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Does God exist? The ego's favourite shield

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By Acharya Prashant



Does God exist? Asks the ego. We take the question seriously. The ego has succeeded. In listening to the question, we have forgotten to listen to what the ego deliberately did not ask. Our response to the 'God exists?' question usually is 'Yes', or 'No', or 'I do not know'. All three are irrelevant responses. We forget to ask: For whom? For whom does God exist or not? Who is asking this question?

The believer says 'Exists' and the agnostic says 'No' and clutches logic. In either case, the ego experiences some relief after speaking. In questioning the existence of

God, the ego successfully hides its own non-existence. Master distractor.

The 'God exists?' debate is about putting 'God' in the dock so that the real culprit ego may roam free.

What does it mean to 'exist'?

The question was about God. But the important word is not 'God.' The important word is 'exist'.

Before asking whether God exists, ask: what does it mean to say anything exists at all?

Here is the newspaper you are reading. Does this newspaper exist? Yes. How do you know? Your eyes see it. Your hands can hold it. Your senses report it. Your mind arranges these reports into a coherent object called 'newspaper'. And behind the mind sits the sense of 'I,' the claimant that says, 'I know, I judge, I conclude.'

Now notice: who is above whom? Is the newspaper above you, or are you above the newspaper?

The newspaper exists because your senses certify it. Your senses are the judge. And who controls the senses? You do. Close your eyes. The newspaper disappears. Turn your head. It vanishes. Open your eyes. It returns. Who is the master here? I am not saying the paper is annihilated just by shutting your eyes, I am showing what 'exists' actually means when you use it.

So the newspaper is the servant of your senses. Your senses are the servant of your mind. Your mind is the servant of your ego. The newspaper is the servant of the servant of the servant.

Sounds unacceptable? Then ask yourself what you mean by 'exists' when nothing can be sensed, inferred, or even conceptually held. For you, 'exists' is always certification, by senses, by instruments, by mind.

Chairs, phones, planets, galaxies - everything that 'exists' is something your senses and mind have certified. Everything that 'is' sits below you in the hierarchy. You are the judge issuing certificates of existence.

The problem with 'God'

Now say 'God exists.'

You say God is the highest, the supreme, the ultimate. Being Highest and Supreme is the definitional hallmark of 'Godness'. But anything that 'exists' must be certified by your senses and mind. Anything that 'is' becomes your object, placed below you. If God 'is', then God too is below your senses, your mind and your ego. How can the highest be the servant of your servant? Huge contradiction!

Think. The newspaper exists. It is below your senses. Your senses are below your mind. Your mind is below your ego. No problem. But now you say 'God exists' and also 'God is supreme.' By what logic? If God exists the way the newspaper exists, God has become your object. Your slave. The servant of your servant.

You have committed an impertinence while claiming devotion. It should be placed in the amusingly absurd category of 'blasphemy by the ultrareligious'.

Now the atheist. He declares, 'God does not exist.' Who is the judge? The same senses. The same mind. The same ego on its throne, issuing verdicts. Whether you say 'is' or 'is not,' you have placed yourself above the thing being judged.

The theist makes God his slave by affirming. The atheist makes Truth his slave by denying. Same arrogance, different vocabulary.

Saint Kabir was asked: does God exist? He replied:

Hai kahoon to hai nahin, nahin kaha na jaaye. Hai nahin ke beech men sahab raha samaay.

"If I say He is, He is not; and it also cannot be said that He is not". Why? Because 'is' makes Him the slave of my senses. 'Is not' does the same. Beyond 'is' and 'is not,' Truth is not an object of debate.

Truth is not an object. So does Truth have something to do with the subject? Let's see.

The nature of consciousness

Consciousness, as we ordinarily experience it, is not some pure, luminous awareness. It is a dualistic phenomenon. At one end sits the experiencer, the ego. At the other end sits the experienced object. Between them runs a relationship of desire, delusion, and attachment. A dualistic relationship means both ends are helplessly dependent on each other for their existence, hence neither end truly 'exists', because true existence demands independence.

There is always an 'I' experiencing something. Always a subject here, an object there. The 'I' and the object define each other. Without an object, the ego has nothing to attach to. Without the ego, the object has no one to certify it. They are bound together. Without a subject, 'object' is not an experienced category at all.

When you ask 'Does God exist?', what are you doing? You are trying to place God as an object at one end of this duality, with yourself as the knowing subject at the other: 'I worship God', 'I say God exists'. You are trying to bring the ultimate within the same framework where you experience chairs, phones, and newspapers.

The category error

Philosophers call this a category error. What is the colour of a fragrance? What does white light smell like?

One person says the light smells good. Another says it smells bad. They debate fiercely. The debate is absurd. Light does not belong to the category of things that have smell.

Similarly, terms like "exists" and "does not exist" apply only to objects. To things certified by senses and mind. When you ask whether the ground of existence itself "exists," you are asking for the smell of light.

The question is not deep. It is malformed.

The debate is amateurish, because it uses 'is' and 'is not' where only objects qualify for such verdicts. "Is" and "is not" can only be said about material objects, mental objects, anything the mind can grasp. The moment you say "is" or "is not," you have objectified. You have made it small. You have made it yours. You want to ask whether God exists, without asking whether even you exist in the first place.

Sophisticated theologians may protest that their God is 'beyond being' or 'the ground of existence.' Very well. Then stop saying 'God exists.' Say instead: 'Existence is.' But that is precisely what this essay proposes - and it is called either absolute existence, or nothing at all, but never theism.

The impertinence of naming and framing

Those who understood this refi

Why? Because naming begins objectification. The moment you name something, you start imagining it. Try this: I give you a nonsense word. 'Tootoopar.' You have never heard it. It means nothing. Yet the moment I said it, something stirred. Some vague image. Some attempt at meaning. You cannot help it. The mind grabs.

This is why the Upanishads refused to name the ultimate. They said: you cannot describe it, define it, locate it inside or outside, call it big or small. The eyes cannot see it. Why? Because it is behind the eyes. How will the eyes see what is behind them? The Kena Upanishad says: speech goes out to describe it and returns exhausted, having failed. The mind goes out to imagine it and falls back, having grasped nothing.

So what did the sages say? No name. Just a pointer: *Tat*. That. Just 'That'.

And they did not stop there. If 'That' is separate from you, it becomes your object again. So they said *Tat Tvam Asi*. That you are. Not outside you. Not your object. But You. Your Truth. Inseparable.

The moment you place God in the heavens, somewhere far away, watching, judging, rewarding, you have committed a childish error. You have tried to objectify even Truth. You have made a story. Given a form. Assigned attributes. And then you call this construction 'supreme'?

Who are you to certify the Supreme, if the Supreme, by your own definition, is beyond you?

The egoic rebuttals

"But I have experienced God. I felt His presence. My prayers were answered."

Who experienced? The ego. What was experienced? An object. Bliss, peace, light, a voice, a sign, all objects within the subject-object framework. The experiencer remained intact, in fact it got strengthened: "I am the one who experienced God." The ego has acquired a spiritual trophy. This is not liberation, this is decoration of the prison cell. If it came and went, it is not the ultimate. The ultimate is not an experience, it is the dissolution of the experiencer.

"The design of the universe proves a designer."

Who is seeing design? The mind, a pattern-seeking machine. It cannot look without imposing order, so it shouts 'designer!' and then imagines one. And if complexity needs a creator, who created the creator? If you exempt the creator from the rule, you have admitted that something can be uncreated, then stop using 'createdness' as your proof.

"Without God there is no moral

Then your morality is obedience and fear management. Real morality does not come from

threats and rewards, it comes from clarity. When you see that the other is not other, compassion is not a duty, it is natural. Morality born of fear is fragile; morality born of understanding is unshakeable.

Everything else, miracles, scriptures, prophecies, numbers, wagers, gaps in science, meaning and comfort, is the same trick in different costumes: the ego begging for insurance. It is either trying to convert its ignorance into a name, or convert its fear into a belief, or convert its greed into an afterlife bargain. Need does not create truth. The demand for comfort does not certify reality. It only certifies the ego's desperation to survive.

Truth is God

The believer says 'is' and feels secure. The atheist says 'is not' and feels superior. Both avoid the real question: who is this one demanding verdicts?

To live without the comfort of 'is' or 'is not' means honesty. It means the ego bowing the head and falling silent before that which cannot be made into an object. Not 'God exists.' Not 'God does not exist'. Silence, and the recognition that the judge is faking jurisdiction.

Now see the only formulation that does not secretly preserve your favourite idol. People say, 'God is Truth'. First you keep your named God, your imagined God, your inherited stories, your chosen form, and then you decorate your object by calling it Truth. Truth becomes a property of your possession.

What is Truth then? Does 'is' even apply to Truth? Well, we again turn the question upon the questioner. When the ego sees its own falseness, it can no longer stake a claim to being the Truth. It examines itself, and finds its claims and stories to be all false. The ego disappears. The seer cannot survive the seeing. When the seer is seen through, what remains is not a new conclusion but the end of the one who needed conclusions.

With the ego gone, what remains is Truth. So, what exactly remains? Obviously, nobody remains to tell that. Nothing apart from the Truth remains as the *teller* of the Truth. Truth as Advait, non-dual absolute, yet nothing in the usual sense of words, imagination or experience. This is not mystical evasion. Any description of Truth would require a describer, and that describer would be the ego claiming to certify the ultimate - the very error this essay exposes.

If God is defined as that beyond the ego and its world, then only Truth fits the definition of God.

So, Truth is God.

Not God is true, but Truth is God.

The little problem is that the moment you say 'Truth is God,' the ego is cornered. It must drop its images. And if it drops its images, it must also face its own falseness. That is why it prefers the safe claims of 'God exists' or 'God does not exist.'

Truth does not protect the claimant. Truth burns it.

The question in the debate dies when the questioner is seen through. That seeing is the only honest response, and what remains need not be named.

Everything else is the ego playing dress-up, and sometimes, yes, the ego playing God.

What then is one to do? Nothing dramatic. Simply watch. Watch the one who wants to know. Watch the one who wants to believe. Watch the one who wants to deny. In that watching, the watcher begins to thin. No technique is needed. Honesty is enough.

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