The Chicken or the Egg

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The Bible begins, 'In the beginning God…' (Genesis 1:1). Amongst the many things we can learn from this, two stand out. First, it tells us there was a beginning. Second, it tells us that before that beginning, God was there.

The Bible presupposes God. It does not begin by introducing or explaining Him. God is revealed first in what He does and only later through who He says He is. There is no scramble to explain the nature of God, the intricacies of the Godhead or the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When Moses asked God who to say was sending him, God simply replied, 'I Am who I Am. Say this to the people of Israel: 'I Am has sent me". The God of the Bible just is. (Exodus 3:13-15)

However, in our post-Christian world, many reject this foundational belief in God. Influenced by secularism and the tide of Darwinism that has swept through the sciences, many do not believe in God, and have never even stopped to consider if they should. But even if we set our Bibles aside, a good argument can be made for the existence of God simply from the world around us.

Without Excuse

In explaining the gospel, Paul the apostle says, what can be known about God is plain, because

God has shown it. ‘For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.’ For this reason, Paul says, all men are without excuse (Romans 1:16-21).

While creation may not contain sufficient information to bring a person to salvation through Jesus Christ, there is sufficient information in the natural world, to show us God’s eternal power and divine nature. The argument that an eternal, divine being is necessary as the cause of creation, is called the Cosmological Argument, because it appeals to the world, or cosmos, around us. Forms of this argument have been understood since the 6th Century BC. Anaximander, one of the earliest philosophers, and Parmenides, who first deduced that ‘nothing comes from nothing’, both understood the need for a first cause. The Cosmological argument is found in Scripture and the teaching of the early church, and was cemented into Christian thinking by the great philosopher theologian, Thomas Aquinas.

The Cosmological Argument

We start with the fact that material things exist. Material things are those that are physical rather than spiritual; objects rather than ideas. Some philosophers have argued about this, but most rational people acknowledge that the world is real. While belief in the supernatural may require faith, the natural is solidly present all around us.

The second premise is that all material things have beginnings. This was believed in the Judeo-Christian tradition long before the unbelieving world caught up. But today, even secular science understands the universe had a beginning. We see beginnings in everything from volcanoes, forests and deserts, to the universe itself. We see it in the birth of a child or the life cycle of a humble domestic chicken.

Most people are probably familiar with the old conundrum: what came first: the chicken or the egg? The question continues to puzzle us because we inherently understand causation – that material things have beginnings. We understand that chickens come from eggs and we understand that eggs come from chickens. Logically, it seems impossible to avoid an infinite regression, unless one special chicken or one special egg broke this rule.

And that is exactly what we find. We know the first domestic chickens were bred from Red Jungle Fowl. So the egg of the first chicken didn’t come from a chicken. But, even so, this ‘first cause’ was still a material thing with a material beginning, so the same conundrum still applies. Even if we allowed for a Darwinian model, where the first jungle fowl came from a dinosaur egg, and the first dinosaur came from a primordial soup, we are still only replacing one material cause with another, all the way back to the dawn of time.

In the Beginning

A universe that began must have come from something. The laws of physics only confirm what the philosopher Parmenides knew, which is that we cannot get something from nothing. If the universe, with its beginning, came from something else that also began, then the regression only continues. The one way we can stop the infinite cycle of regression, for the chicken, the universe or anything, is if their ultimate beginning had a non-material cause. If the first cause is non-material, uncaused, a creator outside the creation, then a true beginning can be found.

The Bible says, 'In the beginning God…'.God, as described in the Bible, is not caused and is not material. He did not come from somewhere nor was He created. He is not part of creation, therefore He is not bound by time or space or matter. He just is. Knowing what we do about creation, belief in this kind of God is not only logically sound but necessary.

So, the next time someone laughs at you for believing in God, just ask them about the chicken and the egg. Remember:

1. material things exist;
2. material things have beginnings;
3. every beginning has a cause;
4. the universe is a material thing. It requires a first cause, both non-material and uncaused;
5. the best explanation of a non-material and uncaused cause is God.