Is The Bible Really Independent Evidence For The Existence Of God?

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This paper considers John Lamont’s claim that the Bible is a basic form of evidence for the existence of God. It is argued to the contrary that its admissibility depends upon God’s existence being an acceptable real prior possibility.

John Lamont argues as follows:

"... testimony is a basic sort of evidence, that provides warrant on its own; believing in the Bible is believing in testimony; therefore believing that God exists because the Bible says so is warranted."

And, in order to prove this, he refers to a case of his receiving and accepting at face value the truth of a letter from a Mr Jones, reporting to be the District Superintendent of the Water Conservation Board, and threatening to cut off his supply due to excessive consumption. However, surely he must have independent reasons for thinking that there might well be such a person and such a body, before the message can be accepted without credulity. For otherwise it would follow that he should also accept as true the origin and contents of a letter from a certain Mr Toad of Toad Hall, complaining about a drop in the water level of the river. Yet it would be ridiculous to do this - Toad is a well-known fictional character, so this message is most likely a hoax. Therefore, by the same argument, if the Bible is to count as evidence for the existence of God, it appears necessary for God’s existence to be a real possibility apart from its purportedly being from God and relating divine truths. So what preliminary evidence is required here?

Arguments for the existence of God will have to be examined, such as the “Five Ways” outlined by St Thomas Aquinas. For these are reasons to indicate that positing a God is certainly not inconsonant with understanding the nature of the world. For example, (in reference to the Fifth Way), despite the fact that order in nature seems now to be largely accounted for by evolution, the question of whether this universe with its laws suitable for creaturely development is simply the production of chance, remains. So the real possibility of God cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, the likely attributes of this possible supreme being will have to be considered, so that any allegedly divine communication might really be from God. For instance, omniscience, omnipotence and
perfect goodness allow for the real possibility of revelation. This reasoning might be schematized as follows:

1. Self-communication (revelation) is probably within a divinity's behavioural repertoire.

2. Certain events - for example, Jesus' life and claim to being the Son of God - would be explained by the existence and activity of God, if the existence of God is possible.

3. But God's existence is possible, as indicated by certain proofs.

4. Therefore, this scriptural evidence counts for the existence of God.

Thus, Robinson Crusoe follows a similar pattern of thought in deciding that he is not alone: it is likely that anyone else on the island will leave some sign of being there, and this apparent footprint would certainly be such an indication if another's presence is possible; it is, therefore it is probable that someone else is about. But unless he has reasons to believe that another's presence on the island is possible, or in the absence of knowing what human footprints are like, this evidence would not count as any proof of Friday. Consequently, the thesis that the Bible on its own is a warrant for the existence of God is mistaken.

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NOTES

2. Ibid, p. 121.