

Introduction: The Big Q

It seems to be basic to being human to wonder if there is anything more to life — more than just making the most of the seventy or so years that our hearts manage to keep beating.

Our lives are all too brief. In fact, the sad truth is that we only keep together the atoms that make us *us* for about 650,000 hours. 650,000 hours — that's nothing! After that these faithful friendly atoms, which have configured together to make our bodies, lose their sense of loyalty and begin to find other commitments. Our lives are too short.

But not only are our lives frighteningly short, they can often feel tragically pointless. After all, what is the purpose of such a short existence? What is the point of being courageous, or good, or kind, if all we end up as is being dissipated into nothingness? If we are merely freaky bundles of molecules that just happen to possess conscious thought for a few hours then there is no real significance or point to anything we do. It's like an absurd cosmic joke — we have climbed, clambered and evolved far enough out of some primeval sludge to achieve conscious thought only to become conscious enough to comprehend that our fleeting existences are futile.

What is life all about? How can we make sense of it? Where have we come from? Why are we here?

This reflecting seems to be unique to us. Do you ever see a monkey meditating on the meaning of life? Has anyone ever stumbled over a python pontificating on the possibility of continued consciousness after death? Indeed, can you conceive of a kangaroo cogitating whether its existence is worthwhile? Of course not — as far as we know it is only *homo sapiens*, that is, people, who think like this. We are uniquely conscious beings



— and that unique consciousness makes us think — and sometimes it makes us really think.

At some time or another, most of us engage our brains on the really big questions of life, death, the universe — and beyond. Whether we are moved to ponder by a sunset or jolted into reflection by the sudden death of a friend we start, for a moment, to shake off the shroud of indifference that our society pulls over us and seriously begin to wonder. And it is this sort of wondering we are about to explore. So, tune in your cerebral cortex, switch on your neuronal connections, take a deep breath and let's set out on a mental journey to the edge of known reality — and beyond.

As we begin our adventure of exploration and discovery into the unknown, and decide to stretch our mental machinery to beyond its capacity, it is important to ask what the really big questions are. After all, if we don't know the questions we are asking, it will hardly be surprising if we stumble over less-than-clear answers.

We could list a whole series of critical questions: Is there any real significance to my life? Does it matter how I behave? Does it matter whether I am kind or cruel? — Whether I help an old granny across the road, or push her under a bus? Are these seven or so decades all I have? Is that it? Does my consciousness persist after my body's atoms dissipate when my body finally staggers to a biological halt and then either slowly rots or quickly burns? These are urgent questions and we haven't got long to find the answers. The countdown to possible oblivion is well advanced. We had better get a move on.

What may be helpful is to find some sort of key to unlock this box of conundrums and sort them into some kind of sense. The key may be to discover the question behind the questions, to uncover the question behind all questions. But is there such an ultimate all consuming, all connecting question. I think there is.



Now don't turn off when I say this, but I think it is the old 'God Question'. Let me explain. If there is no God and we are just a random collaboration of molecules that somehow mindlessly stumbles upon conscious thought, then chance rules. By chance, we wake from cosmic nothingness only to dream for a while before entering our short nightmare: oblivion. If this is the case, then there is no significance to my life; it does not ultimately matter how I behave — and there is nothing after death.

On the other hand, if there is a God, the supreme personal ruler of the universe and beyond, then I am made for a purpose. I am watched as to how I behave and my life will extend beyond the grave. I am accountable. Of course, it all depends on what that God is like and how he has made the universe — and we can only know these things if he has communicated them to us. But these secondary issues will have to wait — they can only be answered once we accept that God exists. We will return to whether he has spoken and how he may have set up the whole of reality later. First things must come first.

For now, it is sufficient to say the existence of God at least holds out the possibility of purpose, an understanding of what is good and what is bad, and whether there is life after death. So, the first and key question, the Big Question, if you will, is 'Does God Exist?'



*The universe is not only queerer than we suppose;
it is queerer than we can suppose.*

J. B. S. Haldane, Biologist



Follow the White Rabbit

So, the key question is, 'Does God exist?' Many believe he doesn't, and feel that any belief in something like that should be relegated to the nursery. Faith in God is seen as an illusion — wishful thinking for the gullible and a vain dream for the weak minded.

However, many who take this position have never really looked carefully at the evidence; they have hardened opinions based on little more than ignorance and prejudice. A few have reacted against a Christian upbringing and have never seriously looked back since their childhood or teenage rejection. Others have been raised in homes with a mindset against any Christian perspective; they have swallowed the pill of cynicism without critical thought. The majority, perhaps, fall between these more extreme backgrounds and have assimilated the indifference and scepticism of our society. Agnosticism rules — we don't know — we can't know — and there is no point in even trying to know.

The fact of the matter is that many who hold each of these varying perspectives have never really considered the evidence seriously. Nor have they considered it with an open mind. I'm not saying this is deliberate. There just isn't time. Higher priorities lift us off our feet and propel us in other directions. But for those who can press life's pause button for a few moments, we will steer a course straight into the key cosmic question: Is there anyone out there? Does God exist?

For those who set out on such a journey, this might well, depending on your perception, be a mind-altering exercise — and, even mind-bending. It will certainly lead down pathways of understanding that may rupture your perception of life, reality and



even everything. This is not a journey for the faint-hearted. As a certain Alice once discovered, rabbit holes can go a lot deeper than you think.

So, what evidence is there that there is a God?¹ The best place to start is right where we are, looking at what we see around us. If we carefully consider what we encounter every day, we will uncover some important clues, clues that might even totally change the way we think. Strangely, the obvious isn't always the most obvious. Rabbit holes often begin right where we are standing — we can trip over them.

From Snooker to Dominoes

We live in a world where nothing happens by itself; things only occur because something else causes them to occur. Nothing is truly autonomous. Think of snooker balls for instance: a coloured ball rolls across the table and into a corner pocket. Why does this happen? It takes place because a white ball sped across the tabletop and hit the coloured ball. So, the coloured ball only moved because of the force of the white ball bumping into it. But then we logically ask: why did the white ball move so that it crashed into the coloured one? And of course the answer is because it was hit by the cue. And then the cue moved because the player moved it; the player moved his arms because of the contraction of his muscles. But it does not stop there: the muscles contracted due to chemical reactions in the cells and so produced that movement. And the chemical reactions caused the movement because they were releasing chemical energy they had received from the blood. And where did the blood get its energy? This was absorbed through the intestinal wall from food that had been digested. But this is not the end of the story either: the food received its energy from the sun. Either the food was plant matter, or it was meat from an animal that originally ate plants. Whichever way we look at it, all our energy comes





from the sun. The millions of green leaves we see around us are silently and gently processing the beams of sunlight that fall on them. And some of those plants are considerate enough to store that energy in a form that is palatable and digestible — in short, they feed us and keep us alive.

But all this is only the start of the journey. If we think about the sun we realise that it does not make energy out of nowhere; it simply releases it from the chemicals it is made of. The next obvious question is where did these substances get their energy? They received them from elsewhere, from somewhere else in space. Energy flows through the cosmos but where does it come from? The rabbit hole keeps going, but now it bends out of view. From here on we can only guess — with a little help from cosmologists. The main point is clear though: nothing happens by itself. It only happens because something happens to it.

In other words, what we see all around is what scientists call ‘cause and effect’. Something acts on something else to produce a result or effect. Whatever we look at had something causing it, which in turn had something causing it, and that in turn had something causing it. And like a tumbling line of dominoes, the chain reaction can’t be infinite. This chain of cause and effect intriguingly disappears out of sight. It is the White Rabbit going down a rather deep and mysteriously fascinating burrow.

Another way of expressing this is to say that everything is dependent on something else; nothing acts by itself. Nothing is autonomous. Some scientists and philosophers use a special word for this — contingent. In a former generation, if a young woman was asked out for a walk in the park, she might well have said something like, ‘I would be pleased to go, contingent upon the weather.’ In today’s speech, what she meant was, ‘I will go, dependent upon the weather.’ Contingent means dependent.

The point of all this is that everything in our universe is contingent; everything is dependent; everything is bound up in a relationship of cause and effect. The natural question that arises out of this is what caused the whole process? What started it all



off? You can't have contingencies going back for ever; you can't have an endless chain of causes. There has to be a First Cause. There has to be something (or perhaps someone) that started it all.

The universe as we experience it is made of dependent stuff. This means that any hunk of it that we bump up against is unable to explain itself — we must appeal beyond it to something else to explain it. No single element of our world is self-explanatory. This is true of every part of our universe; but also, if you take the universe as a whole, the whole thing is contingent. Everything in our universe is contingent, or dependent, and therefore the whole universe must be contingent. If you have a whole load of contingencies and put them together, you don't suddenly get an explanation, you get a lot of contingency. A universe full of contingent stuff is a contingent universe. If all the parts are dependent, then the totality must be dependent. But what is it all dependent on? Where has the White Rabbit gone?



Where has the White Rabbit Gone?

Logically, the universe must be dependent on something non-dependent. By definition the cause must be non-contingent — something outside of our contingent and dependent universe must have caused it. This perspective is consistent with what the Bible opens with, and teaches throughout. Genesis 1:1 puts it in these words: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.' This independent reality might just be the God described in the Bible.

Sometimes people respond to this by asking the question, 'Well then, if that is true, who made God?' And the answer is of course that nothing made God, because God by definition is independent or non-contingent. The whole argument for his existence here is based on the need for something autonomous or absolute — something that everything else is dependent upon





— something of a different order of reality — something independent. If the whole argument is based on the need for something or someone unmade, then it requires a perverse misunderstanding of the argument to ask the question of who made the Maker. The very point that indicates his existence is the need for something unmade, or non-contingent, or independent, or eternal.

When scientists gather their data they try to come up with a theory or model that fits and explains the evidence. Various theories might be suggested, and then the best one is picked — the one that is most consistent with the data. What the Bible gives us is a model or theory as to how to view the universe: the universe is dependent on what it calls ‘God’, who is independent of it. All the evidence that we have been looking at is consistent with this perspective. That is not the same as saying that this evidence proves the existence of God — that would be stretching the data too far, making it prove more than it is able to bare. But it is quite fair to say that belief in God is consistent with this data. The White Rabbit might well lead to God.

The question that arises is whether there are other theories that fit the evidence better. Some people have suggested that an all-powerful absolute Creator is not needed, all that is required is something more powerful than anything in our purely material cosmos. They say that such a force or being could have set the ball rolling, so to speak. But of course this can’t be true, for by definition what is needed is something independent or non-contingent — that is, absolute. If the something that made our universe was immensely powerful, but still dependent or contingent, then we would have to ask, well, what caused it? In other words, it would not solve the problem of a dependent universe. The only way a contingent universe could come into being is by something non-contingent, or absolute. Anything just a bit more powerful, be it a force or being, would not fit the bill. This theory is not consistent with the evidence.



The Magicians

This neatly knocks on the head many of the pagan, neo-pagan or new age perspectives that are so rife these days. One has only to peruse the average bookshop to realize how a belief in some spiritual force, forces, or even gods has captured the hearts and minds of many. Most of the alternative therapies have at root an acceptance of this sort of thing. Indeed, this shift of popular thinking in an ever-increasing belief of this kind is upheld by one survey that found that British people are becoming less religious but more spiritual.² What was meant by religious was something controlling, institutional and moralizing; what was understood by spiritual was the appreciation of another dimension to life beyond the merely material and mechanistic.

Pagan, neo-pagan, or new age followers feel that the cosmos is caused by gods or forces, who although powerful are not absolutely powerful — they are dependent beings, and as such still need an explanation themselves. For those who feel that ‘God’ is the force behind and within nature in all its manifestations, then the same problem still arises. Those who take this perspective feel that there is no real distinction between nature and ‘God’, for the force not only infuses nature, but is one with nature.³ The problem here is that if the ‘god-force’ is indistinct from nature, then ‘it’ or ‘he’ or ‘she’, depending on the particular perspective, is by definition dependent. This understanding has a contingent force within and behind the cosmos — and such a force still needs a non-contingent cause.

Whichever way we look at the pagan model or theory, it does not fit with a contingent universe. Again, the biblical perspective is consistent with the data: a creator-God who is independent and non-contingent explains the universe as we experience it: ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’

It is interesting and significant that at the time of the early spread of Christianity recorded in the New Testament, one of the main arguments used against paganism was the need and



reality of an independent creator-God. This is recorded in Acts 14:15: ‘We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in them.’ The man who said this, the Apostle Paul, used the same approach when he was debating with the Greek philosophers in Athens in Acts 17:24-28:

The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each of us.

The Stuffers

But even though a modern ‘spiritual’, new age, or neo-pagan perspective does not fit the evidence of a contingent universe, are there other models that fit better, or at least as well as a belief in the one creator-God described in the Bible? Many people feel there is — and they are the Stuffers. The Stuffers are people who only believe in stuff. To put it another way, they only believe that matter exists, and so are more often called ‘materialists’. The Stuffers feel that although everything we see is contingent, and it might therefore imply a non-contingent cause, the reality of the situation is that matter has always existed. The cause and effect relationships of contingency just keep on going back for ever — for no less than infinity. Stuff is eternal. But the stuffers have a problem here, and it is a very big problem — in fact, as big as the universe. Their problem is that they have run out of



time — just like the White Rabbit running past Alice muttering ‘Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late.’

The universe only has so much available energy in it and it is running down. Scientists have what they call ‘the Second Law of Thermodynamics’. Basically, this law describes the universe the way we experience it, that is, that available energy is getting less and less. If this fundamental law is true, and no reputable scientist would dispute it, then according to the Stuffers we would have already run out of energy. If the universe has been going on for ever, and if it only has a certain amount of energy, and that is being continually used up, then clearly it should have run out by now. But as the energy of the universe is still running down, then clearly our cosmos must have had a beginning. The universe cannot be eternal; this stuff must have had a beginning.

It might be helpful to think of a car. If a car is driving along a road with a full tank of petrol, and if there are no garages, there will come a point when it will run out of fuel. If there was only a certain amount of petrol in the tank in the first place and no more could be added, and also it was continually being used up to the point that it stopped, then it is obvious that there was a time when the journey started. It would be illogical and absurd to think that the journey had been going on for ever. In the same way, it would be equally illogical and absurd to suppose that a universe with a limited amount of available energy has always been here — it hasn’t. There are no cosmic petrol stations. To put it in a sentence: our dependent or contingent universe must have had a beginning when what it was contingent on made it.

However, most Stuffers don’t capitulate at this point; they fall back to another line of defence. The most common view these days for the beginning of the universe is some form of the Big Bang theory. Put simply, this says that the whole universe started as a microscopically and infinitesimally tiny dot. This dot was apparently so small that it had no dimensions — it is known as a singularity. From this jot, a Big Bang of cosmic proportions apparently ensued, the result of which is all that we





can see, hear, smell, taste and feel — everything we can detect with our most advanced technology — and all we can't detect as well. Whether this theory is true or not does not really affect the argument we are sketching out for the existence of God. If this was the way the universe came into being then that singularity was still contingent — where on earth (I'm sure that's not the right way of expressing this) did that come from? So with or without a Big Bang we still need an explanation for a contingent and dependent universe. The power of the argument remains.

But the point the Stuffers make here is not the case for such a Big Bang, but what happened before the Big Bang. Their next argument for a universe that is eternal and does not need an explanation is that before the Big Bang there was another universe — the opposite of our expanding and running down one. This contracting cosmos ended up crashing and falling in on itself to form the singularity. What they imagine happening is what is sometimes called a steady-state universe, which is oscillating or continually contracting and expanding. So, our universe expands and runs down until it has expanded and run down so much that it is evenly spread out through space. At this point the forces of expansion are overcome by gravity and this starts to pull it together again, until we end up with the singularity, which then explodes, expands and runs down again. By proposing this neat scheme of things some Stuffers feel they have comprehended an eternal universe that is itself non-contingent and not dependent on anything or anyone else. If this is true the argument of contingency breaks down. The White Rabbit has disappeared down a blind burrow — it leads nowhere. (Or, perhaps more accurately, it leads back up to the surface again.)

But however ingenious this idea is, we have to ask a pretty tough question. And the question is this: what evidence is there for such an oscillating universe? Here, the emperor of stuffism is seen as embarrassingly stark naked. It all sounds very clever, but all it is, is an imaginative bit of fantasy — there is not one piece of evidence in its favour — it is all guesswork — a leap of



faith, if you will (or wishful thinking). All we see is a universe that is expanding and running down, and so it is pure conjecture to imagine that it was preceded and will be followed by one that is contracting and increasing in energy. There is a basic law of science and philosophy that should be brought to bear here. And it is this: if something looks like a cucumber, smells like a cucumber and tastes like a cucumber, then the burden of proof lies with those who would say that it is not a cucumber. Blind faith will not do.

There is still another problem with asking what was before the Big Bang — and things now get really peculiar, or as Alice said when down the rabbit hole, ‘Curiouser and curiouser!’ It is actually utterly meaningless to ask what happened before the Big Bang. The reason for this is that scientists call the point of singularity $t = 0$, that is, this is when time began. Before $t = 0$, time didn’t exist. There was no ‘before’ to enquire into; there was no past to emerge from. That’s what the physicists say — and that’s where their calculations lead. What is needed, therefore, is something or someone outside of time, or eternal, to bring it into being.⁴ Again, this is entirely consistent with the biblical perspective, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.’ And it is totally inconsistent with the fantasy of ‘Once upon a time’. There was no time.

Putting all this together, when we look carefully at the universe around us, we see everything is contingent, or dependent. This is the White Rabbit. And when, like Alice, we follow the White Rabbit, we find ourselves going down a trail to something beyond our imagination. The trail or burrow of cause and effect leads to someone or something uncaused, independent or non-contingent. There is no way out.

This does not prove the existence of God as such, but it is certainly consistent with belief in God. What is intriguing is that it does seem to rule out the opinion that our universe is self-explanatory. All the evidence fits the God-model.



The White Rabbit has led us to the most surprising of places: God could explain our universe. Is this Wonderland?

Of course, in the original tale, Alice was only dreaming, but there again, as Morpheus asked in the film, *The Matrix*, 'Have you ever had a dream Neo, that you were so sure was real? What if you were unable to wake from that dream? How would you know the difference between the dream world and the real world?'

Perhaps the dream is that there is no White Rabbit — and no Wonderland — and most people are asleep.

Perhaps reality truly is stranger than fiction.

Perhaps the Bible could wake us up to see the universe as it really is — and more importantly, who is behind it.

Perhaps behind this universe there is someone — someone who makes sense of everything.

To quote *The Matrix* again: 'The truth is out there.'