

## **Examining Christian Doctrine**

### **Lesson 5: The Doctrine of God – The Existence of God**

Does God exist, and if so is it possible to know him, and if we can know him what is he like? These are three crucial questions as it not only relates to the universe and existence itself, but to us personally in our lives in how we can relate to this God. Theists (those who believe in God) and Atheists (those who do not believe in God) have been debating God's existence for millennia. Arguments have been put forth both for and against the existence of God, so in this lesson we will look at some of those arguments for the existence of God. These arguments can range from Biblical to Theological, Natural, and to Philosophical.

So, let's dive in to these two important topics.

#### **Arguments for the Existence of God**

When talking about God, most people will begin with the Bible, however the Bible doesn't set out to prove that God exists, it begins with an understanding that God just is: "In the beginning God..." (Genesis 1:1). Therefore, theology works from a framework that assumes the existence of God and works its way out from there. Many of the ideas for the existence of God comes from Philosophy. It is philosophy of religion that often explores and analyzes the various arguments, concepts, and questions related to the existence of God.

When making arguments about the existence of God, three things are necessary: **1.** The argument must be logically valid, **2.** The argument must have true premises, and **3.** The premises of the argument must be more plausible than the contradictory view. Various philosophical arguments have been presented for the existence of God throughout the course of history, these include:

#### **1. The Argument from Contingency** (Contingent/Dependent = Everything is dependent)

The argument from contingency is a philosophical argument for the existence of God that is based on the contingency or dependence of things in the universe.

The argument can be outlined as follows:

- **Principle of Contingency:** Everything in the universe, including beings and events, is contingent, meaning that they depend on something else for their existence.
- **Chain of Contingency:** If everything in the universe is contingent, then the universe as a whole must also be contingent. This leads to the idea of a chain or series of contingent beings and events, each relying on something prior for its existence.
- **Need for an Ultimate Explanation:** Since contingent beings and events cannot exist on their own and require an explanation for their existence, there must be something that is not contingent, something that exists necessarily and independently.
- **Necessary Being:** This necessary being is posited as the ultimate explanation for the existence of contingent beings and events. It is self-existent, uncaused, and does not depend on anything else for its existence.
- **Identification with God:** This necessary being is identified with the concept of God, understood as the supreme, transcendent, and self-sufficient reality that is the ground of all existence.
- **History:** The argument from contingency can be traced back to ancient philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle, but it was developed more fully in medieval philosophy by thinkers like Thomas Aquinas

#### **2. The Cosmological Argument** (Cosmic/Universe = Everything has a cause)

The cosmological argument is a philosophical argument for the existence of God that is based on the principle of causality and the existence of the universe. It seeks to establish the existence of a first cause or necessary being that is responsible for the existence of the cosmos. Here's a breakdown of the cosmological argument:

- **Principle of Causality:** The argument begins with the principle of causality, which asserts that every event or thing in the universe has a cause. This principle is based on the observation that things do not come into existence from nothing; rather, they are brought into existence by something else.
- **Need for a First Cause:** If the universe has a cause, then this leads to the idea of a 'first cause' or 'uncaused cause' (nothing caused God to exist) that is responsible for bringing the universe into existence.
- **Argument from Infinite Regression:** The cosmological argument rejects the idea of an infinite regress of causes, where each cause is itself caused by another cause ad infinitum. Such an infinite regress would fail to provide an ultimate explanation for the existence of the universe.
- **Identification with God:** The first cause or necessary being is posited as the ultimate explanation for the existence of the universe. It is identified with the concept of God, understood as the supreme, transcendent, and self-sufficient reality that is the ground of all existence.
- **History and Variations of the Argument:** There are different variations of the cosmological argument, including the Kalam argument, which emphasizes the finite past of the universe, and the Thomistic argument, which draws on Aristotelian metaphysics and Aquinas' Five Ways.

### 3. The Ontological Argument ('Being' = God is the greatest being)

The ontological argument is a philosophical argument for the existence of God that is based on the concept of God as the greatest conceivable being. It was first formulated by St. Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century. Here's a breakdown of the ontological argument:

- **Concept of God:** The argument begins with the concept of God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." In other words, God is defined as the greatest conceivable being, possessing all perfections to the highest degree.
- **Idea of Existence:** Anselm argues that existence is a perfection or attribute that makes a being greater. A being that exists in reality is greater than a being that exists only in the mind. Therefore, if we conceive of God as the greatest conceivable being, then we must conceive of God as existing in reality, not just in the mind.
- **Proof by Contradiction:** Anselm presents the ontological argument as a proof by contradiction. He begins by assuming that God exists only in the mind and not in reality. Then, he argues that this leads to a contradiction.
- **Contradiction:** If God exists only in the mind and not in reality, then we can conceive of a being greater than God—a being that exists both in the mind and in reality. But this contradicts the initial definition of God as the greatest conceivable being. Therefore, the assumption that God exists only in the mind leads to a contradiction.
- **Conclusion:** Since the assumption leads to a contradiction, Anselm concludes that it must be false. Therefore, God cannot exist only in the mind; God must exist in reality as well. Thus, the ontological argument concludes that God necessarily exists.

### 4. The Teleological Argument (End/Purpose = Everything has a design and purpose)

The teleological argument, also known as the argument from design, is a philosophical argument for the existence of God that is based on the apparent design and orderliness observed in the natural world. It posits that the complexity, purposefulness, and fine-tuning of the universe suggest the existence of an intelligent designer or creator. Here's a breakdown of the teleological argument:

- **Observation of Design:** The teleological argument begins with the observation of design and order in the natural world. This includes the intricate structures of living organisms, the complexity of biological systems, the regularity of natural laws, and the fine-tuning of physical constants and conditions necessary for life.
- **Inference to a Designer:** From the observation of design, the teleological argument infers the existence of an intelligent designer or creator. The intricate complexity and purposefulness observed in the natural world are seen as evidence of intentional design, rather than mere chance or necessity.

- **Analogy to Human Design:** The teleological argument often employs analogies to human design to illustrate its reasoning. For example, just as the complexity and functionality of a watch imply the existence of a watchmaker, so too the complexity and orderliness of the universe imply the existence of a cosmic designer.
- **Fine-Tuning Argument:** A specific version of the teleological argument, known as the fine-tuning argument, focuses on the precise calibration of physical constants and conditions in the universe that make life possible. The fine-tuning of these parameters suggests that the universe is "fine-tuned" for the emergence of life, leading to the inference of a cosmic designer who set these parameters.
- **Complexity and Irreducible Complexity:** The teleological argument often emphasizes the irreducible complexity of biological systems, where the removal of any part would result in the system losing its functionality. This complexity is seen as evidence of intelligent design, as it is unlikely to have arisen through random chance or natural processes alone.

## 5. The Moral Argument

The moral argument for the existence of God is a philosophical argument that posits the existence of objective moral values and duties as evidence for the existence of God. It argues that without a transcendent source for moral values, such as God, moral realism (the view that moral facts exist independently of human beliefs or opinions) cannot be adequately explained.

- **Objective Moral Values:** The argument begins with the observation that there are objective moral values—values that are true and binding regardless of human opinions or cultural norms. Examples of objective moral values include the intrinsic wrongness of actions like rape, torture, and genocide, and the intrinsic goodness of actions like love, compassion, and altruism.
- **Existence of Moral Duties:** In addition to objective moral values, the argument also considers the existence of moral duties or obligations—requirements to act in certain ways or refrain from certain actions. Moral duties impose obligations on individuals to do what is morally right and to avoid what is morally wrong.
- **Need for an Explanation:** The moral argument contends that the existence of objective moral values and duties requires an explanation. Without a transcendent source for moral values, it is difficult to account for their existence or objectivity. Naturalistic explanations, such as evolutionary biology or social contract theories, may explain the origin of moral beliefs but cannot ground the objective truth or binding nature of moral values and duties.
- **Transcendent Foundation:** The argument posits that the best explanation for the existence of objective moral values and duties is a transcendent foundation—namely, God. God, as a transcendent and morally perfect being, provides the ontological grounding for moral values and duties. God's nature serves as the objective standard by which moral values are defined and moral duties are derived.
- **Epistemic and Motivational Implications:** The moral argument also considers the epistemic and motivational implications of moral realism. If objective moral values and duties exist, then moral realism provides a basis for moral knowledge and moral motivation. Belief in God as the foundation of morality can provide assurance of moral knowledge and motivation to follow moral obligations.

## 6. The Biblical Argument

The biblical argument for the existence of God is rooted in the testimony of Scripture, which presents God as the creator, sustainer, and sovereign ruler of the universe. While the Bible does not offer a formal philosophical proof for God's existence, it provides theological and revelatory evidence that supports belief in God. Here's a breakdown of the biblical argument for God's existence along with relevant scriptures:

- **Revelation of God's Existence:** The Bible begins with the affirmation of God's existence as the creator of the heavens and the earth: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1).
  - Throughout the Old Testament, God reveals himself to humanity through various means, including direct encounters, prophetic messages, and miraculous interventions. These manifestations of God's presence and power attest to his existence and activity in the world.

- **Divine Attributes:** The Bible describes God's attributes, such as omnipotence (all-powerful), omniscience (all-knowing), omnipresence (present everywhere), and omnibenevolence (all-loving). These attributes affirm the reality of God's existence and his character as the supreme being.
  - Psalm 139:7-10 affirms God's omnipresence: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there."
- **Divine Revelation in Jesus Christ:** The New Testament presents Jesus Christ as the ultimate revelation of God to humanity. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declares his unity with the Father, affirming the existence of God: "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).
  - The apostle Paul teaches that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, affirming the reality of God's existence and his revelation in Christ: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9).
- **Testimony of Creation:** The Bible acknowledges the testimony of creation as evidence for the existence of God. Psalm 19:1 declares: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."
  - The apostle Paul also affirms the existence of God as evident from creation: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:20).
- **Divine Guidance and Providence:** The Bible recounts numerous instances of God's guidance, providence, and intervention in human affairs. These accounts serve as testimony to God's existence and active involvement in the world.
  - Psalm 23:1 affirms God's providential care: "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing."

### **'Eight Reasons in Support of God's Existence' by William Lane Craig**

1. God is the best explanation why anything at all exists.
2. God is the best explanation of the origin of the universe.
3. God is the best explanation of the applicability of mathematics to the physical world.
4. God is the best explanation of the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life.
5. God is the best explanation of intentional states of consciousness.
6. God is the best explanation of objective moral values and duties.
7. The very possibility of God's existence implies that God exists.
8. God can be personally known and experienced.

### **'Three Reasons Why it Matters' by William Lane Craig**

1. Life is ultimately meaningless without God
2. Without God we live without hope
3. If God Exists, you can know His love personally