



# STUDY GUIDE

## DOES GOD EXIST? 4 NEW ARGUMENTS

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**KEY TERMS:** atheist  
life

big bang  
introspection

abiogenesis

<b>NOTE-TAKING COLUMN:</b> Complete this section <i>during</i> the video. Include definitions and key terms.	<b>CUE COLUMN:</b> Complete this section <i>after</i> the video.
<p>What did Mr. Pastore think atheists based their beliefs and values upon?</p> <p>What is the second ‘big bang?’</p> <p>What ‘choice’ does Mr. Pastore present in accounting for the sudden leaps of ‘something from nothings?’</p>	<p>What changed Mr. Pastore’s perspective from being an atheist to believing in God?</p> <p>Why are the four ‘big bangs’ so important to the debate over the existence of God?</p>

## DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Mr. Pastore shares with us that he was challenged by his teammates to explain, “...why atheism is the only real and true outlook for anyone not deceived by fantasy, fiction, or mythology. I mean, for someone who wants to base their beliefs and values upon evidence and argument, not emotion and tradition.” Why do you think that so many atheists think that only atheists use reason to arrive at their beliefs? Why do you think so many atheists only accept empirical evidence for a supernatural force or being rather than being open to accepting other kinds of evidence or reasoning?
- Mr. Pastore then explains that he responded by setting out, “...to disprove theism, which I didn’t think would take very long...” Why do you think Mr. Pastore didn’t think it would take long? What are the problems associated with trying to prove or disprove theism?
- However, Mr. Pastore points out that, “I was confronted with the awareness that there are really four big bangs that have to be accounted for, not just one.” What exactly does he mean by this? Accounted for in terms of what? Explaining the ‘something from nothing’ would support which side of the debate?
- In examining the supposed ‘4th big bang,’ Mr. Pastore asks, “How do you account for free will and introspection, let alone man’s pressing existential drive to ask, “why?” Well we’re going to need some kind of psychological 4th big bang to account for man’s moral and aesthetic sense – his search for meaning, significance, and purpose, and of course his appreciation for the true, the good, and the beautiful.” How would you answer Mr. Pastore’s question? Do you think that humans are the only animals to search for meaning, act based on morals, and to appreciate beauty? If yes, why? If no, what are some examples to support your answer?
- Mr. Pastore ends the video by stating, “I, like you, have a choice. It’s either faith in these four big bangs of “somethings from nothings” to account for what we see all around us, or faith in some kind of creator God behind it all.” Do you think that the scientific evidence weighs more heavily for the ‘big bangs’ choice or for the ‘God’ choice? Explain. Do you feel, like Mr. Pastore, that ‘the only valid explanation for the something-from-nothing must be supernatural’ argument is more compelling? Why or why not?

## EXTEND THE LEARNING:

### CASE STUDY: Elephant Painting

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “Elephant Painting,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What exactly do the tourists pay to see? Are the elephants actually painting? Are the elephants creating art?
- What is controversial about the activity? Why do some people feel that the elephants are being abused? Do you think the elephants are being exploited or abused? Why or why not? Would you pay for one of the paintings? Why or why not? Why do you think that some people do support the activity?
- Mr. Pastore describes man’s ‘appreciation for the true, the good, and the beautiful.’ Considering how the trainers treat the baby elephants, how do you think that the trainer’s ‘appreciation for the true, the good, and the beautiful’ compares to the elephant’s?



# QUIZ

## DOES GOD EXIST? 4 NEW ARGUMENTS

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- 1. Astrophysicists tell us that the cosmological Big Bang yielded:**
  - a. All of the elements in the Universe.
  - b. Most of the elements in the Universe.
  - c. A Handful of fundamental elements.
  - d. No elements.
  
- 2. Scientific advancements have led to the ability to create life from dead stuff:**
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
- 3. Charles Darwin never answered which core question?**
  - a. What is the theory of evolution?
  - b. How did evolution begin?
  - c. What is natural selection?
  - d. None of the above.
  
- 4. The psychological Big Bang must account for:**
  - a. Man's search for meaning, significance, and purpose.
  - b. How all the matter in the Universe came to exist.
  - c. How basic lifeforms arose.
  - d. How psychoanalysis developed.
  
- 5. Abiogenesis refers to:**
  - a. The diversity of life on Earth.
  - b. The formation of planets.
  - c. Life developing from nothing.
  - d. None of the above.



# QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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<http://www.snopes.com/photos/animals/elephantpainting.asp>

# Elephant Painting

[snopes](#)



**Claim:** Video clip shows an elephant painting a picture of an elephant.



**PARTLY TRUE**

**Example:** *[Collected via e-mail, March 2008]*

This shows an elephant painting an elephant. It's a little unbelievable. Is it true?

**Origins:** The above-linked video is "true" in the basic sense that it captures the real phenomenon of elephants who perform the physical process of creating drawings by holding brushes in their trunks and applying them to cards mounted on easels. A BBC News article described an exhibition of such paintings at an Edinburgh gallery in 1996:

Pictures which were painted by elephants have gone on display at an Edinburgh gallery.

Art graduate Victoria Khunapramot, 26, has brought the paintings from Thailand to the Dundas Gallery on Dundas Street.

They include "self-portraits" by Paya, who is said to be the only elephant to have

mastered his own likeness.

Paya is one of six elephants whose keepers have taught them how to hold a paintbrush in their trunks. They drop the brush when they want a new colour.

Mrs Khunapramot, from Newington, said: "Many people cannot believe that an elephant is capable of producing any kind of artwork, never mind a self-portrait.

"But they are very intelligent animals and create the entire paintings with great gusto and concentration within just five or 10 minutes — the only thing they cannot do on their own is pick up a paintbrush, so it gets handed to them.

"They are trained by artists who fine-tune their skills, and they paint in front of an audience in their conservation village, leaving no one in any doubt that they are authentic elephant creations."

Mrs Khunapramot, who set up the Thai Fine Art company after studying the history of art in St Andrews and business management at Edinburgh's Napier University, said it took about a month to train the animals to paint.

The web site of the [Asian Elephant Art and Conservation Project](#) explains the background behind elephants' being taught to [paint](#), with the resulting artworks being sold and the monies so raised being used to fund elephant conservation projects. The site includes a [video](#) gallery that features several clips of pachyderm artists in action similar to the one linked above, as well as galleries displaying the individual elephants' works. (Based on the similarity of drawings, we'd guess that the elephant shown in the example video is [Hong](#), a nine-year-old female living at the Maetaman Elephant Camp in Thailand.)

However, although these animals may be creating artworks in a purely physical sense, critics contend that the elephants participating in this activity are not actually "painting" in any meaningful sense of the word: They aren't engaging in any form of creativity, much less abstractly making free-form portraits of whatever tickles their pachydermic fancies at the moment; rather, they're simply actors performing in tourist trap attractions in Thailand, where they do nothing more than outline and color specific drawings they've been painstakingly trained to replicate — and they manage that much only while receiving a good deal of prompting and guidance throughout the process from their mahout (trainers).

As zoologist Desmond Morris wrote after he and scientist Richard Dawkins traveled to Thailand in 2008 to investigate the "elephant painting" phenomenon:

So are these endearing mammals truly artistic? The answer, as politicians are fond of saying, is yes and no.

Let me describe exactly what happens. A painting session begins with three heavy easels being wheeled into position. On each easel a large piece of white card (30in x 20in) has been fixed underneath a strong wooden frame.

Each elephant is positioned in front of her easel and is given a brush loaded with paint by her mahout. He pushes the brush gently into the end of her trunk.

The man then stands to one side of his animal's neck and watches intently as the brush starts to make lines on the card. Then the empty brush is replaced by another loaded one, and the painting continues until the picture is complete.

The elephant then turns towards its audience, bows deeply and is rewarded with bananas.

The paintings are then removed from their frames and offered for sale. They are quickly snapped up by people who have been astonished by what they have just witnessed.

To most of the members of the audience, what they have seen appears to be almost miraculous. Elephants must surely be almost human in intelligence if they can paint pictures of flowers and trees in this way. What the audience overlooks are the actions of the mahouts as their animals are at work.

This oversight is understandable because it is difficult to drag your eyes away from the brushes that are making the lines and spots. However, if you do so, you will notice that, with each mark, the mahout tugs at his elephant's ear.

He nudges it up and down to get the animal to make a vertical line, or pulls it sideways to get a horizontal one. To encourage spots and blobs he tugs the ear forward, towards the canvas. So, very sadly, the design the elephant is making is not hers but his. There is no elephantine invention, no creativity, just slavish copying.

Investigating further, after the show is over, it emerges that each of the so-called artistic animals always produces exactly the same image, time after time, day after day, and week after week. Mook always paints a bunch of flowers, Christmas always does a tree, and Pimtong a climbing plant. Each elephant works to a set routine, guided by her master.

Other critics contend that not only is the elephant painting phenomenon a misleading show put on to garner money from tourists, but that the animals who participate in it have been abused; therefore, visitors to Thailand should shun the purchase of such works:

I was recently sent an email video which shows an elephant painting a picture of an elephant holding a flower over its head and was asked to comment on it. As you may or may not know, I returned home last night after my 7th trip to Chiang Mai, Thailand, where the video was shot. I can tell you with absolute certainty that elephant did not create that picture out of a need for a creative outlet. It was trained to follow the mahout's (trainer) command and was purely following orders out of fear of the abuse it suffered during the training process.



If you look closely during the wide angle shots you will see other mahouts standing on their elephant's left side and they too are leading their elephant during the process. The close ups show an elephant's trunk moving a paint brush across a canvas and it appears to be creating a picture, except it is taking commands from its mahout who is out of the shot.

The training process is called the 'phajaan' or 'crush' and is centuries old and is used throughout Asia today. It involves taking a 3-year-old baby from its mother's side and roping it into a small bamboo cage in which it cannot move except to breathe. Of course the elephant fights for its freedom and is beaten, poked with sharp bamboo, starved, dehydrated, and sleep-deprived until it submits to its captors' demands. The process may take a week, depending on how long it takes to 'crush' the elephant's spirit. About 50% of the babies die from the process and the survivors are left with physical and emotional scars for the rest of their lives.

The demand for elephant paintings comes mostly from Japan, Europe, and the US, and the motivation from the Thai people is purely financial since a single painting can fetch several thousand dollars. I honestly hope that if people knew the true process for creating a picture, they would not offer any support at all for it. So PLEASE tell your friends, family, anyone who will listen: **DO NOT SUPPORT ELEPHANT PAINTINGS IN ANY WAY, SHAPE, OR FORM!**