no-disembodied-minds” argument which requires a fair amount of sophistication when it comes to cognitive psychology.

But your approach works because most believers have not thought out their own beliefs to a degree that allows them to be internally consistent. (Indeed, most religious people today scarcely know what they do believe!)

But I'll accept your challenge of defining a God that you won't be able to shoot down in the way you normally can:

God is just an extremely powerful immaterial being. He didn't really create the universe, but intervenes in it from time to time as “his” whims dictate. He is not omnipresent, omnipotent or omniscient, though he knows a lot, can do a lot, and gets around a lot! He does not know what his own future decisions will be. He does not answer prayers, and may not even be aware of them. He has no morality concerns, either good or bad. He doesn't give a damn about humanity in particular. But now and then he'll do things that impact humanity, such as causing a massive flood, or toss us an asteroid. Just for the fun of it, let's suppose!

OK, show that that concept of God is inconsistent or illogical or impossible!

This can actually be done, but only by focusing on the “immaterial being” part of the definition.

It is of course true that mental decisions can lead to physical actions. I can raise my arm when I mentally decide to do so! But this is only because my mental decision is actually *a way of looking at* part of a *changing physical system* (my body). By definition, a “disembodied mind” could not be part of any developing *physical* system. Therefore while I can “intervene” in the world and make changes to it, no “disembodied mind” would be able to do so, or could actually

even exist at all. (If it is supposed that it did exist, it could still not affect the physical world or human beings in any way whatsoever. Its supposed “existence” would be entirely vacuous.)

\* \* \*

It might be argued that this postulated “God” of mine is not close enough to the usual conception of God to count. How about if I throw in, then, that this God actually did create the physical universe, but otherwise is the same as I postulated. There still is not much basis for an attack on this conception of God except the scientifically incoherent idea of a noncorporeal “entity” somehow being able to “*create*” and then further *affect* physical reality. (The objection that such a universe would have been created by an entity *outside* and *prior to the existence* of that universe might cause a few problems, however. We might have to say that the physical universe includes everything *but* God.)

The general point here is that the one essential aspect of God that cannot be fudged away is the core conception of “him” as a disembodied mind. If God is assumed to be a physical being, then he is no longer really a god at all, but only a very powerful extraterrestrial being. Nobody denies that something like that is possible!

Scott