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PHILOSOPHY

# Proofs for the Existence of God

## Arguments from Logic and Experience

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Laura Garcia, Ph.D.



LECTURE GUIDE

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Dr. Laura L. Garcia is a professor and scholar in residence at Boston College. She graduated *summa cum laude* from Westmont College with honors in philosophy and went on to receive an MA and PhD in philosophy (1983) from the University of Notre Dame. Dr. Garcia specializes in philosophical theology and metaphysics, and has taught at Calvin College, the University of Notre Dame, the University of St. Thomas (St. Paul, Minnesota), The Catholic University of America, Georgetown University, and Rutgers—the State University of New Jersey.



Dr. Garcia's work focuses on philosophical questions about the nature and attributes of God, the relationship between faith and reason, and the prospects for natural theology. More recent interests include the basis of human dignity and its moral implications for bioethics and the dignity of women and children.

Dr. Garcia is a founding member and past Co-president of University Faculty for Life (1989), a multidisciplinary organization of faculty members speaking out for human life. She has lectured internationally on life issues, marriage and family, and the vocation of women, and contributed essays and reviews to *Crisis*, *New Oxford Review*, *Catholic Dossier* and *First Things*.

## Selected Publications

- "A Response to the Modal Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 1. 1984: 378-88.
- "Preserving Persons." *The Contribution of John Paul II to Bioethics*. Editor Christopher Tollefsen. Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag (formerly Kluwer), 2004.
- "Worth Dying For." *Philosophy and Narnia*. Editors Jerry Walls and Gregory Bassham. *Popular Culture and Philosophy Series*. Chicago: Open Court, 2005.
- "Design Arguments" in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* New York: Macmillan, 2006.
- "Ontological Arguments for God's Existence" *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. Editor Kelly James Clark. Buffalo: Broadview Press, 2008.



## Lecture 1 | Reason: The Philosopher's Only Tool

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*“Does God exist?”*

This question, “Does God exist?” is of course one of the biggest questions of philosophy. It would seem that nothing is more important than to know whether or not there is a God. This question ultimately forms the basis of our moral and intellectual inquiries, our belief in the existence of a soul, our belief in life after death, the possibility of miracles, the possibility of validating Revelation, etc. Once you accept the existence of God, your entire worldview shifts.

The Catholic Church has always taught that it's possible to know that God exists on the basis of reason alone. This seems to be mainly due to the various references

in Scripture which suggest that the existence of God can be known through the observance of creation. St. Paul specifically mentions this in his letter to the Romans arguing that the pagan world – a world that has not accepted the existence of God – is without excuse (*Romans 1*).

Reason is man's “knowing faculty,” it is natural and innate, broader than the ability to solve mathematical equations or logical puzzles. Reason is contingent on the truths of common sense and our basic experience of the world around us – it is the only tool of philosophy. Our reasoning, though finite, can grasp many truths about reality. Philosophy restricts itself to reason in order to come to these truths by virtue of our natural powers of thinking. Though we can go wrong in our reasoning, this should not prevent us from studying philosophy. However, it is at least important to acknowledge our limitations.

St. Thomas Aquinas suggests that arriving at the existence of God by means of our natural reason is possible, and he points to the work of the Greek philosopher Aristotle as an example of such a possibility. Thomas forms the basis of his proofs for the existence of God on Aristotle's argument known as, “The



Cosmological Argument” for God’s existence. This will be addressed in greater depth later on.

In this series, we will be studying various arguments for God’s existence. These arguments are only successful in so far as the conclusions drawn from their premises are true. We will be making a case for it. If the case actually does support the conclusion, then it’s a strong argument. A philosophical argument appeals to various reasons. First you begin with a claim, as you would in a court case. You then argue your case (as in a court) and draw various reasons to support your position. In our current study, the claim is that God exists, and so our arguments will seek to support this claim.

A philosophical proof is drawn from a logically or geometrically deductive argument. You begin with self-evident premises (axioms) that no one would deny, and then deduct certain necessary truths from these premises. Philosophical premises may not be as strong as geometrical axioms, but they are usually statements that everyone accepts. Such premises we may call obvious truths, or self-evident truths. If you accept the premises of the proof, you must logically accept its conclusion. If the conclusion seems arbitrary, or perhaps does not coincide with your belief, the premises of the deductive argument can be reexamined to determine whether they are actually solid.

While this is not a course on logic, it will be helpful to discuss a few terms before beginning our study. When an argument is *valid*, it means that its conclusion logically follows from its premises. The validity of an argument does not depend on whether or not the premises are true. When the premises are true, however, this is what is referred to as a *sound argument*. For example:

Premise 1 (a = b): Fido is a dog.

Premise 2 (b = c): All dogs are horses.

Conclusion (a = c): Therefore, Fido is a horse.

As can be noted, the conclusion logically follows from premise 1 and 2; therefore the argument is *valid*. However, because premise 2 is false, the argument is not *sound*.

In the case of a *deductive* argument, conclusions are logically deduced by premises. For an *inductive* argument, conclusions are based on what is called *enumeration*. Here you bring in evidence that does not logically entail the conclusion, but rather, makes the conclusion probable or likely – it’s the most likely explanation of the facts. For example:

All grocery stores I’ve been to sell milk.

Therefore, all grocery stores sell milk.

In our next lecture, we’re going to put these logical concepts, definitions, and so on, to use, as we take a close look at one of the most intriguing proofs for the existence of God in the history of philosophy: “The Ontological Argument.”





## Lecture 2 | The Ontological Argument for God's Existence



The topic for the second lecture of this course surrounds one of the most controversial arguments for the existence of God, proposed by an 11<sup>th</sup> century Benedictine monk, Anselm of Canterbury. His argument is what is referred to as “The Ontological Argument.” Ontology is a branch of philosophy that addresses the nature of reality – the nature of being. This argument is also a form of what is called the “*reductio ad absurdum*” argument (*Latin* – “reduction to absurdity”), where the opposing view is proved to be necessarily false and a contradiction. Needless to say, it is a very strong argument.

Anselm begins with the premise that God necessarily exists, defining God as the *greatest conceivable being*, or as he phrases it: “The being than which none greater can be conceived.” The argument is laid out as follows:

- 1) **Premise:** The greatest conceivable being exists at least in the understanding.
- 2) **Premise:** It is greater to exist in reality than to exist in the understanding alone.
- 3) **Reductio ad Absurdum (atheistic view):** suppose the greatest conceivable being exists only in the understanding, and not in reality.
- 4) **Conclusion:** If the greatest conceivable being only exists in the understanding (3), then it is not the greatest conceivable being because it is greater to exist in reality, than just in the understanding (2). Therefore, a greater being can yet be conceived that actually exists in reality.

As can be noted in the conclusion, the atheistic proposition (3) leads to a contradiction. There must, therefore, be a premise which is false – that has to be given up. The first two are self-evident. They can't be given up. Therefore, the atheistic position must necessarily be false.

Now, in a deductive argument, the first thing to check is the validity. In

Anselm's argument, it does seem to be valid – the conclusion seems to follow from the premises. Next, we examine if the argument is sound – are the premises true? In regard to our first premise, we may ask, “Can the greatest conceivable being actually exist at least in the understanding? Can this concept exist?” Even the atheist who denies the existence of God must at least have a concept of this being in his mind in order to deny it.

Another question about the first premise we may ask is, “Should we define God in this way, even though he has not revealed himself as *the greatest conceivable being*?” Again, philosophers are seeking to arrive at truth without the aid of revelation. And so, it seems fair to say that the philosophizing theist ought to believe whatever is true about God. If there is a greatest conceivable being, it must be God.

Moving on to premise 2: “It is greater to exist in reality than to exist in the understanding alone.” An objection to this argument might be that existing in reality makes no difference to the conception of the being in our understanding. It matters to the being whether or not it exists, but not to our conception of it. However, most people would conclude that if a being were perfectly good, holy, just, unchanging, omnipotent, omniscient etc, that this being would not actually be the greatest conceivable being if it didn't exist in reality.

St. Thomas Aquinas, who was very familiar with Anselm's argument, believed that “The Ontological Argument” could not work, because you could not simply define something into existence. You can't simply begin with the definition of God and somehow deduct God into reality simply by defining what God is. Anselm might say that in most cases this is true. You cannot define a unicorn and then simply by definition arrive at the unicorn's existence in reality. However, Anselm might argue, that in the case of God, this is possible. It seems that we can at least say (in light of Anselm's argument) that the greatest possible being, if it exists, must exist in reality as well as in the understanding. If it doesn't, of course, it won't be the greatest conceivable being. This is Aquinas' point in critiquing Anselm's argument: That while the premises do follow from one another, the existence of God cannot actually be proven by this argument – by simply defining God.

While Aquinas' insight shows that we cannot simply arrive at existence from conceivability, he does not leave the question of God's existence unanswered. He proposes several other ways to show that God necessarily exists. They are not simply conceptions in the mind, but empirical truths – cosmological truths – that are obvious to everyone. We will be discussing Aquinas's arguments at greater length in the proceeding lectures.





### Lecture 3 | The Cosmological Argument



In this third lecture we will be considering a second argument for God's existence. However, unlike Anselm's argument, we will not begin with a definition of God, but rather with certain facts, or truths about our ordinary experience. St. Thomas Aquinas is the greatest advocate for these cosmological arguments and his *Five Ways* will be the main focus of the next few lectures.

Cosmological arguments are called such because they deal with the cosmos - everything that is. Cosmological arguments begin with truths about the contingent universe, known by what we experience through our senses, and then arrive at a non-contingent being - a necessary being. In this way, Aquinas is actually building upon many of the arguments posed by Aristotle.

The first three arguments of Thomas' *Five Ways* form a type of cosmological argument beginning with premises that hardly anybody could deny. Things move and change, some beings are contingent, and some beings are not necessary etc. The first three arguments all begin in this way, and because of their similarity, we will unify them in our discussion. Thomas' fourth way deals with the gradation in things. Some things are hotter than others; therefore there must be a source of pure heat. Similarly, some things are more beautiful than others, some things are more good; therefore, there must be a source of beauty - of goodness - itself, which we call God. Aquinas' fifth way is often referred to as the "Teleological Argument" - or the argument from design. "Telos," from the Greek meaning "end" or "goal." And so this argument has to do with the ordering of things toward their end.

Now, focusing on the cosmological proofs we will begin with these premises:

- 1) There are things that don't have to exist, but they happen to exist at this time.
- 2) Nothing comes from nothing (the cause of something that exists cannot be nothing).
- 3) Therefore, contingent beings must have a cause of their existence.

4) Nothing can be the cause of its own existence.

5) The cause of a contingent being is not identical with itself (another contingent being may be the cause of a contingent being, but it is separate from itself).

6) There cannot be an infinite causal series of contingent beings.

7) Therefore, since there can't be an infinite series of causality, there has to exist a being that is not caused, a non-contingent necessary being – a being that could not fail to be. This being man calls God.

Now, what Aquinas is not saying in this argument is that because there cannot be an infinite series of contingent beings, we'll just stick God on the top of that chain of causality and now we have an explanation for contingent beings. If this attitude is adopted, a typical response is usually, "alright then, who created God?" Rather, what Thomas is alluding to in his cosmological argument is that God *has* to exist – he is a necessary being. The very nature of God necessitates existence. If the cosmological argument simply arrived at God as another contingent being, we would not have explained anything. Thomas' point here, is that contingent beings point to the necessity of a non-contingent being – an uncaused cause. If we do not have an ultimate cause, a necessary being, it is impossible to explain why anything exists at all, since contingent beings do not have to exist. If we cannot explain the ultimate cause of a

being, we have failed to understand that being in its entirety. Therefore, to ask the question, "Who caused the uncaused cause?" is nonsensical.

Unlike Anselm who begins with a definition of God, Aquinas' argument arrives at the definition. Whether you want to call this being the unmoved mover, the uncaused cause, the first cause, or the necessary being, ultimately these conclusions are the very definition of God. So Thomas thinks that the first premise is obvious from our experience. Of course there are things that come to be, pass away, and are not necessary. The other premises are all self-evident. And so, we reach the conclusion that is necessary in order to explain the things of our experience: a necessary being has to exist. This is perhaps the strongest proof for God's existence known in philosophy.

In our next lecture we're going to consider whether or not the argument is sound. The conclusion seems to logically follow from the premises, and therefore it is valid. However, in order for the argument to be sound, of course, the premises also have to be accepted. Because this is such a strong and well-known argument, it is important for atheists to have some sort of commentary on it; otherwise they're going to have to comply with the demands of logic and accept the existence of God.







## Lecture 4 | Criticisms of the Cosmological Argument



In our last lecture we laid out the premises for Aquinas' cosmological arguments, in this lecture, we are going to look more closely at those premises to determine whether the argument is sound. As you may recall, a sound argument necessitates that its premises are true. Simply because a conclusion validly follows from its premises, does not mean that the argument is sound.

In the following layout of the cosmological argument, you will notice that certain conclusions form the basis of new premises, such as (3) which follows from (1) and (2), but also forms the basis of the proceeding premises:

1) There are things that don't have to exist, but they happen to exist at this time (contingent beings exist).

2) Nothing comes from nothing (the cause of something that exists cannot be nothing).

3) Therefore, contingent beings must have a cause of their existence.

4) Nothing can be the cause of its own existence.

5) The cause of a contingent being is not identical with itself (another contingent being may be the cause of a contingent being, but it is separate from itself).

6) There cannot be an infinite causal series of contingent beings.

7) Therefore, since there can't be an infinite series of causality, there has to exist a being that is not caused, a non-contingent necessary being – a being that could not fail to be. This being man calls God.

The 1<sup>st</sup> premise is so obviously true, and most critiques of the argument simply accept it and move on to find fault in the other less evident premises. Certain philosophers, such as David Hume, have denied the 2<sup>nd</sup> premise; however, most atheists do not want to disagree with this statement because of the Christian belief of creation being brought forth out of nothing – *ex nihilo*. They would argue, even if God did exist, he could not bring something out of nothing. Now, as has been noted, the 3<sup>rd</sup> premise follows from

(1) and (2), and so if (1) and (2) are accepted as true, you must logically accept premise (3).

Premise (4), however also seems obviously true: nothing can bring itself into being or explain its own existence. There are cases when certain parts of a being cause other parts of that being to function, such as our body. So you might say that there are dependencies within the human body, in that the reason blood flows through the body is because the heart pumps it. However, it would be false to say that therefore the human being – taking all the parts together – is self-explanatory. The parts of our bodies are dependant on each other, and if you lose too many of them you would cease to live. However, more than our parts, the human body is also dependent on external factors such as oxygen, and food intake. Therefore, the line of dependencies extends beyond the body.

Now, another criticism of this claim is called *the fallacy of composition*. In this fallacy, it is assumed that simply because *certain* contingent things need a cause for its being, then therefore the whole universe needs a cause. This is a fallacy in logic which does not result from bad deduction, rather it is a mistake that you could fall into by seeing something that seems to follow in some cases and then assuming it's always going to follow. However, when examining Thomas' arguments closely, it seems that he is not committing the fallacy of composition.

Thomas is claiming that contingent beings exist only because a necessary non-contingent being exists. The atheist providing an explanation for contingent things with more contingent things has not addressed the question: why are there contingent things at all?

Thus far many of the objections to Thomas' argument have not been very convincing. At this point, the atheist usually concludes that if science cannot explain the universe, then at this point in history, there simply is no explanation – perhaps the universe doesn't need an explanation; maybe this explanation is inconceivable. This seems to be the only attitude of the atheist toward Aquinas' argument. As seen in the premises, the conclusion of God's existence has to be logically accepted. If an atheist comprehends the argument, they are almost forced to ignore it as a whole in order to maintain their atheism. This, however, is very difficult for an honest atheist who idolizes scientism – science going beyond its study to empirically test and prove even philosophical questions. Ultimately, the atheist must step down and admit that it is only the theist who provides an explanation for the universe. These philosophical arguments should be a means of great strength and pride for the theist who can actually base his beliefs on rational foundations. The cosmological argument may very well be the most masterfully conducted argument in the field of philosophy, and it rightfully belongs to the theist.





## Lecture 5 | The Teleological Argument



In this lecture we will be discussing various teleological arguments for the existence of God. Several centuries before Christ, Aristotle was the original proponent for the teleological argument. However, it was not until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, when St. Thomas Aquinas posed a similar argument, that it really became a strong tool for the theist's position. It does not simply allude to creation as contingent, as seen in the cosmological argument, but points to the beauty and intricacy of creation as observed in their teleological orientation. This is why the teleological argument is also referred to as the argument from design. The mathematical movements of the stars, the complexity of the human eye – all of these things point

to the existence of an intelligent designer.

The first three arguments of Thomas' *Five Ways* have already been discussed at great length. His fourth way, on the gradation of things, was briefly mentioned. The teleological argument is his fifth way, and is stated in his *Summa Theologiae* as follows:

“The fifth way is taken from the governance of the world. We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end, and this is evident from their acting always, or nearly always, in the same way, so as to obtain the best result. Hence it is plain that not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God” (ST Part I, Q II, Article III).

The repeated action of things toward an object – an end – for the best result is what Aristotle first coined as the laws of nature, or science. When something is observed to act in a certain way “always, or nearly always” this is how we know something is law-like – it is the way nature behaves. Because unintelligible creation abides by some sort of law, it seems to



follow that an outside agent – a designer – would have had to instill this law in them.

Most design arguments are fairly similar to Aquinas' and can be organized as such:

- 1) Experience reveals that some beings lacking in intelligence act for an end, for a purpose.
- 2) Since they do so always, or for the most part, this is not just a coincidence, but a product of design in them.
- 3) Beings lacking intelligence cannot move themselves toward an end, but must be directed to that end by an intelligent being.
- 4) Therefore, an intelligent being exists, who directs all things to their end. This being we call God.

Another form of the design argument emerged from the Enlightenment period with the scientific revolution. Scientists and mathematicians, such as Galileo and Newton, drew similar arguments from design. They saw the laws of physics as cogs in a machine – all of creation working together for a purpose or end. There is also a design argument that is drawn from analogy – what would be called an inductive argument. For example, human inventions clearly act a certain way because of how they have been externally designed. Likewise, it would seem that the universe acts a certain way because it too has an intelligent designer.

To explain the design-like features of the universe by alluding to chance does not

seem to comply with how things act a certain way “always, or nearly always.” The improbability of the universe coming into being by chance can be thought of in this example. The letters in a box of Scrabble, in principle, spell words. Suppose you rattled the box, open it up, and find that words have been spelled. Suppose you do this an infinite number of times – for eternity. Every time you look inside the box, perhaps a few words are found; perhaps even some very impressive words. Maybe you even find the word, supercalifragilisticexpialidocious. But, even after a million times of shaking that Scrabble box, there is simply no way that upon opening the lid you find a Shakespearian sonnet. There is simply no way. If you were to find a Shakespearian sonnet, so beautifully expressive of the human condition, you would say, “All right, who’s been messing with the box?” In other words, you would attribute it to an intelligent being.

The defender of the design argument seems to have a fairly strong case. Though the premises are not self-evident or necessarily true, they are based on observable experience. The difficulty for atheists with the teleological argument is that the theist has a nearly inexhaustible source of apparent design examples. The atheist, therefore, has a rather big task in disproving an intelligent designer. As seen in the cosmological argument, the atheist has to admit that in the case of a contingent universe, as well as the *telos* in which contingent beings are ordered, he simply has no explanation.





## Lecture 6 | Inductive Arguments for Theism



In this lecture we will be examining an inductive argument for proving God's existence. At the service of this argument, we have several proofs (based on experience) for God's existence. We can bring in the cosmological proof, the design argument, scientific research, and even our own common sense. The purpose of this argument is to best explain the data of our experience – the facts of the world in which we live.

In order to conduct a strong inductive argument for the existence of God, you have to observe all the facts in question and address both the theistic and atheistic explanation. It is not sufficient to say that theism has a good explanation – naturalism may also have a good explanation. A theistic inductive argument must show that theism not only has a good explanation, but a much better explanation than naturalism or

atheism. The three questions that will compile our inductive argument are as follows:

- 1) Why is there something rather than nothing?
- 2) Why do things act in a design-like way?
- 3) Why do persons and personhood phenomena exist?

Question 1 and 2 are the basis of the cosmological and teleological arguments. 3, however, has not yet been addressed. This question alludes to all sorts of musings in philosophy such as human freedom, love and friendship, and moral objectivity. These phenomena are rather remarkable and it seems insufficient to explain them by blind natural forces of evolution. Evolutionary theory does not lend itself to the existence of personal beings, who have the capacity to make art, write novels, compose music, establish empires, and so forth. With these questions brought to the table, we can now ask, which position offers a better explanation: theism, or naturalism?

First, the existence of something, rather than nothing. Theists say this is obviously explained by a necessary being. God exists necessarily, so if theism is true, it is in fact impossible that there be nothing – since God is something, and

must have always existed. Now, in the case of our created universe, it did not have to exist, but as Thomas would say, it is fitting that God would create because goodness is diffusive of itself, and God is Goodness Itself.

Secondly, the existence of design-like things. As discussed in our previous lecture, a world created by God would logically be orderly, rational, intelligible, beautiful and so forth. Because God is the supreme intelligence, the supreme mind, beauty itself, it is very likely that anything created by God would reflect his artistry.

And finally the existence of persons, and personal phenomena. This too is to be expected in a universe created by God because God himself is a community of persons – a personal being. As can be observed, the highest good in terms of finite beings, is a person. If God is to contain all perfections, he too must be personal – with the capacity of being known, and loved.

The explanation for the naturalist is rather scarce. For the first question, there simply is no explanation. It is simply a brute fact that there is something rather than nothing, and the atheist simply hopes that one day science will be able to provide an explanation.

What about the existence of design-like phenomena? The kinds of things we talked about in our teleological argument

for God? Again, these cannot be due to any kind of intelligent being. They have to just be due to chance. And it's fortunate for us that we're just that lucky to have come into existence. It's like winning the lottery. Your chances of winning are extremely low but many people continue to play and they figure, "Maybe someday it will be me." And of course, someday it is somebody. This is the naturalist's response – again, not very convincing.

Now, what about the beauty of the universe, moral values, love, altruism and so on? The naturalist has to say in every case, "These phenomena are not real facts. And though they seem like data, they are not data, because they don't actually exist. Persons exist, however they are no different in kind from other beings. They are not qualitatively different from the lower animals. They are just another step along the way. Beauty, goodness, morality – these things are just relative. They are simply the product of evolutionary advantage."

In weighing both positions to the questions outlined above, it seems that the theist's responses are more reasonable than the naturalist. However, atheists have managed to come up with some arguments that seem to bypass the inductive argument. In the next lecture we will be looking at the atheist's most well known argument against the existence of God: the argument from evil.





## Lecture 7 | The Atheistic Argument from Evil



In this course, we have thus far discussed various arguments for the existence of God. In this lecture, however, we will be looking at an atheist's argument against God: the argument from evil. Though this is perhaps one of the strongest arguments for the atheists, it is not without a response. It is not an argument that theists should be afraid of, or simply dismiss. Understanding the opposing position is crucial in defending our own position. And in this lecture's discussion, we'll discover that theists actually do have a very strong rebuttal to this argument.

We will first consider a deductive argument from evil, which if the premises are true, we must logically accept the conclusion. This argument was first presented to refute the existence of God as posed by Aristotle, his teacher Plato, and his teacher Socrates. Epicurus, a post-Aristotle philosopher, closer to the time of Christ, first opined these questions.

Epicurus recognized that there was much evil in the world, and if God certainly exists, he must somehow be incapable of eradicating evil. Or he is simply uncaring and pleased with the suffering of his creation. But if God is good and all-powerful he would want to eradicate evil and would be capable of doing so. Yet, evil still exists. Therefore, God cannot exist. David Hume was the first to take up Epicurus' questions and compose an actual deductive argument from them. Like Anselm's ontological argument, Hume starts with a definition of God, and by means of the *reductio ad absurdum* argument, concludes that the theist position is a logical contradiction:

1. God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.
2. If God is omnipotent, he could prevent all evil.
3. If God is perfectly good, he wants to eliminate all evil.
4. If God desires and is able to eliminate evil, evil should not exist.
5. Yet, evil does exist.
6. Therefore God cannot exist.

There have been some theists who, unable to dispute the argument from evil, conclude that perhaps God is not actually

omnipotent, or omniscient. That perhaps he is limited in his knowledge and can't prevent evil from occurring. Most theists will not give up on God's goodness, because what you are left with is a Satan of sorts - not very comforting.

However, what about the theists who don't want to give up on premise 1? Premise 3 will oftentimes be called into question by the theist wanting to disprove Hume's argument. While it is possible for God to eliminate evil, there is what is called the *free will defense to the problem of evil*.

For example, suppose God wants to create free people who are able to understand and make choices, necessarily having more than one option. They can discover truths about the universe. They're able to make beautiful things, to build things - in a sense, to sub-create. Free beings, therefore, cannot simply be programmed to always choose the right thing. If this were so, they wouldn't be free. In short, real moral choices entail real consequences. Therefore, if we appeal to the freedom of human persons as a good, and that in order to have significant free choices - moral choices - there has to exist the possibility of some evils in the world. So long as bad moral choices persist in the world, evil will exist. And the good of human freedom logically follows from a God who is love - has the capacity of being loved. If there is no human freedom, there is no human capacity to return God's love.

Now, the free will defense may solve the problem of moral evil - evil entailed by human choice - however, there still exists natural evil - evil caused by death, sickness and natural disasters. First, Aquinas and Augustine would say that evil caused by sickness is not intrinsically evil. The fact that we have a nervous system which signals to us that something is lacking, is actually a good thing. Sickness, rather than being a dualistic battle against health, is rather a deprivation of health - a privation of a good that should be there. To eradicate sickness, is to eradicate the real world that we live in, and the laws of nature that God established. Now, obviously this doesn't explain all of the cases of natural evil, so the theist still has more to say.

A possibility, which is not suggested in Hume's deductive argument from evil, is perhaps the hinge of the theist's rebuttal:

7) It is possible, that a perfectly good being has a morally sufficient reason for permitting evils.

Therefore, if (7) is possible, then (3) is not self-evident, and Hume's argument falls apart. While Hume's premises do entail the conclusion, thereby proving its validity, it is not a sound argument, because all the premises are not true. In our next lecture we will discuss what is known as the *New Atheism*, and conclude our course on the Proofs for the Existence of God.





## Lecture 8 | The New Atheism

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The so-called *New Atheism* has attracted much attention these days. While the philosophy of atheism has been around for centuries, it has (in the legacy of David Hume) only recently taken the offensive position and, as a result, has manifested an unprecedented aggressiveness. It is not simply a few individuals who have taken this naturalistic position, but many religiously founded universities as well. In fact, most self-proclaimed theists will not be hired at these universities because of their worldview. As observed through the media, it simply seems that naturalism is taking over. In our discussion of the New Atheism, there

are four attributes that characterize this movement:

First, a negative attitude toward religion. The New Atheism sees religion as undermining reason and morality, as fostering superstition and bigotry. Eliminating religion would thereby eliminate senseless conflicts, and parental conditioning in raising their children.

Second, the idolization of science. Science is a product of reason and will enable an almost utopian society of social well-being and enlightenment. There is no need to use religion as a crutch for the unexplainable, because science and technology bears within itself the whole of reality.

Third, the New Atheism presents an invigorated zeal in their promulgation of their policies. It is not simply musings in philosophy, but an agenda to push for atheism in the public sphere – schools, the family, the media etc.

The fourth and last category we'll mention here, is the embodiment of what is known as, *Logical Positivism*, or *Scientism*. This is what can be defined as a philosophical approach to the scientific method claiming that

knowledge can only be gained through empirical experimentation. And so, with this approach, the New Atheism will claim to have the answers to various questions such as, “What is the meaning of life? What happens when we die? What is the nature of consciousness?” These questions do not belong in the field of science, because they cannot be empirically tested. However, the New Atheism will pose a scientific answer to these questions such as, “There is no meaning to life. There is no life after death. Consciousness is simply the product of neurological cognition – that’s all.”

It seems that this New Atheism is mostly a reactionary response to the many arguments posed by theists. The logical strength of theism, as has been examined within these past seven lectures, poses very reasonable arguments that have yet to be rebutted by atheism. There is a certain blind faith that the atheist has to adopt in believing that even though the existence of something rather than nothing, of design-like phenomena etc, has not been scientifically proven, there is a scientific explanation out there ready to emerge. Their aggressiveness seems to act as a foil for the underlying irrationality of their claims.

By addressing both the atheistic and theistic position, the theist is enabled to

retake his offensive position. The theist has much more going for him than the atheist does, and the various arguments we have discussed prove this. While it is not necessary for a theist to have a proof for the existence of God in order to hold that position, having a “reason for the hope that he has” (1 Peter 3:15) can strengthen his faith tremendously.

Additionally, as Aristotle suggests, the nature of the human person has the intrinsic desire to know. Questioning and reasoning God’s existence is the prerogative of the human person. In formulating proofs for God’s existence, our potential for knowing is actualized and we are enabled to better understand reality. While the object of evangelization and the hope for conversion in our conversations with atheists is certainly a noble goal, it is not the primary end of proving God’s existence. Aquinas, having complied his arguments, did so primarily for the Church – for theists. He understood that the act of contemplating God through philosophy is a good in and of itself for the cultivation of our God-given faculties of the soul, and for an increase in the virtue of love for the one who is Love itself.









# Suggested READING

To learn more about the philosophical foundations for belief in God, Professor Laura Garcia suggests the following titles:

Anselm, *Proslogion*. Trans. Matthew Walz. St. Augustine Press. 2013.

Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae: A Concise Translation*. Christian Classics. 1997.

Craig, William Lane. *Reasonable Faith*. Crossway. 2008.

Davis, John Jefferson. *The Frontiers of Science and Faith: Examining Questions from the Big Bang to the End of the Universe*. Intervarsity. 2002

Feser, Edward. *Aquinas (A Beginner's Guide)*. Oneworld Publications. 2009.

Flew, Antony. *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*. Harper One. 2008.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Two Dozen (or so) Arguments for the Existence of God*. Oxford University Press. 2018.

Plantinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford University Press. 2000.

Rowe, William L. *The Cosmological Argument*. Fordham University Press. 1989.

Swinburne, Richard. *Is There a God?* Oxford University Press. 2010.

Swinburne, Richard. *The Evolution of the Soul*. Clarendon Press. 1997.



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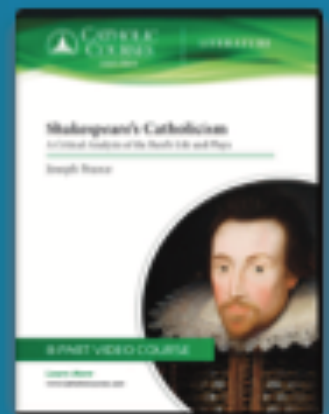
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