

Arguments for the existence of God

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Arguments for God work by *making explicit the existence of real connections between God and Creation*, so that one is put in the position of having to choose between acknowledging the conclusion or rejecting either the validity of the argument or the truth of one of the relevant premises.

An argument for God places God in one balance pan and some other aspect of reality in the other pan and tries to establish a link between them such that the weight of the evidence raises the case for belief. There is nothing that cannot be used as the launch-point for an argument for the existence of God because God is related to the whole of reality.

For example, the moral argument tries to establish the existence of a connection between objective moral value and God's existence. If one acknowledges that the argument is logically valid but nevertheless wish to deny the conclusion, one must deny the existence of objective moral value.

It is now received wisdom that arguments for God are cumulative, or, at least, are best approached cumulatively; that is, the weight of evidence for God accumulates as one adds arguments to an overall case that doesn't rest on any one argument. In other words, the more different links between God and reality one can uncover the more rounded a picture of God one can build up and the more certain one can be that the arguments point to God. The design argument doesn't provide much if any evidence for the existence of a necessary being, whereas the cosmological argument doesn't provide much if any evidence for an intelligent designer; but put the two arguments together and they compliment each other to show that the universe has a necessarily existent intelligent cause. The moral argument adds that the designer is good, and so on. The arguments are like strands in a rope.

Another good way to describe the procedure is the court analogy. Isolated pieces of evidence may be insufficient on their own to warrant convicting someone 'beyond reasonable doubt', but taken together the evidence does warrant conviction. Likewise with the case for God. The cosmological argument does not prove the existence of God. Nor do individual design arguments. But put all those arguments together, and the court may have to decide that God exists.

In fact, I am fairly confident that some theistic arguments can stand alone, in particular the argument from objective moral value and the arguments from desire and absurdity. Nevertheless, the more arguments one can amass, the more chance one has of convincing the honest seeker.

All this said, I am also convinced (by William James) that arguments for God are not necessarily for belief in God to be rational. Suppose you judged the evidence each way to balance out (or suppose you are unable to judge the evidence), you wouldn't be *irrational* in following a gut instinct either to believe or to disbelieve.

Ontological Argument

What do we mean by 'God'? Anselm suggested that we must mean something like 'the greatest possible being'. If we can think of someone better than God, then that better being, and not 'God', would deserve our worship. So God, as 'the being who deserves our worship', must be a being a greater than which is inconceivable or impossible.

Anselm used this definition of God to argue that God must exist. After all, said Anselm, it is greater to exist in reality outside my mind than it is to exist only as an idea in my mind. But God exists as an idea in my mind at least, and so, as the greatest possible being, God must exist in reality as well. This argument is generally distrusted because it feels like a trick, and indeed it is a trick, albeit a very impressive one.

The problem is that *God* does *not* exist as an idea in my mind – the *idea* of ‘God’, a being who exists independently of my idea of Him, exists in my mind. Perhaps the argument shows that *if I accept a certain definition of God* I must think of God as existing in reality on pain of self-contradiction, but why accept the coherence of this definition of God? It’s what we must mean by ‘God’, but perhaps the very notion of ‘God’ is ultimately incoherent; so the atheist might suggest.

Still, Anselm has given us an intuitively impressive definition of God, and that is useful. Better, his definition can be used to argue thus: by definition, the greatest possible being must be a being that exists necessarily, that is, one that must exist if it is possible that it exist (because necessary existence is greater than unnecessary, contingent existence). If one accepts that it is possible that God exists, one must therefore accept that God exists necessarily. In other words, if you want to deny the existence of God, you must hold that God’s existence is not merely contingently false, but necessarily false, i.e. impossible. One way you might do that is to argue that the very notion of ‘greater than’ is meaningless because value is subjective. Thus the very idea of God requires the cogency of objective values.

The Conceptual Argument

This argument was made famous by Rene Descartes. Like the Ontological argument, it uses the very idea of God, but it works not from the idea of God as such, but from the fact that we have such an idea in the first place. How is it that finite, imperfect beings possess the concept of an infinite, perfect being?

It might be suggested that our idea of God, like the idea of a unicorn, is produced by human imagination. If God is a bit like a human father, only perfect, then God is an imaginative projection of fatherhood with the imperfections removed. This attempt to explain away our idea of God sounds well enough, until we ask how it is that we recognize imperfections as *imperfections* unworthy of ‘God’? As Descartes said: “Now all these characteristics are such that the more diligently I attend to them, the less do they appear capable of proceeding from me alone; hence. . . we must conclude that God necessarily exists.”¹

It will not do to say that ‘God’ is an imaginary perfect being extrapolated from real imperfect beings without explaining how imperfect humans came to recognize imperfection as such: “the idea of infinite perfection is already presupposed in our thinking about all these things and judging them imperfect.”² The idea of perfection cannot be the result of a process which presupposes it! So from where do we get this idea of perfection? True, we recognize degrees of relative perfection - this man is a better father than that - but this implies that we possess a standard of perfection to employ in making such evaluations. Therefore, it would seem that the concept of a perfect being is innate to the human mind:

1 Rene Descartes, *Meditations*, (Cambridge, 1931).

2 Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, (Monarch, 1995), p69.

“I should not have the idea of an infinite substance – since I am finite – if it had not proceeded from some substance which was veritably infinite. . . For how would it be possible that I should know. . . that I am not quite perfect, unless I had within me some idea of a Being more perfect than myself, in comparison with which I should recognize the deficiencies of my nature?”³

Cosmological Argument

If anything exists its existence is either dependent upon the existence of one or more things beyond itself, or not. If not, it is an independent thing. Things are either dependent or independent, there is no third option. It is impossible for *everything* to be dependent, for there is nothing outside *everything* to depend upon. Therefore, if something exists, there must exist an independent thing. But something certainly does exist, “I think therefore I am”; so at least one independent thing certainly exists. This conclusion, I claim, is absolutely certain, but not very informative. This argument can also be cashed out in terms of necessary and contingent existence.

We can add that you and I are apparently dependent things, that every physical thing is apparently dependent, which narrows our options with regards to identifying the independent thing. However, the atheist will want to identify the independent thing with the universe itself. Still, the cosmological dependency argument provides, as Dallas Willard puts it, a “logical space” for God in “an ontologically haunted universe”. If God exists He would certainly be an independent thing, whereas the atheist’s claim that the universe itself is independent seems to be worked out after the fact to avoid the inference to God. There is no necessity to think that the universe is independent (one can think of it as dependent upon God), whereas it is necessary to conceive of God as independent (anything dependent can’t be the greatest possible being).

Arguments from Objective Value (Morality and Beauty)

Objective moral and aesthetic judgements require objective standards of goodness and beauty that, it is argued, can only be found in the nature of God, who must therefore exist if objective moral and aesthetic truths exist. If such arguments are correct, not only does the existence of God imply the existence of objective value, the existence of objective value implies the existence of God.

For morality: 1) only persons can prescribe behaviour, 2) only persons can obligate behaviour and 3) only a mind can contain a moral ideal. Nature or subjective minds are incapable of explaining these facets of objective morality. Many atheists, such as Neitzche and Satre, agree with the formula ‘no God = no objective value’.

Then again, we treat our conscience as authoritative, but from where does it get this authority? There are only four options: from something with less authority than ourselves, from something with equal authority as ourselves, from ourselves, or from something with greater authority than ourselves.

How can something with less authority than ourselves, such as the laws of nature or the chance outcome of naturalistic evolution, have authority over us? How can something with equal authority as ourselves have authority over us? How can we have authority over ourselves? If we have the power to bind ourselves we have the

³ Rene Descartes, *op cit*.

power to loose ourselves. Thus the authority of conscience must derive from some source of authority greater than ourselves. Could this source of authority be society? What about moral conflict between human societies? If there is no authority higher than society then there is no authoritative reason to oppose societies such as Nazi Germany. What can have a moral authority higher than the individual or society? God can.

Given the definition of beauty as that which it is objectively good to appreciate it follows that beauty too relates to a standard that can only be found in God, ‘the maximally objectively beautiful being’. Then again, how likely is it that a naturalistic universe would a) be so beautiful as is ours or b) that it should contain beings so finely tuned to the appreciation of beauty? Naturalistic Evolution has problems accounting for both the beauty of the universe and our ability to appreciate it.

Design Arguments

This is an area that has undergone phenomenal growth over the past few decades, and especially in the last decade with the birth of the Intelligent Design Movement, whose proponents tread a judicious path between commitment to creationism and theistic evolution, but the arguments of which seem to be compatible with both.

The well-know design argument from analogy is not destroyed by the theory of evolution. As Dallas Willard reminds us, evolution: “presupposes the *existence* of certain entities with specific potential behaviours and an *environment* of some specific kind that operates upon those entities in some specifically ordered fashion.”⁴ That is, “*any sort of evolution of order of any kind will always presuppose pre-existing order and pre-existing entities governed by it.*”⁵ As J.P.Moreland puts it: “Science cannot explain away all examples of order (or other design-bearing features – e.g. beauty, information) as being the result of merely natural processes, because scientific explanations presuppose and must start with ordered entities and laws.”⁶

The Anthropic Argument.

Non-Christian scientists like Paul Davies and Michael J. Denton have in recent years written books that relate how their scientific studies have convinced them that the universe must be ‘a put up job’ precisely because it seems ‘fine tuned’ to produce sentient beings like ourselves. The anthropic principle of ‘Big Bang’ cosmology is descending from the stars and into the realm of biology, right down into the biochemistry of life.

Faced with such ‘fine tuning’, we can make one of several responses. One is to say, ‘How lucky for us that as a one-off fluke the only universe there is just happened to have those laws which led to the evolution of sentient beings.’ (Pointing out that only in a universe such as ours would there be anyone to ponder the anthropic principle does nothing to lessen the surprise that a universe such as ours should exist in the first place.) Such a scenario is perhaps logically possible, but it is implausible.

4 Dallas Willard, ‘The Three Stage Argument for the Existence of God’, *Contemporary Perspectives in Religious Epistemology*, p217.

5 *ibid.*

6 J.P.Moreland, *The Creation Hypothesis*, (IVP, 1994), p23.

Another response is to say that there must be a great many different universes, all with different natural laws. This proposition is designed to lessen the implausibility of our fruitful universe existing, since there are many unfruitful universes ‘out there’. The problem with this is, What explains the differentiation of many universes all with slightly different physical laws? What stops all those other universes having identical, or very similar, physical laws? ‘Good luck’ is again a possible but unlikely answer, while the alternative is to say that there is some law which ensures ‘universe law differentiation’. If so, that law itself seems to be ‘fine tuned’ to lead to the existence of at least one universe ‘fine tuned’ for the existence of sentient life. In response to *that* ‘fine tuning’ one cannot reply that perhaps it is only one such law among many, without entering into an infinite regress of explanation.

A plausible response then, in the face of the single ‘fine tuned’ universe we know exists (or to a posited ‘fine tuned’ law which ensures the existence of at least one ‘fine tuned’ universe among many), is that the universe (or the law that ensured its existence) was ‘tuned’ by an intelligent ‘tuner’; God.

Michael Behe’s ‘Irreducible Complexity’

Consider structures such as those discovered by molecular biology, or the study of DNA. Biomolecular structures exhibit ‘irreducible complexity’ where each part of the machine is necessary for the useful functioning of the whole and where each part is useless, or worse than useless, without the others. Such systems *cannot* have evolved in a step-by-step Darwinian manner. The odds against the co-ordinated simultaneous appearance of several mutually beneficial mutations are long, so long that one wonders if there isn’t someone inputting information into the system.

Richard Dawkins describes DNA in *The Blind Watchmaker*:

“It is raining DNA outside. On the bank of the Oxford canal at the bottom of my garden is a large willow tree, and it is pumping downy seeds into the air. . . Not just any DNA, but DNA whose coded characters spell out specific instructions for building willow trees that will shed a new generation of downy seeds. Those fluffy specks are, literally, spreading instructions for making themselves. They are there because their ancestors succeeded in doing the same. It is raining instructions out there; it’s raining programs; it’s raining tree-growing, fluff-spreading algorithms. That is not a metaphor, it is the plain truth. It couldn’t be plainer if it were raining floppy discs.”⁷

If it was raining floppy discs, and those floppy discs, like DNA, carried a program (for making other floppy discs), wouldn’t everyone agree that this information must have originated in some mind or minds? Following Dawkins’s usage, both the floppy disc and the willow seed are physical packets carrying complex encoded information. At the very least then there is a strong analogy to be drawn between DNA and a computer program on a floppy disc. We know that computer programs come from minds; should we not also conclude that the information encoded by DNA comes from a mind?

⁷ Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*, p111.

Plantinga's Evolutionary Anti-Naturalism Argument

Most people, argues Alvin Plantinga, think that a function of our cognitive faculties "is to provide us with true beliefs."⁸ Indeed, most of us think that our cognitive faculties do provide us with true beliefs. However, doesn't this present the naturalist, who believes that our cognitive abilities arrived on the scene through a blind process of natural selection, with a problem?

"If our cognitive faculties have originated as [the naturalist] thinks, then their ultimate purpose or function (if they have a purpose or function) will be something like survival. . . but then it seems initially doubtful that among their functions. . . would be the production of true beliefs."⁹

Postmodern Philosopher Richard Rorty argues that: "The idea that one species of organism is, unlike all the others, oriented not just towards its own increased propensity but toward Truth, is as un-Darwinian as the idea that every human being has a built-in moral compass. . ." ¹⁰ The nub of the problem is summed up somewhat colourfully by naturalist Patricia Churchland who writes that:

"Boiled down to essentials, a nervous system enables the organism to succeed in the four F's: feeding, fleeing, fighting and reproducing. The principle chore of nervous systems is to get the body parts where they should be in order that the organism may survive. . . Truth, whatever that is, definitely takes the hindmost."¹¹

The trouble with Churchland's statement is that if truth 'takes the hindmost' in the priorities of evolution, then we have cause to doubt the conclusion that this is the case, since this conclusion (on naturalistic assumptions) is based upon the workings of just such a purposelessly evolved natural system. Plantinga dubs this sort of self-defeating assertion 'Darwin's Doubt', as it can be traced back to Charles Darwin. "With me", wrote Darwin, "the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of the lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy."¹²

Plantinga interprets 'Darwin's Doubt' as questioning the probability of human cognitive faculties being reliable truth-finding apparatus given the assumption that they have been produced by an *unintended* evolutionary process.

Digging ourselves into a pit of despair about the trustworthiness of our minds isn't going to get us very far. So, assuming that our cognitive faculties are generally reliable, we have something to weigh in the balance against naturalism (and in favour of Theism), since it was naturalism that provided us with grounds to doubt the reliability of the natural systems upon which we rely when arriving at any picture of the world, including naturalism itself:

8 Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant & Proper Function*, (Oxford, 1993), p214.

9 *ibid.*

10 Richard Rorty, 'Untruth and Consequences' in *The New Republic*, July 31, 1995, p36.

11 Patricia Churchland, *Philosophy*, 84, October 1987, p548.

12 Letter to William Graham, July 3, 1881, *The Life and Letters of Charles Darwin Including an Autobiographical Chapter*, ed. Francis Darwin.

“suppose you concur in Darwin’s Doubt. . . But suppose you also think, as most of us do, that in fact our cognitive faculties are reliable. . . Then you have a straight forward probabilistic argument against naturalism – and for traditional theism, if you think these two the significant alternatives. . .”¹³

This really is a case of ‘heads I win, tails you lose’. If you think that naturalistic evolution gives you cause to doubt the reliability of human cognitive faculties, but you think those faculties are reliable, then you have reason to reject naturalism. If you think naturalistic evolution gives you cause to doubt the reliability of human cognitive faculties, and you agree that the reliability of these faculties is suspect, then you have reason to doubt your conclusion that naturalism (or anything else for that matter) is true. Either way, naturalism doesn’t look too healthy.

It is interesting to read the secular Philosopher Thomas Nagel grappling with this question. Nagel writes that, “If we can reason, it is because our thoughts can obey the order of the logical relations amongst propositions – so here again we depend on a Platonic harmony [between our thoughts and the cosmos].”¹⁴ Nagel feels that this insight is alarming:

“it is hard to know what world picture to associate it with, and difficult to avoid the suspicion that the picture will be religious, or quasi religious. . . Even without God, the idea of a natural sympathy between the deepest truths of nature and the deepest layers of the human mind, which can be exploited to allow gradual development of a truer and truer conception of reality, makes us more *at home* in the universe than is secularly comfortable. . . I believe this is one manifestation of a fear of religion which has large and often pernicious consequences for modern intellectual life.”¹⁵

Nagel considers several possible explanations for this harmony between thought and reality:

“Probably the most popular. . . answer nowadays [to the question of why our thinking apparatus is generally reliable] is an evolutionary naturalism: We can reason in these ways because it is the consequence of a more primitive capacity of belief formation that had survival value during the period when the human brain was evolving. This explanation has always seemed to me laughably inadequate.”¹⁶

He sees the attraction of what he calls the ‘religious’ answer to this conundrum:

“The universe is intelligible to us because it and our minds were made for each other. . . While I think such arguments are unjustly neglected in contemporary secular philosophy, I have never been able to understand the idea of God well enough to see such a theory as truly explanatory. . . But perhaps this is due to my inadequate understanding of religious concepts.”¹⁷

13 Plantinga, *op cit*, p228 & 231.

14 Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word*, p129.

15 *ibid*, p129-130.

16 *ibid*, p75.

17 *ibid*, p75-76.

I think that the idea of God is understandable enough that we can explain things with reference to His existence and actions. If naturalistic evolutionism is inadequate for explaining our ability to know the history of evolution and the laws of quantum mechanics, then theistic evolution offers a serious alternative.

The ‘Welcome to Wales’ Argument

Suppose you are travelling by train and, glancing out of the window, you see some stones on a hill side spelling out the words ‘Welcome to Wales’. On the basis of this observation you form the belief that you have entered into Wales (this belief may be true or false, it is immaterial to the following argument). It would be unreasonable of you, says Taylor, to continue in this belief if you also came to believe that the stones had not been arranged on purpose to accurately convey information, but had ended up in this formation purely through the operation of natural laws:

“you would, in fact, be presupposing that they were arranged that way by an intelligent and purposeful being or beings for the purpose of conveying a certain message having nothing to do with the stones themselves.”¹⁸

This is admittedly an unlikely occurrence, but it is logically possible. The wind and rain *could* have dislodged the stones so that they rolled down the hillside, coming to rest where the ground was pitted by natural erosion.

The point is this: Supposing you did believe the sign to be the result (however unlikely) of purely natural forces, it would be unreasonable of you to base your belief that you were entering Wales on this stone formation:

“it would be *irrational* for you to regard the arrangement of the stones as evidence that you were entering Wales, and at the same time to suppose that they might have come to that arrangement accidentally, that is, as the result of the ordinary interactions of natural or physical forces.”¹⁹

If you came to believe the workings *of your own brain* to be the result of *purely* natural forces it would be similarly unreasonable of you to base your belief that this was so on the reasoning of that very brain itself:

“It would be irrational for one to say *both* that his sensory and cognitive faculties had a natural, nonpurposeful origin and *also* that they reveal some truth with respect to something other than themselves. . . . If, on the other hand, we do assume that they are guides to some truths having nothing to do with themselves, then it is difficult to see how we can, consistently with that supposition, believe them to have arisen by accident, or by the ordinary workings of purposeless forces, even over ages of time.”²⁰

If the mind just is the brain as metaphysical naturalists must believe it is, and if the brain, like the ‘Welcome to Wales’ sign, is, again as naturalists believe, the result of a merely natural process of chance and non-purposeful necessity (in whatever combination), then anyone who trusts their brain *while believing this* is as

18 Richard Taylor, *Metaphysics*, 2nd edition, (Prentice Hall, 1974).

19 *ibid.*

20 *ibid.*

unreasonable as someone who trusts the stone sign while believing it to be the result of purely natural forces. As Ronald H. Nash, who defends this argument, writes:

“Thus the naturalists seem to be caught in a trap. *If they are consistent with their naturalistic presuppositions, they must assume that our human cognitive faculties are a product of chance, purposeless forces. But if this is so, they appear grossly inconsistent when they place so much trust in those faculties.* But. . . if they assume that their cognitive faculties are trustworthy and do provide accurate information about the world, they seem compelled to abandon one of the cardinal presuppositions of metaphysical naturalism and to conclude that their cognitive faculties were formed as a result of the activity of some purposeful, intelligent agent.”²¹

The Argument From Desire

If God exists and has designed us for relationship with Himself one would expect people to find contentment only within such a relationship and to show signs of deprivation if such a relationship is lacking. That there is a deep need for God within the human heart was recognised by the biblical songwriter who wrote that “As a deer longs for streams of cool water, so I long for you, O God.” (Psalm 42:1, GNB.) Christian writers through the ages have echoed this theme of longing. Augustine wrote in his *Confessions* that: “You made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they rest in you.” Pascal wrote of how “There is a god-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man, and only God can fill it.”

Atheists also recognise the existence of a restless, unfulfilled desire for something more. Jean-Paul Satre admitted: “my whole being cries out for God”. Katharine Tait said this about her father, the famous atheist philosopher Bertrand Russell: “Somewhere at the back of my father’s mind, at the bottom of his heart, in the depth of his soul, there was an empty space that had once been filled by God and he never found anything else to put in it.”²² Russell himself acknowledged that: “The centre of me is always and eternally a terrible pain – a curious wild pain – a searching for something beyond what the world contains.”²³

That this restless desire apart from God predicted by the theistic hypothesis exists, and that people who believe they have discovered relationship with God seem to have discovered the object that satiates this desire, is evidence in favour of the theistic hypothesis; empirical confirmation of Jesus’ claim that: “this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:3) As Pascal argued:

“Man tries unsuccessfully to fill this void with everything that surrounds him, seeking in absent things the help he cannot find in those that are present, but all are incapable of it. This infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite. . . object. . . God himself.”²⁴

21 Ronald H. Nash, ‘Miracles & Conceptual Systems’ in *In Defence of Miracles*, (Apollos, 1997), p129-130, my italics.

22 Katherine Tait, quoted by Luis Palau, *Is God Relevant?*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), p93.

23 Bertrand Russell, quoted by Philip Yancey, *Disappointment with God*, p253.

24 Pascal, *Pensées* 181.

This desire for God (which pulls against our sinful desire to be our own god) was discussed by Aquinas and Pascal; but it was left to C.S.Lewis to present it as an argument for the Heaven of ‘eternal life’ with God:

“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. . . If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world.”²⁵

Is there truly any reason to suppose that reality offers satisfaction to this desire? Being hungry doesn’t prove that we will get fed. True; but such a criticism misses the point. A man’s hunger does not prove that he will get any food; he might die of starvation. But surely hunger proves that a man comes from a race which needs to eat and inhabits a world where edible substances exist: “In the same way,” says Lewis, “though I do not believe (I wish I did) that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will.”²⁶

The Argument from Meaning

Meaningfulness, I am prepared to argue, *is the coincidence of purpose and value* (after all, what’s the point of purpose if it isn’t valuable?). Thus, *for life to be objectively meaningful is for life to have an objective purpose that is objectively valuable*. For the Christian theist, life is meaningful in that it is the purposeful, good creation of God. The *telos* (or goal) of human existence is to know and worship God for eternity. In the Christian worldview then, life has an objective purpose, and this purpose is objectively valuable, in that God (being necessarily and objectively good) is the objective standard of value. For the atheist, things are very different, and the postmodern results are all around us. The crucial point is this: *If God exists, then we have a purpose, a reason why we exist, a goal and a meaning. On the other hand, if no God exists, then the universe has no creator, and no telos, and we have no creator, and no telos, no purpose*. In other words, if God does not exist, existence is necessarily meaningless. Therefore, *if existence is meaningful, God must exist*.

Argument from Miracles

We can define a miracle as ‘any event which, if true, is best explained by the causal activity of a good supernatural being with sufficient power, intelligence and sufficient reason (a motivating purpose) to bring it about’.

The argument from miracles does not argue that such-and-such an event is an act of God and that God therefore must exist; rather, it argues that such-and-such an event has (probably) occurred and that the best explanation for the occurrence of this event is (probably) that it was caused by some supernatural agent with sufficient capacities to cause the event in question. To paraphrase Stephen C. Meyer, “[A miracle] can be offered, therefore, as a necessary or best causal explanation. . . when naturalistic processes seem incapable [or unlikely] of producing the *explanandum* effect, and when intelligence is known to be capable of producing it and thought to be

²⁵ C.S.Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (Fount).

²⁶ *ibid.*

more likely to have produced it.”²⁷ Reason to believe in the occurrence of just one miracle is therefore reason to believe in the existence of a supernatural being able to cause it.

There are many historical and contemporary reports of miraculous events. In the *British Medical Journal* (Dec. 1983), Dr. Rex Gardner described four healings that parallel miracles recorded by the Venerable Bede thirteen centuries ago. He tells of the full recovery of a young doctor who was so ill that she was expected to die, but for whom several prayer groups were formed: “Physicians were unable to explain how her chest X-ray film, which had showed extensive left-side pneumonia with collapse of the middle lobe, could, 48 hours later, show a normal clear chest.”²⁸ Prayer for healing is becoming the subject of serious scientific study:

“One of the most intriguing experiments, involving some 60 patients, is underway at the Arthritis/Pain Treatment Centre in Clearwater, Florida. . . . Some patients have already experienced extraordinary short-term results. . . . At the start of the experiment [one patient] has 49 tender joints. After four sessions with a hands-on praying minister, he had only eight. Six months later he no longer needed pain medication.”²⁹

In another study “Dr [Randolf] Byrd divided 393 heart patients into two groups. One was prayed for by Christians; the other did not receive prayers from study participants. Patients didn’t know which group they belonged to. The members of the group that was prayed for experienced fewer complications, fewer cases of pneumonia, fewer cardiac arrests, less congestive heart failure and needed fewer antibiotics.”³⁰

Two historical examples of miracle are particularly noteworthy: fulfilled Biblical prophecy, and the resurrection of Jesus.

The Argument from Jesus

The arguments from fulfilled prophecy and his resurrection from the dead are powerful indicators that there is something very special about Jesus – but in the context of the claims Jesus made about himself, these two facts of history take on a whole new importance. The fact of the matter is that Jesus claimed divinity. As William Lane Craig reports, “the majority of New Testament critics today agree that the historical Jesus deliberately stood and spoke in the place of God himself.”³¹ It seems impossible for God to arrange for the life of Jesus to be marked by the fulfilment of prophecy and resurrection from the dead if Jesus were not who he claimed to be.

Moreover, Jesus’ claim to divinity (once granted) forces us to ask, ‘Was he sincere or was he lying?’ If he wasn’t lying, then he must have been sincere. If he was sincere, was he right or wrong. If he was wrong, then he was sincerely deluded about his very selfhood in such a fundamental way that it could only be described as madness. Therefore, if Jesus was neither lying nor a mad, he was both sincere and correct. If Jesus was correct about his divinity, then the divine must exist!

27 Stephen C. Meyer, *The Creation Hypothesis*, (IVP, 1994), p97.

28 Quoted by John Young, *The Case Against Christ*, (Hodder & Stoughton, 1994).

29 Kenneth Woodward, ‘Does Prayer Work?’, *Reader’s Digest*, April 1998.

30 Phyllis McIntosh, ‘Faith is Powerful Medicine’, *Reader’s Digest*, May, 2000.

31 William Lane Craig, *Will The Real Jesus Please Stand Up?*, (Baker), p25.

Arguments from Religious Experience, Common Consent & Authority

The fact that a lot of people believe something *is* evidence for its truth, because all these people have made judgements about their beliefs, and have lived by them – tested them in the arena of life. The evidence may be weak, but it is evidence. One can categorize believers in God in various ways, by numbers (the majority of people past and present believe in God), by intellectual ability, as Scientists or Philosophers, as Martyrs or Saints. In all these categories, surely the majority of people have been believers in God. Is it likely that they were all wrong? As the saying goes, ‘A million French men can be wrong, but it is less likely than one hundred French men being wrong’!

Authority is right, not might – it is the right to have one’s opinion weighed with greater seriousness than that of the average person. Most of the greatest thinkers throughout history have believed in the existence of a divine being. One can mention the likes of Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Anselm, Berkley, Descartes, Kant, Leibniz, Locke, Newton, Pascal, Plantinga and Swinburne. Is it likely that the majority of the greatest minds are wrong about the existence of God? To the degree that they are unlikely to be mistaken, so it is likely that God exists.

Many, perhaps most, people from different eras and widely different cultures claim to have experience of the divine; and that includes atheists! Jean-Paul Satre’s experience, paradoxically, actually caused him to abandon belief: “I had been playing with matches and burned a small rug. I was in the process of covering up my crime when suddenly God saw me. I felt His gaze inside my head and on my hands. . . I flew into a rage against so crude an indiscretion, I blasphemed. . . He never looked at me again.”³² Of course, for many, the experience of God is one to be cherished. If it is unlikely that so many people could be wrong about this profound experience then it is likely that the divine truly exists. Moreover, the principle of credulity encourages us to take religious experience at face value, unless there is sufficient reason to doubt it:

“It is a basic principle of knowledge. . . that we ought to believe that things are as they seem to be, until we have evidence that we are mistaken. . . If you say the contrary – never trust appearances until it is proved that they were reliable – you will never have any beliefs at all. For what would show that appearances were reliable, except more appearances?”³³

If you lack religious experience yourself, then it is reasonable to trust the reports of those with such experience.

Conclusion.

If there is no God, millions of people suffer from the strange, life-enhancing delusion that He does exist. If there is no God, Jesus is either a mad man or a liar. If there is no God, then there is no meaning, purpose, objective goodness, or objective beauty. If there is no God, then the overwhelming appearance of design in nature is a statistical freak of nature. If there is no God, a universe made up of a lot of dependent

³² Jean-Paul Satre, *Words*, (New York, 1964), p102.

³³ Richard Swinburne, ‘Evidence for God’.

things has nothing and no one to depend upon. If there is no God, the concept of God is incoherent, even though millions of people have lived their lives in the belief that it makes sense.

The question is, is all this, or any of this, likely? The question is, do these bleak conclusions follow from the denial of God, and if so, are they true? If they do follow, and if they are not true, then it follows that God exists.

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Recommended Resources:

- Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*, (Touchstone/Simon & Schuster, 1998).
Paul Copan ed., *Will The Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan*, (Baker, 1998).
Paul Davies, *The Mind of God*, (Penguin, 1992).
Stephen T. Davies, *God, Reason and Theistic Proofs*, (Edinburgh, 1997).
Stephen T. Davies, *Risen Indeed – Making Sense of the Resurrection*, (SPCK, 1993).
William A. Dembski ed., *Mere Creation – Science, Faith & Intelligent Design*, (IVP, 1998).
C. Stephen Evans, *Philosophy of Religion – Thinking about Faith*, (IVP, 1984).
C. Stephen Evans, *Why Believe? Reason and Mystery as Pointers to God*, (IVP, 1996).
Norman L. Geisler & Winfried Corduan, *Philosophy of Religion*, second edition, (Baker, 1988).
R. Douglas Geivett & Brendan Sweetman ed's., *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology*, (Oxford, 1992).
R. Douglas Geivett & Gary R. Habermas, *In Defence of Miracles – A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, (Apollos, 1997).
Gary R. Habermas: *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus: Historical Records of His Death and Resurrection*, (Thomas Nelson, 1984).
Gary R. Habermas & Anthony Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*, ed. Terry Miethe, (Harper & Rowe, 1987).
Gary R. Habermas & J.P. Moreland, *Beyond Death – Exploring the Evidence for Immortality*, (Crossway Books, 1998).
John Hick ed., *The Existence of God – A reader*, (Collier, 1964).
Peter Kreeft, *Between Heaven & Hell – A Dialog Somewhere Beyond Death with John F. Kennedy, C.S. Lewis & Aldous Huxley*, (IVP, 1982).
Peter Kreeft, *Heaven – The Heart's Deepest Longing*, (Ignatius, 1989).
C.S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man*, (Fount, 1999).
C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (Fount, 1997).
C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, (Fount, 1998).
J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, (Baker, 1987).
J.P. Moreland & Kai Nielsen, *Does God Exist? The Debate Between Theists & Atheists*, (Promethius, 1993).
Michael J. Murray ed., *Reason for the Hope Within*, (Eerdmans, 1999).
Ronald H. Nash, *World-Views in Conflict – Choosing Christianity in a World of Ideas*, (Zondervan, 1992).
Clark H. Pinnock, *Reason Enough – A Case for the Christian Faith*, (Paternoster Press, 1980).
Alvin Plantinga, *Warrant & Proper Function*, (Oxford, 1993).

Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, (Oxford).
 John Polkinghorne, *Belief in God in an Age of Science*, (Yale, 1998).
 John Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos & Christianity*, (Triangle).
 Richard L. Purtill, *Thinking about Religion: A Philosophical Introduction to Religion*, (Prentice Hall, 1978).
 Del Ratzsch, *Science & Its Limits – The Natural Sciences in Christian Perspective*, (Apollos, 2000).
 Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ. A Journalists' Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus*, (Harper Collins, 1998).
 Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, second edition, (Oxford, 1991).
 Richard Swinburne, *Is There A God?*, (Oxford, 1996).
 Keith Ward, *God, Chance & Necessity*, (OneWorld, 1996).
 Michael J. Wilkins & J.P. Moreland ed's., *Jesus Under Fire – Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, (Paternoster Press, 1996).
 Peter S. Williams, *The Case for God*, (Monarch, 1999).
 Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?*, (Word, 1994).

On The Web:

- Holy Trinity Church @ <http://www.ht-leicester.org.uk/>

This is the web site of the Church where I work as the Student Pastoral Assistant in Leicester, the student section of the site includes papers, talks and sermons by me and a massive selection of web-links chosen by me.

Arguments for the Existence of God:

Thomas Aquinas, 'Does God Exist?' from *Summa Theologica* @ <http://newadvent.org/summa/100203.htm>

Michael Behe, 'Molecular Machines – Experimental Support for the Design Inference' @ http://www.arn.org/docs/behe/mb_mm92496.htm

William Lane Craig, 'The Indispensability of Theological Meta-Ethical Foundations for Morality' @ <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/meta-eth.html>

William Lane Craig, 'The Teleological Argument and the Anthropic Principle' @ <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/docs/teleo.html>

William A. Dembski, 'The Act of Creation – Bridging Transcendence and Immanence' @ http://www.arn.org/docs/dembski/wd_actofcreation.htm

C. Stephen Evans, 'The Mystery of Persons and Belief in God' @ <http://www.leaderu.com/truth/3truth07.html>

Stephen C. Meyer, 'DNA and Other Designs' @ http://www.arn.org/docs/meyer/sm_dnaotherdesigns.htm

Alvin Plantinga, 'Two Dozen (or so) Theistic Arguments' @
<http://www.homestead.com/philofreligion/files/Theisticarguments.html>

Richard Swinburne, 'The Justification of Theism' @
<http://www.leaderu.com/truth/3truth09.html>

Richard Swinburne, 'The Argument for Design' @
<http://www.faithquest.com/philosophers/swinburne/design.html>

Peter S. Williams, 'A Conversation about the existence of God' @
<http://www.ht-leicester.org.uk/stlinks.html>

Debates on the Existence of God:

William Lane Craig Debates @
<http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/menus/debates.html>

Miscellaneous:

- *Dr. William Lane Craig* has an excellent Home Page brimming with articles on: The existence of God, divine eternity and omniscience, transcripts of several debates on God's existence, a resources catalogue, and Craig's engagement diary @
<http://www.leaderu.com/offices/billcraig/menus/index.html>
- *Dr. Robert C. Koons* @ <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/koons/index.html>
- *Theistic Philosophers on the Web* @
<http://www.accessone.com/~pmartin/theistic.html>
- *The Academy of Christian Apologetics* @ <http://hisdefense.org/>
- *Leadership University* @ <http://www.leaderu.com/>

The Following Sites all promote Intelligent Design Theory:

- *Access Research Network* @: <http://www.arn.org>
- *Origins* @ <http://www.origins.org/>
- *William A. Dembski* @ <http://www.leaderu.com/offices/dembski/index.html>
- *Discovery Institute – Centre for the Renewal of Science & Culture* @
<http://www.discovery.org/crsc/index.php3>
- *Reasons To Believe* @ <http://www.reasons.org/>