**A Metaphysical Demonstration of the Existence of God**

I have argued extensively elsewhere at great length that we have good reasons for belief in God even if there are no formal proofs for God’s existence. Nevertheless, given that there is no reason to suppose that such a proof is impossible in principle, we can provide both rigor and finality to our rationally-grounded conviction that God exists by supplying such a proof, even if it is not strictly required for belief in God to be rational. In this essay, I will consider two issues: first, whether or not God’s existence is capable of proof in the first place and then, having concluding that it is and provided a valid and sound demonstration of this fact, the role and value of such proofs in philosophical theology.

**Can God’s Existence be a Proper Subject for Rational Proof?** Old-style atheists committed to the deductivist paradigm in the philosophy of religion have, by and large, tended to insist that theism is irrational unless justified by such proofs and set themselves to critique such arguments as are presented to them. Somewhat surprisingly, it is largely theistic thinkers who have argued against the in-principle possibility of providing valid and sound deductive proofs for God’s existence. A brief survey of the literature reveals three basic positions relevant to our discussion here.

 The first view, represented by Calvinists like Bavinck, Kuyper, and Karl Barth, asserts the impossibility, or at least the irrelevance, of natural theology and proofs for God’s existence, on the ground that faith and faith alone is the proper basis for adherence to the Christian religion and that faith is a gratuitous gift of God which one either receives or fails to receive at God’s good pleasure. If God’s existence could be proven, this would either make faith unnecessary, detract from its merit or subordinate faith and its source, Scripture, to mere human reason. However, there are at least three things to be said against this view. First of all, it is evidently unscriptural, since the Bible itself teaches unambiguously that God’s existence is knowable “from the things he has made” (Romans 1:20) hence that there is natural knowledge of God. Second, the sort of belief produced by rational argument is not equivalent to the sort of faith that leads to justification: “even the devils believe - and tremble” (James 2:19). Thirdly, rational proof for God’s existence can buttress faith by removing intellectual obstacles to belief, rebutting unbelievers and even serving as *praeambula fidei*, thereby serving as a source of grace by means of which the soul of one predestined to believe is prepared for the grace of faith. More than this, if both reason and faith converge in the affirmation that God exists, this does not make either subordinate to the other. At any rate, there surely can be no merit in believing something concerning which one has no honest rational conviction or contrary to one’s sincere and well-considered rational judgment.

 A second sort of approach, represented by Austin Farrer, affirms the possibility of an apprehension of God but not of inferential knowledge of God. Although the argument can be generalized, Farrer’s context was the neo-Thomist one, in which God’s existence was considered to be demonstrable by means of a valid and sound syllogistic proof from self-evident premises. Farrer’s objection to such proofs is not altogether clear, and seems to involve a number of different elements. First, he says, both God and God’s relation to the world are going to be unique and thus in no way subsumable under a general principle that applies to both God and creatures. Thus, while the principle “Every event has a cause” holds within the physical universe, it has no application with regard to the universe as a whole; the demand for a First Cause is the demand for a cause wholly unlike any cause with which we have any acquaintance and thus very likely unintelligible. To attempt to cover over this difficulty by invoking an “analogous” notion of “cause” capable of covering both the infinite and finite cases begs the question by supposing that the notion of divine causation is meaningful to begin with, thus presupposing the very thing that the proof is supposed to demonstrate. At any rate, any such proof is going to commit the fallacy of four terms, given that the term “cause” when applied to God is going to refer to an unique activity bearing no material resemblance to what we refer to when we use the term “cause” of finite causes operating in the observable universe.

 Defenders of the Thomistic theory of Analogical Predication maintain that since the activities of divine and mundane causation are at best analogous that the meaning of the term “cause” must be analogous rather than univocal in meaning. Critics of this theory maintain that, unless there is something materially common to both types of causality the terms possess no common meaning hence must be equivocal after all. However, both Farrer and the critics of Analogical Predication appear to share a common, mistaken view about language, namely, that the meaning of any term must be constituted solely by a description of its referent, i.e. by its substantive or material/descriptive meaning. In response to both, it needs to be noted that there are other ways to define terms than merely descriptively in terms of their referents. For example, a term can be defined *functionally* by reference to the role it plays in a particular process without any specification whatsoever of its nature. We could thus define the term “cause” as “whatever brings about, produces, or explains the existence or occurrence of something other than itself,’ a characterization of “cause” that is indifferent to and does not require that there be any material resemblance between different types of causes. Thus, in asserting that every event has a cause, we would be doing no more than asserting, with regard to any specifiable state-of-affairs, that something stands to it as cause in the above sense. This does not foreclose the possibility that God might be a being with a unique nature and a unique mode of causality by means of which it is uniquely related to that which it effects or affects. There is, on that account, no *formal* barrier to the possibility of a proof that employs that notion.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 A third view, one defended by Swinburne, asserts that while an inferential strategy is not out of bounds in the investigation of God’s existence, only inductive inference is permissible as a platform for the existence of God; there can be no deductive proofs for God’s existence. Swinburne’s reason for this is that a valid and sound deductive argument for God’s existence would require that we be able to deduce a contradiction from some statement of fact and the denial that God exists. Swinburne maintains that this cannot be done, hence that no such proof can be had. However, he gives no proof or evidence of this claim other than the failure of proofs along this line in the past. He thus leaves open the in-principle possibility that such a proof could be crafted.

To this point, then, we have found no *a priori* constraint on the possibility of a deductive proof for God’s existence. In what follows, proceed to the task of attempting to provide one. Since I have argued elsewhere that nothing hangs on this for Christian belief there is, strictly speaking, no need for such a proof.[[2]](#footnote-2) However, that does not mean that such a proof is not possible. After presenting the proof, I will go on to discuss its import for believers.

**Contingent Being and Surd Facts (The Basic Argument)**

1. A *metaphysically contingent being* is one that *actually* exists but *need not* have existed at any moment that it actually exists and *would not* have existed if the actual world had been different in certain respects than it is in fact.
2. For any such being, there is some specifiable set of conditions such that, had they obtained, would have prevented the existence of that thing or caused its existence to cease.

[Such preventing conditions could simply consist in ontic *privation –* the failing to obtain or ceasing to obtain of the necessary conditions for that thing’s positive or continuous existence at T.]

1. As such, given that some metaphysically contingent thing is/was actual at T, those preventing conditions must have failed to obtain at T.

[Proof for 3: If these preventing conditions had obtained, they would have prevented the existence of this thing at T; since, by hypothesis, the existence of this thing has not been prevented, those preventing conditions have failed to obtain at T.]

1. Preventing conditions operate either through being exclusive of the necessary and sufficient positive conditions for the existence/persistence that thing, or by that thing’s being prevented through ontic privation – the removal of the necessary and sufficient positive conditions for the existence/persistence of that metaphysically contingent being.
2. Therefore, no metaphysically contingent being can be such that its existence is a *surd fact*, i.e. a fact having no further explanation – which is to say that *every contingent being needs an agent cause for its existence at T and actually has one if it in fact exists* *at T*.

[In the same way, that the conditions necessary for the existence of some material thing failed to obtain in actuality is a necessary condition for that thing’s non-existence, since their obtaining in actuality would have been sufficient to make it exist, so that that thing’s non-existence entails their non-existence as well.]

1. Neither, therefore, could the universe terminate in a first member or set of members themselves metaphysically contingent, since this would constitute a contingent being or set of beings that need not have existed at T, are capable of non-existence through ontic privation, and thus require by the necessity of their nature that the required antecedent external conditions obtain in order for them to actually exist. At the same time, the envisaged scenario asserts that those beings yet nevertheless actually exist in abeyance of those conditions actually obtaining. To make such an assertion is to fall into a *material* contradiction that describes an internally incoherent state-of-affairs, one that (like an Escher drawing) cannot be reduced to a formal contradiction and is even in some sense imageable for us, but is nevertheless impossible if conceived as some thing, event, or state-of-affairs actually obtaining in reality.
2. If the existence of a contingent being or some set of such beings cannot be accounted for by reference to some set of conditions internal to the physical universe – which is simply the aggregate collection of all concrete, existing material things – then it must be accounted for by reference to some set of conditions external to the physical universe.
3. That set of conditions cannot itself be a contingent being or set of contingent beings without raising a further question as to their own existence, on pain of generating an infinite, vicious regress, ontic circularity, or the positing of surd facts.
4. Therefore, the universe of metaphysically contingent beings must terminate in a being whose existence is *metaphysically* *non-contingent*, such that it both exists concretely and yet possesses its existence independently of any conditions obtaining external to itself.

I will now go on to show that such a being can only be one whose existence is self-explanatory, i.e. *materially necessary*, one whose actual non-existence, though formally possible, is nevertheless *materially impossible*, i.e., impossible if entertained as actually obtaining in reality.

## Formalizing the Essence/Existence Argument

I offer the following reconstruction of the Essence/Existence Argument as a valid and sound proof of God’s existence. Since I have discussed all of the steps of the proof in the foregoing, I will not stop to offer any further commentary on the argument at this point.

According to modern logic, to say that anything exists is to say that it is the exemplification of a natural kind and to posit it as actual; the *fact* of existence serves as the truth-condition or “truth-maker” for existential statements. In turn, the fact of existence is constituted by the *being* of whatever it is that is truly posited as actually existent.

Being is *structured activity/energy*; *a* being is an *instance* or *example* of structured activity/energy. Activity/energy-as-such is the *principle* of existence in each being (that which makes it to be in the sense expressed in statements asserting existence and expressing the *fact* of existence). Inherent structure is the *principle* of essence-as-nature in each being (that which makes that being to be what it is, i.e. an instance of its natural kind). In what follows, we will call these two principles as present in any individual being its (act of) *existence* and its *essence* (or essence-as-nature) respectively.

 **First Stage: Proving the “Real Distinction”**

1. A metaphysically contingent being is any being that, while actually existent at T, is at the same time potentially non-existent at T.
2. To assert that a being is potentially non-existent at some time T is to assert that its essence-as- nature, (individuated mode of being) though actually exemplified or instantiated at T, need not have been exemplified or instantiated at T and is such that it is actually capable ceasing to do so at T as a consequence of changes in circumstances that could occur at T.
3. This will be conceivable only on the supposition that existence-as-activity is *separable* from that essence-as-nature at T, hence that essence and existence are *non-identical* (i.e., non-internally related to each other) in that being.
4. Essence and existence will be non-identical/non-internally related to each other in that being only on the supposition that they are really distinct and separate principles in that being, i.e., such that neither is the principle of the other.
5. Thus, in any materially contingent being, there will be a real distinction between existence and essence.

**Second Stage: I am a Metaphysically Contingent Being**

1. I exist.

[This is directly known by as something extrinsically certain for me yet as something actually true about the world – an empirical fact.]

1. I possess both existence and essence as separable, hence separate, principles jointly constituting my being.
2. My essence is not the principle of my existence.

*Subproof A*: If my essence were the principle of my existence, then my essence would entail my existence and be inconceivable without it. Yet my essence-as-concept is clearly conceivable apart from my actual existence. So my essence is not the principle of my existence.

1. My existence is not the principle of my essence.

*Subproof B*: If existence were the principle of my essence, then existence (activity-as-such) would be inconceivable apart from its being the instantiation of my individuated essence. However, my essence-as-concept is not the only conceivable essence-as-concept nor need it have been instantiated at all, let alone in my own case. So my existence is not the principle of my essence.

10. Neither are existence and essence merely aspects of some further thing

 that precedes them in being.

*Subproof C*: Anything prior to existence and essence would have to be real or actual prior to and independently of both existence and essence, i.e. without either existing or existing as anything. This is unintelligible. Therefore, existence and essence are not merely aspects of some further thing that precedes them in being.

11. Neither am I a necessary being.

*Subproof D*: If I were a necessary being, existence and essence would be identical/internally related in me. If existence and essence were identical in me, then I would be one in which existence was the principle of essence and I would possess the essence fully expressive of activity-as-such. As such, I would be an infinite being, one limited only by the inherent potentialities of activity-as-such. By the same token, since my being would be fully expressive of the fullness of being, I would be a perfect being as well. If I were a perfect being, I would be omniscient and thus know that I am a perfect being. I don’t know that I’m a perfect being, hence am not omniscient. Not being perfect, neither am I an infinite being. Not being an infinite being, neither am I a necessary one.

12. Therefore, I am a contingent being, one in which essence and existence are really distinct in me

 and such as to be separable from one another in my particular case.

**Third Stage: God Exists**

1. My actuality or real existence presupposes my *substantial unity*, i.e. that my existence and my essence constitute a single unitary being/subject of predication or *supposit*.
2. If existence and essence are really distinct principles in my being, they are not sufficient by themselves to account for my substantial unity.
3. Therefore, my substantial unity requires an external cause that operates in me and preserves my being at every moment that I exist.
4. This external cause cannot be merely another contingent being, nor even an infinite series of such beings.

[PROOF: Any such supposition must either:

*a.* be *circular,* in which case *viciously* so, since it will turn out that the existence of the thing itself will be presupposed as one of its own sustaining causes through its role as a sustaining cause of the things that sustain it, or

*b. terminate* in a set of metaphysically contingent conditions lacking sufficient conditions for their own existence and thus fail to provide an explanation for the existence of the thing from which we began, or

*c*. end by *positing* an actually infinite web of metaphysically contingent conditions each of which is sustained by yet further conditions without end; such an infinite series will be a *explanatorily vicious* one, as is shown by the classic examples (the infinite stack of books, turtles all the way down, the infinite chain holding up a weight, Grisez’s infinitely endorsed check, etc.)

*d*. Nor can this explanation consist of an infinite past chain of contingent events each of which is caused by an immediately preceding member of that series. Since each member of the series can act as a cause only through being caused, no such member of the series is the sufficient cause of its successor, but presupposes the existence and causal operation of an infinite series of prior causes for its own existence and causal operation. This makes each member of the series the product of a completed *supertask*. However, since completed supertasks are impossible, so too is each member of the series considered as an actually existing being. Since the whole series is nothing over and above the members that make it up, such a series is evidently impossible *unless* it is created instantaneously as a completed whole by an external cause existing outside of the series, in which case we once again recognize the need to appeal to the action of an external cause in order to bring it into being.}

17. This external cause must be a non-continent being acting as the ultimate *per se* cause of my being.

18. If any contingent being exists, then a non-contingent being exists.

19. I exist and am a contingent being.

20. A non-contingent being exists.

 21. This non-contingent being is also a *metaphysically necessary being*, one that exists *a se* in virtue of the

 fact that existence and essence are identical/internally related in and inseparable from that being.

22. Therefore, a metaphysically necessary being exists.

23. This necessary being is also an *infinite being*, one that lacks any internal (by nature) limitations or

 external dependence on any circumstances external to itself.

24. An infinite being exists.

25. This infinite being is also a perfect being, one that possesses the nature that belongs to an

 unrestricted act of existence that fully realizes all the potentiality of activity-as-such and

 possesses all value-making attributes internally related in its essence-as-nature in the best

 possible combination.

26. A perfect being exists.

27. There is at most one perfect being.

28. God =df a perfect being.

29. If a perfect being exists, God exists.

30. Therefore, God exists.

 **The Argument from Possibility and Actuality**

Farrer refers to this argument as an “impoverished by-form” of the Essence/ Existence argument just presented, in that it ultimately relies for its cogency on the foregoing argument. I shall present it here as an independent proof. Note that the kind of possibility being spoken here is material, rather than merely formal or even extrinsically epistemically possibility.

1. Real or actual beings exist; at a bare minimum, at least myself.
2. Merely conceivable beings (e.g., unactualized essences existing as merely abstract objects) cannot actualize themselves as actually existent things.
3. Furthermore, the actual world-order represents only one possible world-order among others, realizing some but not all possibilities for existence; as such, things might have been otherwise than they are.
4. Thus, neither the objects constituting the world nor their arrangement is self-explanatory with regard to their concrete actuality or real existence.
5. This will be true regardless of whether or not the universe has existed for an infinite amount of time in the past or takes the form of a “Multiverse,” since these are merely collections of metaphysically contingent beings and so themselves metaphysically contingent collections of such beings that need not have existed.
6. Therefore, there must exist a Creator who actualizes the observable world-order and all of its elements and constituents.
7. This creator must be a concrete being whose own being is self-explanatory, i.e. whose mode of being (essence-as-concept) excludes the possibility of its non-existence.
8. Only a being in which existence and essence are identical (i.e., internally related) could be such a being.

9. Such a being would be God as classically defined.

 10. Therefore, this Creator is God.

 11. Therefore, God exists.

We now proceed to the full version of the argument:

##  A Metaphysical Demonstration of God’s Existence

**Part I: The Cartesian Cosmological Argument**

1. I think (i.e., I am a self-conscious rational subject.)
2. I exist.

(The “I” here is the reader, who apprehends the fact of his or her own existence with extrinsic certainty.)

1. I am a metaphysically contingent being.

(Recall: A metaphysically contingent being is one that is really or actually existent at T and yet at the same moment potentially non-existent at T as the consequence of a change in the circumstances upon which it depends for its existence at T.)

1. In any contingent being, there is a real distinction between existence and essence.

(This is a necessary condition for my metaphysically possible non-existence, i.e. for my essence to fail to be instantiated, since I can either fail or cease to exist only if my essence-as-concept is indifferent to existence, i.e., is conceivable apart from its appropriate act of existence and hence as separable from it. This in turn will be the case only if those principles are in fact separate from one another in my being.)

1. Thus, for any contingent being, there has to be a cause for the substantial unity of act of existence and essence in that being.

(By *cause* in this context I mean the *complete* set of independently necessary and jointly sufficient conditions required to account for the existence, occurrence, or obtaining of any being, event, or state-of-affairs.)

1. The cause for the substantial unity of act of existence and essence in my being is not intrinsic to my being.

(For, as we have seen above, my act of existence is not the principle of my essence, nor is my essence the principle of my existence, nor is there any principle in me more fundamental than these. Further, since I can doubt whether or not I am a perfect being, I am not such a being, and, not being a perfect being, neither am I a necessary being. Therefore, with Descartes, I can truly report that I find within myself (i.e., in my essence-as-nature) no cause or reason for my persistence in being.)

1. The cause for the substantial unity of act of existence and essence-as-nature in my being must lie in the operation of some *per se* cause extrinsic to myself whose activity is ingredient in my own.

(This line of reflection thus far has led to the apprehension of my insufficiency to account for the contingent fact of my substantial unity and of the gap between what I contribute to the constitution and obtaining of that fact and what is needed to establish and account for that fact, hence of the immanent operation of some extrinsic cause within my being that accounts for it. This is the inchoate apprehension of the God of the Philosophers brought to reflective awareness.)

1. The cause for the substantial unity of act of existence and essence in my being is not to be found in the operation of any contingent being or any set of such beings extrinsic to myself.

(Proof: as above, Stage Three of the Essence/Existence argument, 16a-d.)

1. Therefore, the cause of the substantial unity of my being must reside in the operation of a non-contingent being, i.e. one in which there is no real distinction between act of existence and essence, but whose essence is to exist, i.e., that possesses the essence that belongs to an unrestricted act of being that expresses the unsurpassable fullness of being in a single fully actual and unsurpassable Being.
2. Thus, in being aware of the gap between my apprehension of my own existence and what I contribute to the constitution and obtaining of that fact, I likewise apprehend the operation of a non-contingent being whose activity is ingredient in my being as my ultimate *per se* cause upon whom I am immediately and constantly dependent for the entire term of my existence.

**Part II: That the Non-Contingent Being of Part I is also a Logically Necessary Being** (A version of the Ontological Argument):

Let N = the non-contingent being mentioned in conclusion of the Essence/Existence argument, such that “~” = “not,” (EX) = “there exists an x such that.” “(Vx)” = “For all x,” “v” = “or,” and “Nx” = “X is a non-contingent, that is, a materially necessary being.”

1. Necessarily, either (Ex)Nx v ~(Ex)Nx.

(That is to say, the disjunction (Ex)Nx v ~(Ex)Nx is true in every world; this is a logical truth.)

1. As such, in every world at least one of the pair (Ex)Nx, ~(Ex)Nx will be true.

(This follows from the standard interpretation of disjunctive statements in possible worlds semantics.)

1. At the same time, in every world at most one of the pair (Ex)Nx, ~(Ex)Nx will be true.

(This has to be the case by the law of the excluded middle since these statements are formal contradictories.)

1. Any world W in which ~(Ex)Nx is true is a world in which N’s essence fails to be instantiated.

(This is a necessary condition for the non-existence of N in W, since only in that case will it be true in W that (Vx) ~Nx) in W.

1. Any world W in which N’s essence fails to be instantiated is a world in which there is a real distinction between essence and existence in N, i.e., in which God’s essence is conceivable apart from His existence.

(This is a necessary condition for our being able to conceive of N’s essence failing to be instantiated in W, i.e. as not related to an appropriate act of existence. I cannot conceive N’s essence and existence as *separated* in W without first conceiving them as *separable* in W.)

1. There is no world conceivable world W in which there is a real distinction between essence and existence in N.

(This is a conceptual truth about N following from the definition of N as a being in whom essence and existence are “identical”/internally related, i.e. not distinct in N’s being and hence not separable from each other in that being.)

1. Therefore, there is no conceivable world in which N’s essence fails to be instantiated.

(By 5, 6 Modal *Modus Tollens*)

1. Therefore, there is no world W in which ~(Ex)Nx (i.e. Necessarily, ~~(Ex)Nx) and ~(Ax)~Nx.

(By 4, 7 Modal *Modus Tollens*)

1. Therefore, in every world W, (Ex)Nx.

(That is to say: Necessarily, (Ex)Nx.

[PROOF (by S5 Necessitation):

 9a. Necessarily, (Ex)Nx v ~(Ex)Nx S5 Reiteration, 1

 9b. Necessarily, ~~(Ex)Nx S5 Reiteration, 8

 9c. (Ex)Nx v ~(Ex)Nx Box Removal, 9a

 9d. ~~(Ex)Nx Box Removal, 9b

 9e. (Ex)Nx Disjunctive Syllogism, 9c, 9d

 9f. Necessarily, (Ex)Nx 9a-9e, S5 Necessitation)]

10. The actual world is a world W.

(The actual world is a possible world by the standard definition of “possible world” as a way the world could be and in accordance with the axiom “whatever is actual is possible.”)

11. Therefore, (Ex)Nx in the actual world.

(By the Rule: Whatever is necessary is actual.)

12. Therefore, (Ex)Nx – which is to say, God (the God of the Philosophers, exists)

[Additionally, suppose that, as some philosophers have argued, that every essence exists in every world at least as an abstract object, though not all essences are instantiated in every world. However, if it is a conceptual truth that essence and existence are identical/internally related in God, hence not distinct from each other in God, then God’s essence cannot exist in any world merely as an abstract object. Therefore, the essence of God is instantiated in every world and God thus exists in every world, etc. Here is a possible tie-in to Anselm’s version of the Ontological Argument.]

(N.B.- This version of the proof does not require that we simply stipulate or postulate that God’s existence is materially possible; in fact, since (Ex)Nx entails Possibly (Ex)Nx on the grounds that whatever is actual is possible, this suffices to prove the first premise of those other versions of the ontological argument that do make such an assumption.)

**Part III: That the Metaphysically Necessary Being of Part I is an Infinite Being:** This materially necessary being is also a *metaphysically* necessary being, one of such a nature as to be both non-contingent and by nature infinite – without internal or external limitations. Since its existence is wholly unconditioned and unconditional, it altogether lacks any limitations on its act of existence and so possesses the essence-as-nature that expresses the fullness of being.

**Part IV: That the Metaphysically Necessary Being is a Perfect Being** Lacking limitations of any sort, N is also a *perfect being* – one fully actualized, without unrealized potency, exemplifying the fullness of being, and manifesting the essence that exemplifies, either formally or eminently, all intrinsic value-making attributes in their optimal combination.

[This being is God as classically defined; therefore, my apprehension of the metaphysically necessary being of part I is the apprehension of God.]

[Further, the existence of God provides an absolute explanation for everything, since the existence of God can be accounted for by reference to God’s own nature, i.e. the identity/internal relatedness of existence and essence in God.]

[This provides the proof of the crucial premise for Descartes’ Ontological Argument and his argument from my mere possession of the concept of God as a perfect being.]

##  The Value of the Theistic Proofs

If, as I maintain, we apprehend God’s existence as a fact in the course of introspective meditation on the fact of our own existence, and do so with extrinsic certainty, is there really any need for formal deductive proofs for God’s existence? For example, in the two proofs just given, our reasons for accepting many of the premises will derive from the foregoing meditations and rely on it. So are these proofs superfluous?

 Certainly, if there were any flawless strategy for establishing the existence of God – deductive, inductive or intuitive – there would be no need for any further investigation of the matter. However, the plain fact of the matter is that there is no general agreement on any of the approaches to proving God’s existence, and different individuals will have to be met on their own grounds. It is far better for theists to develop and articulate a whole battery of different approaches, showing them either to be convergent or to “cover all the bases” so that theism cannot be dispensed with simply by rejecting the presuppositions of a chosen approach than to adopt the “my way or the highway” approach evinced by the prominent theistic philosophers of today.

 If someone is genuinely convinced (wrongly, as I think) that valid and sound deductive proofs of God’s existence are impossible, then perhaps an intuitive or inductive approach will win a more sympathetic hearing. Those of a more scientific cast of mind may find an inductivist strategy more to their liking, just as those of a mystical cast of mind may find an intuitionist approach, like that offered in the body of this essay, more attractive and thus capable of winning a hearing for theism. Further, despite the difficulties, we ought to strive to satisfy even those who insist that arguments are either deductive or defective by providing them with defensible deductive proofs for God’s existence. For those willing to consider each of these approaches in tandem, perhaps the sheer weight of the evidence for God’s existence drawn from all of these sources will eventually be such as to persuade even the most skeptical that belief in God is at the very least rationally respectable even if not rationally required of us.

 In short, Christian philosophers ought to take St. Paul’s advice, and “be all things to all persons” in order to win souls for Christ. One small but non-negligible part of this task is to remove the intellectual obstacles to belief and to eliminate the grounds for evasion that many intellectuals use to justify their refusal to take the claims of religion seriously. Further, just as we extend Christian charity to our non-theistic and even anti-theistic opponents, so too should we extend the same charity to rival camps within Christian philosophy, seeking to build bridges and forge a united front in the pursuit of the apologetic task philosophy is uniquely competent to accomplish. This, rather than the promotion of one’s own pet theories or projects, ought to be uppermost in the minds of Christian philosophers.

 In my opinion, at least, there cannot be too many proofs or too much evidence for the existence of the theistic God, nor too many different articulations of those proofs or evidences. With this in mind, let us multiply arguments beyond necessity and produce, if possible, such panoply of theistic evidence that the minds of all serious inquirers will be satisfied, each in his or her own way. Of course, we cannot actually expect that everyone will accept even one of these arguments, at least not on a first hearing and must be prepared to field the objections of the recalcitrant. Even so, this does not demonstrate that our arguments are not sufficient to ground rational belief in the minds of those who do accept them; for we all know that there are other reasons besides the weakness of an argument for some people resisting its conclusion. It remains an evident fact, albeit a wholly contingent one, that some people just don’t want to believe in God and will resist it to the end. We must be content to leave people like this to God and instead address ourselves to those at least willing to discuss the matter rationally.

 At the same time, even complete speculative certainty concerning the existence of the God of the philosophers is neither sufficient nor necessary for religious faith. Considered in itself, such knowledge of God’s existence just records another fact about the universe like the atomic weight of iron. More than this, as I (and many others, following Plantinga) have argued elsewhere, it is possible for one to be fully warranted (and thus epistemically justified *so far forth*) in believing the teachings of the Gospel without the need for apodictic proofs or external evidence of any kind. Philosophical argument can at most play the role of providing some of the *praeambula fidei* for some people. As such, it behooves us to advance beyond such arguments and to squarely confront what Paul Moser calls the Divine Challenge issued by the Christian God, a call to repentance and the acceptance of a new life lived in the grace of Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. More than philosophy is needed for this, of course, and to become bogged down in the constant weighing of evidence – always waiting for the next book, the next wrinkle in science or archaeological dig, and so on – can often merely serve as a delaying tactic, yet another way of evading this challenge. Facing and responding to the Divine Challenge is the real business of our lives and ought not to be delayed due to vestigial rational scruples focused on the *minutiae* of abstract philosophical and apologetic discussion.

 God is not “hidden” and there is more than enough reason to receive the teachings of Christianity as a Jamesian genuine option. Those who resist the call and refuse to investigate – to the degree appropriate – the apologetic Christian evidences and make the trial of faith cannot claim, as Russell did, that there is insufficient evidence even if our fallen nature antecedently disposes us to resist that evidence. Those who refuse the Divine Challenge, in whatever form it may come to them, either within or outside the Church, have only themselves to blame if they are excluded from the great good of eternal life. The search for theoretical truth is a serious and an important business, but it is not essential to living either a full or a successful human life. Only a life animated by the grace of Christ, from whatever source and within whatever context it comes, can achieve the natural and supernatural ends for which we were created and to which our true nature as rational beings directs us.

Don’t miss your chance!

1. In fact, this is precisely how I understand the notion of analogical predication – an instance of predication in which the is a formal similarity between the cases being compared without there necessarily being any material resemblance between them. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See my *The Priority of Faith*, Amazon CreateSpace 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)