

WHY WOULD ANYONE BELIEVE IN GOD? 3

Lesson III | Some Proofs from the Universe

Review

Complete the prompts in a way that answers the objection.

“Religion is the opium for the masses. Your belief in God is a dream that is keeping you from living in the real world. You just need to wake up.”

What this quote is not taking into account is that...

“There is as much scientific proof for God as there is for Santa Clause or any other Fairy Tale”

What this quote is not taking into account is that...

Objectives:

- We will be able to explain the difference between Proofs from Creation and Proofs from the Human Person
- We will be able to summarize the basic points of 2 different argument for God’s existence.
- Bonus: We will look at answering one of the two arguments that claim to disprove God’s existence.

Key Vocabulary:

Theism: a philosophical perspective that says there is a God.

Atheism: the philosophical perspective that says there is no God

Argument: a logical sequence of ideas that supports a claim; not a disagreement or a difference of opinion

Agnosticism: the philosophical perspective that says it is unlikely that there is a God and that they question is uncertain.

Proof for God’s existence: an argument based in reason for why belief in God is reasonable;

Naturalism: a philosophical perspective that believes nature is all that exists

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What are the different kinds of Arguments for God's existence?

By and large there are two general categories of proofs for God's existence. One category starts with evidence and data from the Cosmos. In other words it will look at the created world and start reasoning from there back to God. You could call these *cosmological arguments for God's existence*. The other category of proof for God's existence starts with evidence and data inside the human person. You could call these *psychological arguments for God's existence*. These proofs are examples of human logic and reasoning at work given the data we have in the world. Strictly speaking these proofs are from the world of philosophy not science even though they will draw from scientific facts in some of their premises. You can't run an experiment and get these arguments. This is why it's so important to know how to argue against a reductionism that sets the boundaries of knowledge of science alone.

These arguments are tools at your disposal. Each one has different strengths and potential weaknesses. Each one will appeal to a different kind of audience. It's your job to know who you are talking to and use them accordingly. One apologist described the job of the evangelist as a match-maker between God and the other person. You've to figure out for your friend to meet God---because you know, they're made for each other. Today we are going to look at two different arguments for God's existence: *The Argument from Contingency, the Argument from Design*

The Argument from Contingency

The word 'contingent' means something that is dependent on another thing. In this case this first proof says that everything in the universe is dependent or contingent on something other than the universe. This is how it goes. When we are classifying items in the universe we notice that there are some features that are absolutely required for a thing to be itself while others are optional. An example would be for a triangle to be a triangle it needs to have three sides and three angles that add up to 180 degrees. This is an example of a required feature for a triangle and we will call them *essential features* because they are essential to the triangle. Meanwhile the size of triangle or the color of a triangle could vary to any degree: it could be big or small, and could come in any color and could be made of any material. We will call these non-required ones *non-essential features*.

Let's add one other detail to this, when you find an essential feature and ask 'why is it that way?' the answer is "because that is what it means for 'x' to be 'x'". Meanwhile, when you look at a *non-essential feature* and ask 'why is it that way?' you have to look for another cause. So for example, if someone asked "why do triangles have three sides?" the answer is "because that's what we mean by the word triangle". The person who has asked this has not grasped what a triangle is. But if they said, "why is that triangle blue?" then we have to find an explanation for its blue color: a pen or a marker or a something with blue pigment. The *non-essential features* are *contingent* on other things for their causes.

Now when we look at things in the universe we observe many items with a variety of essential and non-essential features. Cars, cows, clouds, caribou, California, constellations and my friend Carl are all examples of things in our universe and each one has its own set of essential features and we use words to designate those differences. But we also notice that, in every case they have something in common: their *existence* is a *non-essential feature*. How do

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we know that existence is a non-essential feature? Well because all of these things, cars, cows, clouds etc. are things that have not always existed. There was a time when each one didn't exist and there will come a time when they won't exist again. Now we just saw a moment ago that non-essential features require a cause, so we must raise the question: what has caused the car, the cow and Carl to exist. Each one obviously has slightly different causes but in each case we run into a problem: the thing that caused Carl to exist, namely Carl's parents, do not possess existence as an essential feature either. Nor does the mommy cow or the car manufacturer. So we have to ask it again and again: where do these things get their existence? But we run into a problem because nothing in the universe possesses existence as an essential feature. So we must conclude that there is something, outside of the universe, that possesses existence as an essential feature, something that is the 'sheer act of 'to be'', and that thing we call God. Here's the argument in the form of a logical argument (called a syllogism) as it might appear in a logic class.

P.1: Things that don't have to exist require an explanation for their existence

P.2: The only thing that can explain the existence of things that don't have to exist is something that does have to exist .

C: There is at least one thing that does have to exist and that thing we call God

Check for understanding:

In the box provided summarize what you have understood about the Argument from Contingency

In the box provided brainstorm some possible objections to the argument from Contingency

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What Caused God?

The person who asks this often has one or both of the following misunderstandings. The first is that they mistakenly think that the argument from contingency says “all things have causes”. This is NOT what it says. It states, “only things that don’t explain their own existence need causes”. God does not need a cause for his existence because we have an explanation for his existence: He IS existence. This brings us to the 2nd misunderstanding, that essential features are what make a thing what they are: In this case when we say the word ‘God’ we mean ‘that which is the ground of existence and possesses existence as an *essential feature*’. And remember, when you ask about essential features it means you haven’t grasped what the thing was in the first place.

Why can’t we say the universe always existed?

This is a very interesting proposal. There are several responses one might say to this. The first is that there is a lot of modern science that believes the universe had a beginning. This is what is implied by the Big-Bang theory (whose developer was Georges Lemaître, a Catholic Priest and Physicist). If you want more on this see the materials from Fr. Robert Spitzer’s Magis Center for Faith and Reason. Another response comes from St. Thomas Aquinas who says, if there had been infinite time, then there would be enough time for there to be every possible universe including the end of the universe. But if this were true we couldn’t exist because from nothing, nothing comes. But *we do exist* so there can’t have been an infinite amount of time.

Maybe things just go on forever in an infinite regress.

The response to this is that just because one thing doesn’t explain its own existence, finding 1 million other things that don’t explain their existence doesn’t give you an explanation. Let say I was asking “How is it that fish are able to breath under water?” and someone replied “Well you know there are a lot of fish that are able to do that,” they may have pointed out something true but it doesn’t help me in my quest for knowledge. Likewise an infinite regress doesn’t really solve the problem. Actually it makes it worse.

The Argument from Design

This is one of the simplest arguments for God’s existence. Here is one way of people have described it. Imagine you landed what you thought had been a deserted island and you found the letters, “S.O.S” traced in the sand in huge proportions. What do you find more reasonable as an explanation: that the waves must have randomly carved and shaped these letters or that a person made them? Or similarly, imagine on the same island you came across a hut with walls, a door, a window and a roof. Would you conclude that the last tropical storm produced this structure or that a person had built it? We perceive something similar in the universe. When we look at the stars we see an overwhelming amount of beauty and order. The obvious question is, how did this get here?

If you are scientifically oriented one variation of this is called the *argument from fine tuning* certain theistic scientists have pointed out that there are number of scientific constants that

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and forces that were all present at the big bang that were necessary to create our solar system. If you want more on this see the materials from Fr. Robert Spitzer's Magis Center for Faith and Reason. If you are intimidated or wary of getting into too many scientific details here is a version that doesn't require extensive scientific knowledge or physics.

- P1. We perceive that the universe is both orderly and not necessary.
- P2. That which is orderly and not-necessary is the product of intelligence.
- P3. There must be an intelligence behind the universe and that intelligence we call God.

Let's unpack what we mean when we say 'orderly' and 'not-necessary'. By 'orderly' we mean that the universe is predictable enough to run experiments on; that things are not totally random but follow a certain pattern. By 'not necessary' we mean that the universe is the way it is but it could just as well have been different. In our universe spiders have 8 eyes but they might have had 7. In our solar system we have 9 planets (if you agree Pluto really is a planet) but there might have been more or less. The point is that you can't figure out things in the universe just by sitting down and logically coming to conclusions on a piece of paper, rather, you have to go out and observe what actually exists. Notice that by 'orderly' and 'not necessary' we are pointing out the two pillars upon which science itself gets off the ground. This may be helpful for someone who values the scientific method. And if things that are creative, orderly and unique are the product of person then there must be someone behind all this beauty.

Check for understanding:

In the box provided summarize what you have understood about the Argument from Design

In the box provided brainstorm some possible objections to the argument from Design

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Objection I: I disagree that order comes from intelligence. Order can come from chaos—this is what the theory of Evolution proves

This needs some careful consideration. There is a principle in philosophy that says '*nemo dat quod non habet*', or "you can't give what you don't have. If I don't have a million dollars I can't give you a million dollars. If I don't have intelligence I can't share intelligence. This is what some people call a first principle because it is at the basis of all our knowledge and question asking in the universe. We can say with great certainty that biologically speaking *chaos came before order* but we can be reasonably question anyone who says that *order came from chaos*. To put it another way, evolution is a great plausible description of *how things came to be*, but it's not an explanation of *why things came to be*. Some people have put it this way imagine you could run the following experiment a thousand monkeys on a thousand type-writers banging away for an infinite amount of time. Let's say that for the sake of the experiment you wouldn't die nor would the monkeys. How long do you think it would take before the monkey's typed out *Hamlet*? And supposing they did, would your first reaction be, 'see I knew it! It was bound to happen sooner or later' or would you say, "who got in there and what did they do to my monkeys?" Which leads us to the following objection.

Objection II: What you call 'order' is really just statistical inevitability—given a long enough time span it had to happen sooner or later.

Well remember, we are pretty sure the universe does have beginning---that is the predominant scientific view at the moment. But we can also say that order is not the same thing as statistical chance because numerical inevitabilities are not predictable in the way our universe is. Remember, we saw that the universe was stable enough to do experiments on and that's not what statistical randomness can give.

Does any of this prove the God of Christianity?

No. To quote Prof. Peter Kreeft they only prove "a very thin slice of what we mean by the word 'God'". It's not enough of God to prove that Christianity is true but it's enough to show the atheist why it's reasonable to believe in God. It does prove that there is more to the world that what we can see. And it proves that whatever is behind the universe is either a.) Existence itself or b.) incredibly intelligent depending on which argument you are looking at.

But remember, these are only tools and more important than your ability to articulate them perfectly is your effort to get to know the person in front of you. "What is your story?" "What do you want in life?", "Are you happy? What makes you happy? Do you think you'll be perfectly happy when you get it?" Every person wants to be known and appreciated. We want to be told, "it is good that you exist". This is often more powerful than any argument. A wise person once told me, "People don't care what you know, until they know that you care". Words to take to heart.

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Objections to God's existence:

When St. Thomas Aquinas wrote his *Summa Theologica* he constructed it in a question and answer format in which he collected the best objections to his position and stated them as clearly and forcefully as he could. The resulting text is a beautiful example of dialogue and intellectual honesty and respect. The maxim of the day was, you cannot give a rebuttal to your opponent until you have restated his case to his satisfaction. As a rule St. Thomas tried to come up with at least three objections to each statement he made. When it came to God's existence he could only come up with two: The *argument from Parsimony* and the *argument from Evil*. While there are many arguments that attempt to show why belief in God is not reasonable these are the only two that claim to disprove his existence outright. Here we will talk about the first one.

The Argument from Parsimony: God is an unnecessary hypothesis:

P1: There's no need to suggest immaterial realities b/c Science can explain everything adequately.

P2: What we have no need to suggest we ought not to suggest. (this is a principle called 'Ockham's Razor').

C: We ought not to suggest immaterial realities.

What can we say to this? Take a moment and jot down some ideas here below:

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Some possible responses

- The first premise is faulty: science still requires immaterial realities for its self to function: logic, mathematics are all non-physical realities that have to be trusted before science can run.
- There's a faulty epistemological assumption in this: that proof is the only valid way of knowing anything. This a form of reductionism and specifically, scientism.
- The assumption that “the scientific method explains everything” can't be explained scientifically; it's a philosophical assumption
 - o “Prove to me that physical proof is the only way to believe something.”
- Ockham's Razor, while a good principle in science is not well suited for every situation: in history while Nazi's helped cause the outbreak of WWII it's not the *only cause* of WWII.

If you are interested in further reading

Books

- *Why God? Why Jesus? Why the Catholic Church?* By John-Mark Miravalle
- *The Handbook of Catholic Apologetics* By Kreeft and Tacelli

On the Web:

- Fr Robert Spitzer: www.magiscenter.com
- Peter Kreeft www.peterkreeft.com
- Bishop Robert Barron www.wordonfire.org
- William Lane Craig www.reasonablefaith.org