

NATURAL THEOLOGY & CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS

Preface

This is the second edition of an essay that I felt compelled to write in 2006. The first edition was quite uncritical of the various arguments examined. However, after further study I felt the need to revise the arguments and, ultimately, the conclusion. Although I may no longer agree with everything written in this essay it remains an important part of my spiritual journey. Some ideas in this essay may be oversimplified and reflect the infancy of my own understanding.

Back when I attended church regularly I had a friend try to explain to me that Christianity is not a religion, but a relationship. However, I was primarily concerned with pursuing the “truth” no matter the consequences. This was my curse. Only years later did the epiphany strike me of what exactly he was trying to convey.

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man.

– Romans 1:20-23

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

– Colossians 2:8

Natural Theology and Classical Apologetics

By Joshua Synon

In former times, one sought to prove that there is no God—today one indicates how the belief that there is a God arose and how this belief acquired its weight and importance: a counter-proof that there is no God thereby becomes superfluous. —When in former times one had refuted the ‘proofs of the existence of God’ put forward, there always remained the doubt whether better proofs might not be adduced than those just refuted: in those days atheists did not know how to make a clean sweep.

– Friedrich Nietzsche

Why is there something rather than nothing? Or in a more subjective sense – How and why do I exist? These questions have intrigued mankind for thousands of years. Is it possible to prove the existence of God? Each side of this ancient debate is by no means lacking of great scholars and philosophers. Everybody believes in a higher power whether it be a natural force or a personal God. Even in ancient Eastern philosophy it was taught that there is a force beyond our control that guides us and gives life direction (e.g. Taoism).

Some claim that belief in the existence of a personal God is entirely reasonable. Others argue that such belief is completely irrational and unreasonable, that God is essentially an outdated hypothesis grounded on ignorance. Those in line with Reformed epistemology argue that positive apologetics are unnecessary, that mankind is justified in assuming that God exists. Still others argue for the presumption of atheism, placing the burden of proof on the theist. For the sake of argument, it will be assumed that man is not justified in claiming the existence of God as self-evident. It will also be assumed that knowledge of God is possible.

Defining God

The first task will be to get a working definition of *God*. The traditional theistic conception of God is generally a being of which there is no greater; that which created matter, but is himself immaterial (spiritual); an atemporal being, existing outside of time; not a force, but a person; infinitely just and loving; therefore, worthy of devotion and worship. This God is reminiscent of Plato's Form of the Good (albeit personal) and possesses all perfections. The theological noncognitivist would argue that the term *God* is meaningless. However, many would claim it contradictory to say that the term *God* is meaningless, for without an ultimate (objective) source of meaning (of which *God* is equivalent) there is no such thing as (objective) *meaning*. Hence, the statement that the term *God* is meaningless would itself be meaningless.

But it has been questioned (by great minds such as Aristotle and Kant among many others) whether God (the Platonic Ideal; the "Good") is really needed for meaning or intelligibility. Sartre went so far as to deny that even God cannot give us a life of meaning. Still, the theological noncognitivist would hold that nobody really knows exactly what they are talking about when they say *God*, for the proposed attributes of the theistic God are inherently incoherent to us. In any case, we will be using the traditional theistic concept of God as our framework here.

The Teleological Argument

Teleological arguments are perhaps the easiest to understand and they date back as far as the ancient Greek philosophers. The word teleological comes from the Greek root *telos* used to denote an end, purpose, or goal (Soccio 173). As such, the teleological argument is also known as the argument from or to design, postulating that every design must have a designer. Supporters of the argument hold that the universe has many hints of design and therefore must have an intelligent designer. William Paley (1743-1805), an English theologian, "...insisted that if one found a watch in an empty field he would naturally and correctly conclude that it had a watchmaker. Likewise, if one studies the more complex design found in the natural world, he cannot but conclude that there is a world Designer behind it" (Geisler 88). This is the major argument used by controversial neocreationist groups such as the Intelligent Design movement. The movement argues that it is almost infinitely improbable that mere chance can account for the *fine-tuning* of the solar system and the seemingly irreducible complexity of many biological forms; they attempt to attribute these things to an ultimate Designer (i.e., God). Still others, such as Kant, hold that the very intelligibility of the universe necessarily implies the idea of God, but that the nature of human reason renders knowledge of such a transcendental being utterly impossible.

Objections to the teleological argument come mostly in the form of those posed by David Hume (1711-1776), the radical British skeptic. These include contentions that the analogy drawn between man-made designs (such as Paley's watch) and nature is not very good, suggestions that chance can possibly

account for the existence of mankind, and questioning the conclusion of the argument as adequately describing the theistic God. Hume argued that the teleological argument reduced the existence of God to something that is merely probable at best. In recent times, most objections to the teleological argument are aimed at showing that random chance can indeed account for the apparent hints of design found in the universe. Hume argued that, "Given enough time it is possible that chance reshuffling would produce any given combination of elements including the human eye, the human anatomy, and the whole of the so-called order of nature" (Geisler 89). If there is infinite space and time, then, it seems, there is an infinite amount of possibilities, including the universe experienced today. Norman Geisler, a contemporary philosopher and theologian, argues that "the immensity of the universe does not help the chance hypothesis [because] the mere possibilities in the unknown universe cannot outweigh the probability in the known universe." When the universe is fully examined it may be that it argues more so for design than chance (232).

Proponents of the Intelligent Design movement argue that infinite time does not allow for infinite possibilities based on the second law of thermodynamics, commonly known as entropy, which states that closed systems tend to move toward disorder and disorganization. If the universe had no beginning, they claim, then it would now be in a state of heat death. However, it must be noted that it is an incoherent claim that the universe is materially infinite because infinite is merely a mathematical nuance that can have no ontological status. Furthermore, it is also nonsensical to claim that the universe is finite because the question is immediately raised of what lies beyond the universe. It seems that we can make no absolute claim as to the size of the universe.

Furthermore, the probability that the current universe with all of its abounding life on Earth arose by way of pure chance is infinitesimally small. Julian Huxley (1887-1975), a British biologist, is said to have "calculated the odds against a purely chance evolution of life at 1 to 1,000 to the millionth power (i.e., one followed by 3 million zeros)" (Geisler 233). The naturalist, however, sees that the universe indeed exists and therefore has to live with those slim odds. Geisler further argues that supposing atheism from the argument from chance is self-defeating: "Chance makes sense only on the backdrop of design, as meaninglessness can be understood only in the overall context of meaning... there is no way to even express the state of complete randomness without implying that there exist such characteristics of design as relatability, or even intelligibility" (ibid). Therefore, chance, it seems, cannot *prove* atheism, it can only allow for its possibility, however slim. In much the same way, as Hume points out, the argument from alleged design, however convincing it may be, does not *prove* the God of traditional theism:

But were this world ever so perfect a production, it must still remain uncertain, whether all the excellences of the work can justly be ascribed to the workman. If we survey a ship, what an exalted idea must we form of the ingenuity of the carpenter, who framed so complicated, useful, and beautiful a machine? And what surprise must we feel, when we find him a stupid mechanic, who imitated others, and copied an art, which, through a long succession of ages, after multiplied trials, mistakes, corrections, deliberations, and controversies, had gradually been improving? Many worlds might have been botched and bungled, throughout an eternity, ere this system was struck out: Much labor lost: Many fruitless trials made: And a slow, but continued improvement carried on during infinite ages in the art of world-making... (Soccio 306)

An interesting argument that relates to Platonic Idealism was posed by a medieval Christian philosopher named Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). His fourth way, out of five, of proving the existence of God consisted of an argument from gradation. Aquinas argued that there must be an ultimate standard to which people compare things, For example, some things are more beautiful, while others are less beautiful. The more beautiful must be said to resemble a perfect form of beauty more so than the less beautiful, much as Plato would argue. Therefore, there must exist a being that consists of all of these perfections, including beauty, goodness, and so on. God is said to be this perfect being and ultimate standard. Descartes later advanced a similar argument, but this all seems to be edging on the ontological argument, which will be discussed later. A problem can be seen with this type of argument when one suggests that all knowledge is relational or subjective. For instance, it could be posed that, from birth, we gradually *learn* what others consider “beauty” and then apply it to things on our own. Perhaps beauty is simply familiarity. If this is the case, then there is no such thing as “perfect” and no good reason to employ Aquinas’ ultimate standard or Plato’s Forms.

The Cosmological Argument

It is clear from what has been said that there is a substance which is eternal and unmovable and separate from sensible things.

– Aristotle

Perhaps the most widely debated type of argument for the existence of God is termed the cosmological argument. This type of argument was named so because it alleges to prove the existence of God using experience and facts about the world or universe: the cosmos. The cosmological argument can be dated back to the days of Plato (427-347 B.C.) and it has been debated by great minds ever since (e.g. Aquinas’ Unmoved Mover). There are multiple variances, but in its most basic form the cosmological argument can be stated thus: Everything that exists has a cause; the universe exists; therefore, the universe has a cause. The first premise simply states that everything that is in existence has a cause for its existence. Nobody can deny the second premise, for in attempting to do so he would only affirm it. The conclusions is that, since the universe exists, and all existing things have a cause for their existence, the universe must ultimately have a cause for its existence. This cause is claimed by theists to be God.

The principle of sufficient reason states that everything needs a cause. Critics such as Bertrand Russell (1872-1970), a British philosopher and logician, object that “if everything needs a cause, then so does God; if God does not need a cause, then neither does the world (Geisler 216). This objection has been resolved in part by a temporal version of the argument termed the *kalam* cosmological argument, which dates back to medieval Muslim philosophers such as al-Kindi and al-Ghazali (Reichenbach). It was most recently defended by a contemporary philosopher and theologian named William Lane Craig. The argument is reworked thus: everything that *begins* to exist has a cause of its existence; the universe began to exist; therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence. No longer does God need a cause, the theist claims, as God did not *begin* to exist. Rather, it is claimed that God is atemporal.

The task at hand is to show that the universe did indeed have a beginning to its existence. Craig goes about this by arguing that an *actual* (as opposed to a *potential*) infinite is impossible (Craig). An *actual* infinite, he suggests, is only logically, not metaphysically, possible. Attempting to follow temporal causes back in time will soon cause one to realize that there seems to be an infinite temporal regress of causes. A beginningless temporal series of causes constitutes an *actual* infinite. An actual

infinite cannot be reached by successive addition, and, therefore, an actually infinite amount of time cannot be traversed. In order to stop this regress the universe must be said to have had a beginning that was caused by an essentially *uncaused cause*. But this, of course, reveals nothing about any characteristics of the first cause: whether it is a person or a force; if a person, whether it is essentially good or bad, etc.

Critics, however, claim that it is nonsensical to speak of “before” the Big Bang. Time and space as we know it, they claim, were nonexistent “before” the Big Bang and cannot be meaningfully spoken of. Others claim that trying to reach the beginning of time is quite an asymptotic task in which one can get closer and closer without ever reaching it. This, however, seems only to push the problem back and avoid the issue. In any case, it seems that it is meaningless to speak of the beginning of time, as “time” is simply a regulatory idea that we use to make sense of phenomena: nothing really exists except this moment. Time begins when a person thinks about it.

Modal Cosmological Arguments

Another solution to the objection brought up by Russell is the argument from contingency. The existential principle of causality states that every finite, contingent, changing thing has a cause for its existence outside of itself. A thing is said to be *contingent* if it is possible for it to *not* exist, making it dependent on something other than itself for its existence. A thing that cannot possibly cease to exist is said to be *necessary*, as it relies on nothing outside of itself for its existence. This modal form of the cosmological argument can be stated as follows: every *contingent* thing has a cause of its existence; the universe is contingent; therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence. This avoids the criticism that God needs a cause by positing God as a *necessary*, rather than a contingent, being.

Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), a French existentialist, objected that in order to end the seemingly infinite temporal regress of causes one must invoke a cause that must be self-caused (Geisler 217). As a self-caused being is impossible, because that would require it to be in existence before it was in existence, it is asserted that God cannot exist. Geisler argues, however, that “since only finite, dependent beings need a cause, [the principle of causality] leads to an infinite and necessary Being that does not need a cause” (225). God is therefore an *uncaused*, rather than a self-caused, being. Geisler does admit, however, that “the principle of sufficient reason, by demanding that everything needs a cause, does lead to a contradictory self-caused being... theists... must agree with atheists in rejecting arguments based on the principle of sufficient reason” (ibid). Theists, it is claimed, must rather rely on the Thomistic existential principle of causality.

Geisler, in his book entitled *Christian Apologetics*, pushes an argument from contingency, rejecting both purely *a posteriori* arguments (as Hume showed that causal relationships cannot be shown to exist in a purely *a posteriori* fashion) and purely *a priori* arguments as invalid to prove the existence of God. He attempts, rather, to combine the self-evident *a priori* principle of existential causality, which states that every *effect* has a cause (actualization of a potential), and the undeniable *a posteriori* fact that something contingent exists. It is understood that an *effect* is simply something that has been caused and a *cause* is something that can produce an effect (252). He argues for a cause of here-and-now *being*, rather than of *becoming*, in such a way that is not subject to many of the previous objections. The question he is attempting to answer is why there is *something* rather than *nothing*. Geisler notes that, “The only adequate explanation for why there is something rather than nothing at all is that the something that could be nothing is caused to exist by something that cannot be nothing” (243).

In essence, Geisler's basic argument is: every effect has a cause; the world is an effect; therefore, the world has a cause (253). He begins by affirming that something undeniably exists (e.g. he cannot deny his own existence. He argues that "his existence must fit one of three logical categories: impossible, possible, or necessary." His existence is neither impossible nor necessary, but rather possible; thus it follows that his nonexistence is possible. Something that has the possibility of nonexistence is currently caused to exist by another because potentiality is not actuality (239). Reason dictates that there cannot be an infinite regress of *current* causes of here-and-now *being*: "If each being is a *caused* being... then adding up all these *effects* does not provide a cause for these effects. No amount of effects equals a cause" (245). Therefore, "a first uncaused cause [an *unactualized actualizer*] of [his] current existence exists" (239). Geisler is here attempting to answer the question of why anything has current here-and-now *being* at all rather than simply nothing existing, instead of the temporal form of the cosmological argument.

But perhaps the universe is the "something that cannot be nothing." To this end, Geisler explains, a necessary being, as this uncaused cause is, must be: pure actuality (pure *being* as Plato would have it) because if it had any potentiality (*becoming*) whatsoever with regard to its existence, then it would be possible for it not to exist, which a necessary being cannot do; changeless because change requires potentiality and possibility; nontemporal and nonspatial because space and time involve change and finiteness; eternal because if it ever did not exist, then it would be a possible, contingent existence rather than necessary; one because if there were two or more it seems that none would be fundamentally different from the others in its being; simple and undivided because there is no principle of differentiation in it and whatever is composed has the possibility of being decomposed or destroyed; infinite in all of its attributes because only what has potentiality can be limited; uncaused because whatever is caused passes from potentiality to actuality (240-241).

If we assume that this evaluation is accurate, then it is obvious that human beings are not necessary beings. Mankind and the universe are contingent, limited, and changing beings. Contingent beings must have their *being* caused to exist by another because "potentiality is not actuality" (Geisler 242). Geisler goes on to explain that this uncaused cause must also be: omnipotent because it is infinite in all of its attributes and must have unlimited causal power; omniscient because the cause of the ability to know must be infinitely *knowing*; all-good because the cause of goodness must be all-good (247-248). Furthermore, he argues, this being must be personal, as opposed to an impersonal *force* of sorts, because the cause of personhood cannot be less than personal, although he may be more than what is meant by finite person (249). This infinitely perfect being is appropriately called *God*.

Geisler's final conclusion is that since "this God who exists is identical to the God described in the Christian scriptures, it follows that the God described in the Bible exists" (250). However, it does not follow that everything the Bible says about this God is true, but only that the God described in the Bible exists and events attributed to him in the Bible that do not seem to go against his established nature *could* have happened.

On the contrary, all this talk of a non-local necessary being seems nothing but pure conjecture, especially the specific attributes ascribed to such a being. Geisler's *pure actuality* sounds quite similar to Plato's theory of the Forms. Both, however, seem to dive into the metaphysical realm of unfalsifiable speculation. Furthermore, the necessary being described by Geisler is rather unthinkable and unknowable, a purely logical thing rather than a metaphysical thing. We could not even begin to

comprehend such a being, nay, we cannot even begin to comprehend what such *nonspatial* and *infinite* attributes even mean. To us, they are apparently meaningless. Indeed, *infinite* only applies to logic and mathematics, and has no metaphysical equivalent. Furthermore, it does not follow that the being that created matter now has the power to control it, or that this being even still exists. Nor does it follow that the cause of knowledge or personhood must be omniscient or a person. It is presumptuous to claim that there must exist a necessary being, or that, if it does exist, the universe is not such a being.

Various Objections to Cosmological Arguments

Until rather recently, the first premise of the argument has been understood to be self-evident: everything has a cause. However, scientists are claiming that findings in quantum physics undercut the Causal Principle:

On the quantum level, the connection between cause and effect, if not entirely broken, is to some extent loosened. For example, it appears that electrons can pass out of existence at one point and come back into existence elsewhere. One can neither trace their intermediate existence nor determine what causes them to come into existence at one point rather than another. (ibid)

However, Craig points out that:

...quantum events are not completely devoid of causal conditions. Even if one grants that the causal conditions are not jointly sufficient to determine the event, at least some necessary conditions are involved in the quantum event. But when one considers the beginning of the universe, Craig notes, there are no prior necessary causal conditions; simply nothing exists. (ibid)

Quantum events may not have any physical cause, with particles coming into and going out of existence seemingly randomly, which would suggest a non-local reality, but, with regard to the origin of the universe, one prior necessary condition for any of this to even occur is the existence of *any* energy in the first place. However, as Craig presumptuously notes, the traditional belief is that *nothing* existed before the beginning of the universe and for a piece of energy to spontaneously pop into existence out of *absolutely nothing* not only violates established laws of physics, but is blatantly contrary to reason. Nothing comes from nothing and the first law of thermodynamics still holds at the quantum level. However, as nothing comes from nothing, it seems that belief in creation *ex nihilo* is also irrational. Even so, if current beliefs about quantum events are true, then one of two scenarios is implied: Either there indeed does not exist any *efficient cause* for quantum events, in which case it follows that one can no longer use the cosmological argument to prove the existence of a first cause, or there exists a *nonlocal* reality, which we have not found or cannot know.

Hume objected to the cosmological argument on the basis that when the individual parts of the universe are explained, then the whole is explained:

But the *whole*, you say, wants a cause. I answer that the uniting of these parts into a whole... is performed merely by an arbitrary act of the mind, and has no influence on the nature of things. Did I show you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I should think it very unreasonable should you afterwards ask me what was the cause of the whole twenty. This is sufficiently explained in explaining the parts. (Reichenbach)

Hume claims that it is sufficient to explain, via natural processes, each of the individual parts of the universe. Hence, there is no need to explain a cause of the universe as a whole. However, his objection fails to provide a reason for “why these parts exist rather than others, why [dependent beings] exist rather than not, [and] why the parts are arranged as they are” (ibid). Kant refuted Hume’s assertion by affirming that the “arbitrary act of the mind” is actually part of what creates the universe. It is as necessary to the *phenomena* as the objects, the *noumena*, themselves. Moreover, if each individual part is explained by another part of the universe, it seems that this would inevitably lead to an infinite regress of causes and would never lead to a cause of the existence of the universe.

Also, it seems, that if all of the parts of the universe are contingent, then it follows that the whole of the universe is contingent. However, the critic may argue that the parts of the universe are indeed necessary. Aquinas, anticipating this approach, “goes on to ask whether these beings have their existence from themselves or from another. If from another, then we have an unsatisfactory infinite regress of explanations. Hence, there must be something whose necessity is uncaused.” Aquinas understood this uncaused necessity to be God, but nontheists may contend that the uncaused necessity is matter itself (Reichenbach). This seems to lead to the claim of Russell that the universe *just is*, an objection which has already been covered by the *kalam* cosmological argument. Hence, the universe must be contingent since it has a beginning, and, as such, it must have a necessary cause for its existence outside of itself.

In a devastating blow to the cosmological argument, Hume questioned the validity of the causal principle, arguing that “there is no reason for thinking that the Causal Principle is true *a priori*, for we can conceive of effects without conceiving of their being caused” (Reichenbach). What we perceive and label as cause and effect is actually nothing more than one event followed by another, and we are not justified in generalizing the apparent causality of the event. Hume’s reasoning is logically consistent, but was shown to be fatally lacking shortly after his death by German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Kant argued that there can be no such thing as a necessary being and therefore undercut the cosmological argument. He “contends that the cosmological argument, in identifying the necessary being, relies on the ontological argument, which in turn is suspect” (Reichenbach). Kant held that theists unjustly claim infinite attributes for the first cause. Although Hume’s analysis of reality was found wanting, Kant’s solution to the causality problem showed that one cannot use causality to prove the *ontological* status of God. Causality, in this case, is simply another regulative transcendental idea that we use to make sense of reality. This regulative idea, as such, can merely lead to a logical regulative *idea* of a first cause or designer, which imposes order and unity on the universe, but can say nothing of the ontological status of such a thing. Moreover, this transcendental idea can only be cognized by analogy with nature: hence, all the world religions trying to make sense of things.

The Ontological Argument

The first ontological argument for the existence of God was developed by St. Anselm in 1078 AD. In more recent times, great minds including René Descartes (1596-1650) defended similar arguments. Descartes, a French philosopher, is known for his mistrust of human senses and empirical evidence. This led him to rely on an entirely *a priori* proof of God that allowed him to trust his senses to some extent. Ontological arguments are “arguments, for the conclusion that God exists, from premises which are supposed to derive from some source other than observation of the world – e.g., from reason alone” (Oppy). Ontology has to do with the nature of *being* and ontological arguments are entirely *a priori*. The

basic ontological argument goes something like this: God is a being of which no greater can be conceived; if God does not exist then there is something greater than God that can be imagined, namely a God that *does* exist; therefore, God exists. The first premise describes what God is thought to be, namely the greatest being that can be thought of. In the second premise, "St. Anselm reasoned that if such a being fails to exist, then a greater being can be conceived, namely one that does exist. But this would be absurd: nothing can be greater than a being than which no greater can be conceived. So a being than which no greater can be conceived – i.e., God – exists" (ibid). A being that exists is surely *greater* than a being that does not exist, therefore God must exist. Descartes' argument is similar. He notes that he has an idea in his mind of infinite perfection. This idea, he says, cannot proceed from merely himself: "...because of its very uniqueness, the idea of an infinite, perfect being must come from just such a being: God" (Soccio 271).

The first critic of St. Anselm's argument was a contemporary of his named Gaunilo. Gaunilo proposed that he could use the same logic to prove the existence of any perfect thing, e.g., the perfect painting in a painter's mind. An argument that arrives at the conclusion that a perfect painting exists seems to be clearly fallacious. Perhaps the most infamous objection to the ontological argument, Kant argued that existence is not a *property* of metaphysical objects. The logic of the ontological argument seems to be begging the question, i.e., it is circular: it assumes what it purports to prove. It seems to be a redundant way of defining God as existent and then coming to the conclusion that God exists. Some claim, however, such as Descartes, that the idea of God is completely unique and therefore the only exception for which this type of argument can work.

Critics such as J.N. Findlay (1903-1987) have also attempted to disprove the existence of God using ontological arguments:

[J.N. Findlay] follows Kant in holding that necessity is merely a logical characteristic of propositions, but not a characteristic of reality. It would follow from this that the existence of the theistic God is impossible. For if the only way that a theistic God can exist (*viz.*, as a necessary being) is the very way in which he cannot exist (since no statement about existence can be necessary), then it follows that God's existence is impossible. (Geisler 217)

Geisler maintains, however, that this ontological disproof of God is self-defeating. When Kant and Findlay claim that no statements about existence are necessarily true, they are making a necessary claim about existence (225). Either their claim is necessarily true, in which case it cancels itself out, or it is not a necessary statement about existence, in which case it remains that there can be necessary statements about existence.

Another form of ontological argument is of the modal type. It can be stated thus: It is possible that God exists; God is not a contingent being, that is, either it is not possible that God exists or it is necessary that God exists; hence, it is necessary that God exists (Oppy). If God is not a contingent being and it is possible that he exists, then it is not impossible for him to exist and it follows that God is a necessary being that must exist. However, this argument can be easily turned around to reach the opposite conclusion: It is possible that God does not exist; God is not a contingent being, that is, either it is not possible that God exists or it is necessary that God exists; hence, it is not possible that God exists (ibid). The argument suggests that it is possible that God does not exist. If it is possible that God does not exist then it follows that God is not a necessary being, leaving the only alternative that God cannot exist. This seems to prove that this type of ontological argument is invalid as a proof of the existence of a thing.

Geisler seems to agree with Hume that nothing can be proven to exist *a priori* unless the contrary leads to a contradiction: The only way to prove something *a priori* is if its opposite implies a contradiction; if something implies a contradiction, then it is inconceivable; everything can be conceived not to exist; therefore, nothing can be proven to exist *a priori*. (Holt, Hume's Critique of A Priori Theistic Proofs). Geisler agrees that, "One cannot argue from the mere concept of an absolutely perfect or necessary Being to its existence the way Anselm or Descartes did" (251). Aquinas also concurs, "it does not therefore follow that he understands that what the word signifies exists actually, but only that it exists mentally" (Aquinas). Just because a necessary being can be conceived of – in thought only – has nothing to say about any metaphysical reality.

The Axiological Argument

The next argument in favor of theism to be examined has often been termed the axiological argument. It is self-evident to most that there exists a universal moral code of sorts. There are of course moral relativists who hold that morals are relative not only to circumstance, but to each individual or society. However, it is generally agreed throughout the world that there are at least some absolute morals such as it being wrong to murder or lie. It has been argued that the mere existence of objective moral values necessarily entails the existence of a higher power that is the source of those values. A.E. Taylor (1869-1945) notes that a law or moral system is not valid unless there is "an intelligence which recognizes and upholds it" (Byrne). The enforcer must have ultimate authority and sovereignty over all creatures because these moral standards apply to each and every creature. Taylor goes on to note that, "it cannot be human intelligence that provides the needed recognition and upholding of moral law, since the moral law holds everywhen and everywhere whereas the human mind is limited in its comprehension and scope" (Byrne). Kant, however, would argue that the key to discovering morality is reason alone, the source of morality being not God, but laws that the nature of free will and reason demand, and that a good will is an end in itself.

Kant proposed a different type of axiological argument. He suggested that moral behavior is rational and, therefore, one has good reason to act morally if it is in his best interest to act rationally. If immoral behavior were to lead to the best consequences then it would be rational to behave immorally rather than morally. However, it is known that immoral behavior often does bring better consequences. Hence, moral behavior seems only to be rational if there is more than this life, a divine Justice giver in another life (Hold, The Moral Argument). Hence Kant's faith in the immortality of the noumenal soul. This is reminiscent of the afterlife and judgment taught by much of Christendom.

Another moral case for a Creator is termed the perfectionist moral argument. This argument can be stated thus: humans ought to be morally perfect; *ought* implies *can*; but humans cannot be perfect. The perfectionist moral argument suggests that:

The most plausible resolution of the conflict is not to deny our duty by saying that it's okay to fall short of the moral standard, or to exaggerate our potential for moral behavior by saying that we can meet that standard really, but to invoke God. If God exists, the argument suggests, then he can help us to bridge the gap between what we are able to do by our own strength and what morality requires of us." (Holt, The Perfectionist Moral Argument)

This is reminiscent of Christian theology that suggests mankind cannot, on his own terms, be justified before God without willingly asking for his help.

The Euthyphro Dilemma

In millennia past, Plato marked the origin of a great moral problem posed against the traditional conception of God. When Socrates was being held for trial, he had a discussion with a man named Euthyphro. Euthyphro was only there to witness against his father for murdering a slave. Socrates reasoned that such a person as Euthyphro must truly understand piety. Euthyphro was unable to give a proper explanation of piety ironically establishing that the men of Athens sentencing Socrates to death did not even understand the charges brought against him. However, during their dialogue Socrates exclaims, "The point which I should first wish to understand is whether the pious or holy is beloved by the gods because it is holy, or holy because it is beloved by the gods" (Plato). This enquiry gave rise in later generations to what has come to be known as the *Euthyphro dilemma* and was posed as a disproof of God as the source of morality by Bertrand Russell:

...if you are quite sure there is a difference between right and wrong, then you are in this situation: Is that difference due to God's fiat or is it not? If it is due to God's fiat, then for God himself there is no difference between right and wrong, and it is no longer a significant statement to say that God is good. If you are going to say, as theologians do, that God is good, you must then say that right and wrong have some meaning which is independent of God's fiat, because God's fiats are good and not bad independently of the mere fact that he made them. If you are going to say that, you will then have to say that it is not only through God that right and wrong came into being, but that they are in their essence logically anterior to God. (Russell)

The dilemma asks whether moral absolutes exist because God wills them to or if God enforces them because they are absolute morals in their own right. If moral absolutes exist because God wills them to, then it would seem that they are merely the arbitrary will of God. It would then be quite meaningless to claim that God is good, in which case few would feel justified in worshiping such a deity (as he could arbitrarily *will* anything to be *good*, e.g., murder). However, if these moral absolutes are somehow existent on their own merit apart from God, then the origin seems to lie outside of God and there is no longer any ground for saying that God is the source of morality. With this dilemma in mind, it only seems possible to call God good if his commands and actions reflect some good anterior to himself, such as natural law. Neither answer seems to fit with the traditional theistic concept of God.

The solution that Geisler proposes to this dilemma is that moral values are derived from the unchangeably good and just *nature* of God, not from his will alone, nor from anything beyond him (226). In this sense, the question seems akin to asking whether two plus two equals four because God wills it or if God wills two plus two to equal four because it does. It would seem that the latter would be the best response. Although arithmetic is merely man's way of organizing the universe, the concept of mathematics is derived directly from the *nature* of the universe as observed by man. Furthermore, as Kant attempted to show, the *very nature* of mankind in this world demands certain duties of men. The origin of moral values seems neither from God or man's fiat alone, but rather from the very *nature* of the universe.

It is, of course, possible to claim that God's nature (as opposed to his *fiat*) defines moral values, and that his commandments are merely the revealing of his nature to mankind. In this case, God does not choose or declare what *good* is, but, rather, he *is* the good. This type of argument seems to reduce God to a type of logical idea in a speculative realm rather than an ontological being. Furthermore, this argument would normally claim that a certain holy book (be it the Bible, the Qur'an, etc.) reveals God's nature and

thus moral absolutes, but then the question moves to the reliability of the divine claim of revealed scriptures, which is a claim that is impossible to verify or falsify. Thus, it is only possible through faith to hold that the traditional theistic God is the origin of moral values. Either way, fiat or nature, adding God to the moral equation seems only to add unnecessary metaphysical complications.

Humanitarianism – For or Against God?

Another moral dilemma was posed by a French writer named Albert Camus (1913-1960). In his novel entitled *The Plague*, Camus contends that “one must either join the doctor and fight the plague of rats sent by God on the sinful city or he must join the priest and refuse to fight the plague lest he be fighting against God who sent it.” However, if one refuses to fight the plague then he is acting in an antihumanitarian way. Thus, it follows that if humanitarianism is correct, then theism is not (Geisler 219). The dilemma, however, is based on a false dichotomy: “it assumes a disjunction between fighting the plague and being a believer in God.” Geisler argues, “The theist may claim that man has brought the plague on himself by rebelling against God, but he need not refuse to help him back to God and wholeness again” (227). It is now apparent that it is neither antihumanitarian nor against God to help men recover from their “self-inflicted plague” by bringing them nearer to God.

The Problem of Evil

A giant in terms of arguments against the plausibility of the existence of God, the so-called problem of evil has been debated for centuries. The problem was stated in the late seventeenth century by Pierre Bayle thus: “...evil exists in the world; if there were an all-powerful God, he could destroy this evil; and if there were an all-good God he surely would destroy this evil. But this evil continues... [therefore] the infinitely perfect and powerful God of traditional theism is logically ruled out” (Geisler 218). It is allegedly impossible for the traditional God of theism to create a world in which evil exists. This apparent dilemma was first advocated by ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) and has been disputed in many different ways throughout the course of history.

Karma and Reincarnation

Eastern philosophy has proposed a unique solution to the problem: “Indian thought is able to endorse a complete and consistent retributive explanation of evil: all suffering can be explained by the wrongdoing of the sufferer himself” (Kaufman). Karma and rebirth is the name of this solution to the problem of evil. It suggests that all suffering is ultimately justified in that the sufferer earned the punishment imposed on him, whether in this or a past life.

However, karma seems to be inherently problematic when posed as a systematic theodicy. Kaufman suggests multiple moral problems with karma as a systematic theodicy. The first has to do with the lack of memory of past lives. Aside from casting doubt on the fact of reincarnation, the moral implications are staggering. It would seem unjust to administer the punishment for sins of a past life on the current life because the subject has no idea what he is being punished for. There is a lack of repentance and learning from one’s mistakes and this makes karma seem more like a strict system of retribution or revenge. A second problem is that there seems to be an infinite regress of rebirths. The response typically given by defenders of reincarnation is that the process is beginningless, which only sidesteps the question as it has already been shown that an *actual* infinite is impossible. A third problem lies in finding a reason why *all* humans must die.

Furthermore, if each person has infinitely many lives to reach perfection, then it seems to lessen the ultimate impact of everyday choices in the present life, making them relatively unimportant. A more serious problem arises when the concept of free will comes into mind. Consider the scenario of a terrorist killing innocent people. If these people do not deserve this suffering, then this system has lost its grounds for explaining all suffering. However, if they do deserve this suffering, then the terrorist can be seen as enacting karma on the guilty victims, which could ultimately justify any evil act – “human justice apparently counts as divine justice” (Kaufman). Either scenario seems to discount karma and rebirth as an adequate explanation of human suffering.

Theistic Solutions

Theists have also proposed solutions to the problem of evil including explaining that evil is necessary for the nature and consequences of free will as well as defining evil as something that is not always bad. Saint Augustine is quoted as saying, “God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist.” Geisler contends that this may not be the best of all possible worlds, but it is the best way to reach the best possible world (227). The nature of free will demands that there be such a thing as good and evil to choose from.

Christian philosophers have also established the idea of the fall of man, or original sin, as being the reason that suffering exists. Suffering then, the result of Adam’s original sin, seems to be the stain with which every human being is born with. It may also be argued that only through suffering are great virtues to be learned, including patience and perseverance. Perhaps the most intriguing rebuttal was put forth by Aquinas. He argued that evil is not a positive quality of a thing, but is rather a *lack of good*. As such, God never created evil nor willed it at all, but it has come about as the logical consequence of the free will given to mankind.

Another solution, which relates to the Kantian moral argument discussed earlier, is to invoke an *afterlife* in which ultimate justice is delivered. The early Christian author Paul, in Colossians 3:25, wrote that, “...he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality” (Holy Bible). However, a great number of people have found the concept of conscious eternal physical torment in a fiery hell to be incompatible with the loving nature of the traditional theistic God. A few solutions have been proposed including *universalism*, which denies the existence of a literal eternal hell and claims that every human being will *get into* heaven somehow (perhaps reincarnation), and *annihilationism*, which holds that hell is essentially annihilation of the soul altogether.

In any case, Geisler maintains, moving back to the original argument that the existence of morals demands the existence of God, “...the only way to disprove God via the problem of evil is to posit God as an ultimate moral standard of justice beyond the world” (228). Without an ultimate standard of justice there would be no such thing as *evil*. But to claim that there is evil and at the same time claim that there is no God (who is the ultimate standard of justice) is contradictory and self-defeating.

Alleged Antinomies

Many nontheists have contended that the proposed nature of the classical theistic God is self-contradictory. Included in their attempts to disprove God is the famous oft-posed question, “If God can do anything, then can he create a rock so heavy that he cannot lift it?” It is argued that if God cannot lift the rock, then he is not all-powerful because there exists something that he cannot lift. If God cannot

create the rock, then, likewise, he is not all-powerful because there exists something that he cannot create. Therefore, the classical theistic God cannot possibly exist. However, the problem seems to lie with the nature of omnipotence. Omnipotence does not mean the ability to do what is impossible, but only the ability to do everything that is possible.

Others argue that omniscience and divine foreknowledge seem to be incompatible with the concept of free will. It is argued that, "Because God's omniscience entails knowledge of all of our future acts, therefore, it also entails that it is impossible for any of us not to perform those acts" (Holt, Freedom and Foreknowledge). This argument implies a fatalistic outlook, which hardly seems compatible with complete free will. The theist can argue, however, that God is atemporal, existing outside of time, and therefore he can see what we *choose* to do. The theist could also argue that there are no *facts* to know about the future because it has not happened yet, and therefore God is still omniscient.

Pascal's Wager

I suppose we have all heard of Pascal's Wager. Basically, it states that it is more rational to believe in God than to disbelieve: if one chooses to believe in God and God does exist, then he will be infinitely rewarded; if one chooses to disbelieve in God and God does exist, then he will lose everything; and finally, if one chooses to disbelieve in God and God does not exist, then he will gain nothing. Pascal maintains that, in this case, it is most rational to believe in God. His analysis, however, seems to be seriously lacking. First, it unfoundedly presupposes, as does much of Christendom, that, if God exists, mere belief in God results in infinite reward. Second, it does not follow that accepting the reward is morally virtuous since this God may be, say for the sake of argument, an evil demon. The third, and perhaps most serious flaw, is that it reduces belief in God to self-interest, as do most religions today, and is therefore unworthy of the gravity of the situation. Faith in God should *not be dependent* on any notions of heaven (infinite reward) *or* hell (infinite loss).

Conclusion

It seems that not one of the classical arguments for the existence of God definitively proves his existence. Natural theology is thereby impotent and reason cannot lead to God. Perhaps the only argument that holds some weight is Kant's transcendental *postulate* of God (as a necessary regulating faculty of human reason and experience), but even this postulate is an abstraction within Kant's epistemological system and has no bearing on the ontological status of such a being.

Neither the theist nor the atheist seem able to make any absolute claims about the existence of God. It seems, then, that it requires at least as much faith to uphold *strong* atheism as it does to be a theist. Theism, as well as atheism, is utterly irrational. It is common knowledge that the ancients attempted to explain the unknown via the actions of gods. Is it possible that in the 21st century we are still accustomed to explaining the unknown via the work of God?

What we are left with is an *idea* of God, essentially Platonic, which is not exactly synonymous with the traditional theistic God. But anything more, any statement about the ontological status of such a being, proceeds from nothing more than *pure faith*. There is no *pure reason* to uphold belief in the existence or nonexistence of God.

Such *pure faith*, essentially arising out of nothing other than *inductive intuition*, in things such as the existence of God, in free will, in the immortality of the soul, in the existence of minds other than our

own, in the existence of the outside world, and even in the existence of our own persisting selves, however, is *justified in practice*. However, lack of belief in the existence of the theistic God, it seems, is also justified.

In closing, it has been frequently noted that the God of the philosophers is *not* the God of Abraham, for the latter is *lived in faith*, while the former is merely an endless grasping for metaphysical truth. Faith in God is therefore not synonymous with *belief* in God, for faith is essentially a *state of being*. Ultimately, though, one thing is certain: the purpose of life is *not* to sit around and figure out if God exists. Perhaps Western philosophy has much to learn from the Eastern anti-metaphysical traditions. I am honored to allow Kierkegaard the final word on the matter:

How extraordinarily stupid it is to defend Christianity, how little knowledge of humanity it betrays, how it connives if only unconsciously with offence by making Christianity out to be some miserable object that in the end must be rescued by a defence. It is therefore certain and true that the person who first thought of defending Christianity is de facto a Judas No. 2; he too betrays with a kiss, except his treason is that of stupidity. To defend something is always to discredit it.

If the whole of Christianity hangs on this, on its having to be believed, not comprehended, on its either having to be believed or one's having to be offended by it, is it then so commendable to want to comprehend?

Reason has brought God as near as possible, and yet He is as far away as ever.

People have wanted to perform the astonishing trick of saying: "Christianity is an objective doctrine." This is what has abolished Christianity.

If the problem is to calculate where there is more truth, whether on the side of the person who only objectively seeks the true God and the approximating truth of the God-idea or on the side of the person who is infinitely concerned that he in truth relates himself to God with the infinite passion of need – then there can be no doubt about the answer for anyone who is not totally botched by scholarship and science.

When subjectivity, inwardness, is truth, then truth, objectively defined, is a paradox; and that truth is objectively a paradox shows precisely that subjectivity is truth, since the objectivity does indeed thrust away, and the objectivity's repulsion, or the expression for the objectivity's repulsion, is the resilience and dynamometer of inwardness.

An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the truth, the highest truth there is for an existing person. At the point where the road swings off (and where that is cannot be stated objectively, since it is precisely subjectivity), objective knowledge is suspended. Objectively he then has only uncertainty, but this is precisely what intensifies the infinite passion of inwardness, and truth is precisely the daring venture of choosing the objective uncertainty with the passion of the infinite. I observe nature in order to find God, and I do indeed see omnipotence and wisdom, but I also see much that troubles and disturbs. The sum total of this is an objective uncertainty, but the inwardness is so very great, precisely because it grasps this objective uncertainty with all the passion of the infinite. In a

mathematical proposition, for example, the objectivity is given, but therefore its truth is also an indifferent truth.

In so-called Christian speculative thought, what other presupposition can there be at all than that Christianity is the very opposite of speculative thought, that it is the miraculous, the absurd, with the requirement that the individual is to exist in it and is not to waste time on speculatively understanding. If there is speculative thinking within this presupposition, then the speculative thought will instead have as its task a concentration on the impossibility of speculatively understanding Christianity.

As long as I keep my hold on the proof, i.e., continue to demonstrate, the existence does not come out, if for no other reason than that I am engaged in proving it; but when I let the proof go, the existence is there. But this act of letting go is surely also something; it is indeed a contribution of mine. Must not this also be taken into the account, this little moment, brief as it may be — it need not be long, for it is a leap.

— Søren Kierkegaard

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Will Christian theology make up its mind one day to take seriously the word of the apostle and thus also the conception of philosophy as foolishness?

– Martin Heidegger