

ETERNAL QUESTIONS

a Journal of Metaphysics written by
Brother Erikos, a Forest Monk of the
Black Eagle Stoic Monastery

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Important Notice

As you may have noted in the banner above I have become a Forest Monk of the Black Eagle Stoic Monastery. At this time in my life, metaphysics—not Stoic physics, logic, and ethics—is the focus of my study and contemplation. As a Forest Monk my association with the monachi is distant and sporadic, and the EQ Journal will henceforward be written almost entirely by me. That may change, everything changes, but for now I will be your metaphysician.

I don't pretend to be a scholar; therefore, it won't be necessary for you to be a scholar to understand what I'm saying. I won't be filling half of the page with footnotes, because much of the time I will be using knowledge acquired over a lifetime, not just what I've read in books. I intend to use the expository essay style as clearly and concisely as possible, but I'm 78 years old now, and I do tend to ramble.

In these articles, I will be including paranormal symbolism, stories, and ineffable experiences—first and secondhand. It's all part of this field. There will be a number times when we approach the edges of reality, but you will not be required to believe in what we find. I spent three years studying Pyrrhonism, and my respect for that ancient and purest form of skepticism has never left me. If you're unfamiliar with Pyrrhonism you can look it up on the Internet; or, you can go to the Eternal Questions website <https://theeternalquestions.org/> and read the *Book of Doubt* for a more thorough examination. It's free.

While you're there, if you want to know more about my background, and you should, go to the Author page and you will have done your due diligence. It's always good to know the background of anyone who is poking the parameters of sanity. And, now, please join me at the beginning of time where we will investigate that phenomenon we call God.

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The Birth of God, part I

The Old Testament

As I'm sure most of you know, the Holy Bible is the sacred book of Christians. It's divided into two parts: the first part, the Old Testament, begins with God's creation of the world and is a story of how humans began and multiplied until Jesus of Nazareth was born. The followers of the charismatic Jesus called him the Christ, which in Greek is *Khristós*, the "anointed one."

From the followers of Christ we got Christians, and thanks to their domination of world affairs, the history of the world was divided into two parts: Before and after the birth of Christ. BC and AD. Year zero. It's important to note that although BC stands for Before Christ, AD is the abbreviation for Anno Domini, the year of our lord, not After Death as some people say, which would leave about 30 years of his life missing from the Julian calendar.

Nearly 300 years ago, with the waning of Christian dominance, Renaissance writers and intellectuals began renaming the division of history into Before the Common Era (BCE), and the Common Era (CE). But notice, all they did was substitute the word "Common" for Christ. It's still divides the history of everything into before and after the pivotal time of Jesus. Many Christians still find this change offensive and continue dividing history into BC and AD.

I'm sorry if this division of the world was irritatingly tedious, but I think it's important to know whose version of the birth of the world as created by God we are learning. Even though I will be quoting from the Holy Bible, the Christian version of these things, we must not forget that the story itself is borrowed from the records of the twelve tribes of Israel, a people that wandered for centuries from Egypt to the land of Canaan in 1400 BCE. It's the "old testament" of the Israelites that we're going to examine now.

The Old Testament starts with the book of Genesis, the beginning of everything. Here we are quoting Genesis, Chapter 1, verses 1–3: "In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth, the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss, and a mighty wind that swept over the surface of the waters."

By the way, I'm quoting from the Oxford and Cambridge *New English Bible*, and that's the one I'll always use unless otherwise specified.

Back to the creation of our familiar universe. Basically, what we have here is an abyss in darkness, and a planet, Earth, without form and void. I can't really picture what a planet without form and void looks like. I can imagine a dark abyss. That makes sense, but then a mighty wind comes from somewhere and sweeps over the surface of the waters.

So how does that work? We have a wind sweeping over the surface, the surface of the waters—waters, plural, in the abyss. And not just a few drops of water floating around, but enough water to have a surface, which means there is an even greater quantity of water beneath it. OK. Well, let's finish this passage.

"God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light...'"

So now, this is what we have at the very beginning of everything we know. We have a dark abyss with a mighty wind, a formless earth, a *formless* earth, whatever that means, and we have water, apparently a lot of water. Then, somewhere in that abyss of darkness, wind, and water we have God. The God.

I'm ready to let go of everything in the abyss, just let it go, but I really want to know how God got there. Where did God come from? How was he or it born? The tribal records don't say, not a clue, but there he is. And, yes, it's definitely a HE—that gender thing comes up in the very next sentence. So, in that dark abyss of wind and water we have a god that someone or some THING created, and it's not just a great ball of energy described by some great mathematical formula, we have a god that is male by gender.

And that's the beginning—of everything!

So, where did this god come from? Well, when you ask that question everything falls apart before it even begins. Right from the very first words in the first book of the *Holy Bible* we have a Logical Fallacy, an Infinite Regress. That's the name of this logical fallacy, Infinite Regress. We have a passage at the beginning of the Holy Bible that states matter-of-factly that God (with a capital G) appeared. Out of nothing. So, who or what created it, him? And who created the creator? And *that* creator? and so on back to infinity. When you start a creation story with a logical fallacy it really makes me wonder about the truth of what I am being told.

Until the 19th century and the rise of doubt among some modern theologians, pretty much every Christian believed the words in their Holy Bible were exactly and literally true. The Christians we know as Fundamentalists today still believe it. All of it. Every word. For them nothing has changed. They don't have a problem with their bible beginning with a logical fallacy. Their response for this and everything incomprehensible, contradictory, or nonsensical is the same, "When we get to heaven all these unknown things will be made plain."

This excuse for ignorance is not unlike the same claim by the reductionists of the scientific community who always answer painfully difficult *unknown questions* with the promise of better theories and solutions in the future. But, we will deal with that later.

Today, the orthodox and fundamentalist members of the Abrahamic faiths—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—hundreds of millions of them, still believe this is how the world began. The stories vary somewhat, but they all begin with a logical fallacy. Here in full is the biblical quote we pulled apart earlier:

“In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth, the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss, and a mighty wind that swept over the surface of the waters. God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light; and God saw that the light was good, and he separated light from darkness. He called the light day, and the darkness night.”

I agree. It IS a lovely story about the beginning of everything. But can we believe in it? No. In the Big Bang theory we do have a separation of light from darkness, presumably, but the rest of it is poetic imagery. And as important as that may be in a sacred story, it quickly becomes irrelevant in the face of the sudden appearance of God. God simply appears, apparently with the idea of separating light from darkness. Great idea, but there's nothing here that overcomes the logical fallacy of his birth.

Nevertheless, the people who do believe in this story represent a significant segment of the world's population. And I'm not just talking about desert dwelling, illiterate sheep-herding nomads; I'm also talking about urban and suburban people you meet every day in every city, everywhere. I know these people; I grew up with them. Many of them have doctor of philosophy degrees from good universities. But the challenge of science and even modern theology does not and will not modify their fundamental beliefs. (It's called "faith.")

Let me give you an example. Many fundamentalist Jews, Christians, and Muslims spend lifetimes studying their sacred books in excruciating detail. After all, if it's the word of Yahweh, God, or Allah, then it is without a doubt the most important thing one can study. And if you know that, then it should not surprise you to find that there are those who have calculated the history of the world to the very year of its birth. They do this mainly by adding up the life spans of its earliest recorded biblical prophets and kings. By their calculation we know, we actually KNOW exactly when God said, "Let there be light." 6,000 years ago.

It's actually 6,098 years ago—as of this year, 2023 (CE), but to make it easier to remember, I rounded it down. It's OK. Now how do we know this? Well, because true believers like Mr. Brodi Hodge, an engineer by profession, has done the work. Mr. Hodge is a researcher for the "Answers in Genesis" organization, and he provides us with an exhaustive examination of numerous lists, tables, and calculations to prove that the whole universe was created on 4045 BC.

OK. Are we done with the Old Testament? Yes. But, we still don't know WHERE GOD CAME FROM? We find that out in the "New Testament." What we find out is that God came from a word. Yes, a WORD.

The New Testament

Remember, the New Testament starts with the birth of Jesus, the Christ, the anointed one who was born in a manger in Bethlehem, 10 kilometers south of the city of Jerusalem. Quoting from the same bible we find the book of John in the New Testament, chapter 1, verses 1-3: "When all things began, the Word already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was the Word was. The Word, then, was with God at the beginning, and through him all things came to be; no single thing was created without him."

Then John goes on to talk about the light that shines in the dark, et cetera, and when we come to verse 14, he says, "So the Word became flesh;" (BTW, the 'W' of Word is capitalized here which means it is a divine thing.) "...he came to dwell among us, and we saw his glory, such glory as befits the father's only Son, full of grace and truth."

Did you get that? The Word who dwelt with God from the beginning became flesh in the form of Jesus who the Christians believe was the son of God. The Word becomes flesh. Think about that—a word becoming flesh. Well, obviously we need to know more about this word, Word. Why? Well, because it's important that we know where the early Christians picked up this idea of a word becoming the son of God. I know this is probably sounding a little too scholarly for some of us, but there is a very important reason why should know what the Apostle John, actually someone pretending to be the apostle, is saying.

First, let's be very clear what was meant by the use of the word, Word. In Greek, and John borrowed the idea from the Greeks, that word is *logos*. You don't have to take my word for it. Here's what Professor Thomas McEvelley said in his great magnum opus, *The Shape of Ancient Thought* (Allworth Press, 2002). "The concept of *Logos* started, with Heraclitus, as a deity, but to the Stoics it was a secular concept whose principal meanings were 'reason' and 'speech.'"

Stoics also consider the Logos to be God, in addition to reason and speech, and one could argue that their understanding, which predates the Christians by 300 years, may be what the Apostle John borrowed to describe the beginning of the world to the new Christian sect.

But let's listen again to what the Apostle John said, "When all things began, the Word already was." At this point we don't have a dark abyss with water, wind, and a god of some sort, we have the Word (and, yes, word is capitalized designating that it is God). If we wish, we can picture God as the divine reason implicit in the cosmos. Remarkably, that's really not far from what Heraclitus and the Stoics

believed. But, there are very important differences which we will get into when we spend a little time with Heraclitus.

So, anyway, quoting John again, "The Word dwelt with God, and what God was the Word was. OK, for the Stoics, let's try this sentence substituting REASON instead of Word or Logos ... Here's the quote again. "*Reason* dwelt with God and what God was *reason* was." To me this is ambiguous because in the first part of the sentence we have reason DWELLING with God. Then, we imply God and reason are one and the same, what God was reason was.

It's interesting that John is the only one of the faux apostles who even attempts to describe the beginning of the cosmos and God's place in it. I'm sorry, did I already mention that all the first books of the New Testament were written long after the real apostles of Jesus were dead and gone? I really don't want to get into this because it is a distraction that could keep us occupied for hours. For now, if you want to investigate this apostle business the Internet is the quickest way to research it.

But the really cool information that John talks about is that the Word, Logos, or God as reason was born into a single male child, Jesus of Nazareth. Here's what John says about that, "So the Word became flesh; he came to dwell among us, and we saw his glory, such glory as befits the father's only Son, full of grace and truth."

So, we have an infinitely regressing God who was with reason from the beginning and is born as a human being here on earth. But let's get this straight. Yes, I know God is supposed to be omnipresent, but it's hard to imagine that the ORIGINAL God, the one creating light in the abyss, was born completely into a single person here on earth. SOMEONE had to keep doing the God work—you know, managing the laws, smiting people, and hanging tightly onto the forces of nature. To me, it would be more believable if a tiny essence of God was born into a child, namely Jesus of Nazareth.

It's believable to me, because Traditional Stoics, as I am, believe each of us has the essence of the divine within, just as Jesus had.

If reason, or word, or logos was only with God and Jesus, then what about the rest of us? Humankind had reason long before Jesus was born. There is no way the ancient Greeks could have built the acropolis centuries before Jesus was born if they didn't already have some of this Word, Logos, reason stuff already within.

Even so, the New Testament does come closer to describing the beginning of creation in a way I could live with—even though we still don't know where God came from. Where did God come *from*? We are back to the original problem of Infinite Regress, the logical fallacy. And if God was reason and reason was with God from the beginning, I think he—yes, the New Testament god is also a male—I think he should be concerned about his existence as a logical fallacy.

I know I would.

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Next month we will examine the birth of God from the perspective of the Hindus, Buddhists, and from the Stoic cosmologist Heraclitus—not the Anointed One but the Obscure One who created, who actually created the Word.

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Outside

Since late Autumn of last year I noticed two mourning doves that liked to nestle safe and warm on the ground, well-camouflaged in the deep cushion of old twigs and dead leaves collected over the years under the Cape Honeysuckle bushes. I have seen them sitting there many times, and many times I've seen them sit up as I walked past—just in case I came too close.

For the past several weeks, in between the many and very cold “atmospheric rivers” we've had recently, as soon as the sun was up and out long enough to warm their favorite spot I've looked for them to make sure they survived. But for the past week only one of the doves has returned to the warm place. I've never seen them apart before. Occasionally, the one dove gives its cooing sound, but I don't hear an answering call.

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For the Readers

The Eternal Questions Journal of Metaphysics is published online monthly by Brother Erikos, a Forest Monk of the Black Eagle Stoic Monastery

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If you have a question or comment for Brother Erikos go to the EQ website at <https://theEternalQuestions.org> Please state your name, email address, the issue number, and the nature of your question or comment in 200 words or less.

Erik D. Wiegardt, GCDK
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