

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtmwebsite.org Today's Date: September 14, 2025

Philosophical Arguments For The Existence Of God

by Dan Trygg

Last time, we introduced the theological discipline of “apologetics”. The word comes from two Greek words, *apo* = from and *logia* = reason, ...so the original meaning of an “apology” was not an admission of guilt, or asking for forgiveness. It was a reasoned defense for your actions or your beliefs. ***It was an argument that presented a logical explanation for why you believe what you do, ...or why you did what you did, ...or, it was a clear, reasoned argument that refuted false charges against you, and defended your innocence or your claims. We also looked at some biblical examples of apologetic argumentation.*** Romans 1:18-20 and Psalm 19:1-4 argued that ***God’s presence and aspects of His nature are clearly revealed through created things.*** Acts 14:15-17 says that ***God has left a witness of Himself through the world, even revealing that He is good,*** because He gives us good things that we enjoy, and He meets our needs. In Acts 17, we saw how Paul used the partial knowledge about an “unknown god” that the Athenians had to fill them in on the Creator, who made heaven and earth, and who ***placed us here so that we might seek Him and discover Him.*** He has now revealed to us more about Himself, and is warning us that He is going to judge people through a man whom He has appointed, proving that assertion by raising Him from the dead. ***God has put eternity in the hearts of people,*** ...a sense that there is more than simply this earthly existence..., ***prompting us to look for more*** (Ecc. 3:10,11). Romans 2:12-16 indicates that ***all of us, ...whether we were educated in biblical truth, or not..., have an intuitive sense of what is right and wrong.*** This is an indication that we were made by a moral Creator, who imprinted something of His moral likeness upon our hearts. If we were just the products of mindless evolution, there would be no need or explanation for this moral sensibility that is found throughout the world. We also mentioned that ***the ten plagues of the Exodus were each directed against an Egyptian deity.*** God intentionally showed His superiority over these so-called gods, by showing His power over what was thought to be their respective areas of influence. ***This was a defense of Yahweh’s power.*** We also examined Isaiah 44:9-19, ***an apologetic exposé against the foolishness of idolatry.*** From all of these examples, ***we can see that God has communicated much about Himself through the world He made, through His actions in history, and He uses logical argument to show His existence and supremacy.***

In the history of philosophy and theology, there have been many attempts to argue for the existence of God from observations and logic. So-called “proofs for the existence of God” were developed and used to convince people and defend the faith. One of the significant figures in this regard was an Italian Benedictine monk, Anselm (1033-1109), who became the Archbishop of Canterbury, England. ***He was a theologian and philosopher who promoted a method of teaching known as scholasticism.*** Scholastics were influenced by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, and the writings of the early church fathers. They relied heavily on careful analysis and logical disputation to come to common understanding. They promoted the view of “natural theology”, ...that it was possible to come to know God through reason and the observation of general revelation alone. “Special revelation” from God was not necessary.

Anselm proposed an argument for the existence of God that was based purely on reason. His proof is called the “ontological argument” for the existence of God. “Ontological” means the “study of being”. The argument goes like this: ***What is the greatest being which your mind can possibly conceive of?*** (Is He all-powerful? Is He good? Is He interested in you? Would He act on your behalf?) Let your mind ponder that for a moment. ***Then, the next question is: Which would be greater, a being like that who is only in your mind, or a being that truly exists in reality?*** Obviously, a being that exists in actuality is greater than a being only in your imagination. So, ***the greatest being your mind is capable of imagining is a living God. Therefore, God exists.*** While there have been attempts to criticize Anselm’s argument in various ways, it *is* an interesting question to ponder. Why is it that our human minds are capable only of imagining a good, righteous, all-knowing, all-powerful, loving God as the highest thought we can imagine? ***Could it be that we ourselves (our minds and ability to imagine) are evidence of God as our Creator?*** That is no longer Anselm’s argument, but it *is* an important observation about *us*. We have been designed so that the highest thought that can be thought brings us to ponder our Maker. And the highest thought is that He actually exists.

Another of the outstanding scholars of this period was Thomas Aquinas (ca 1225-1274). He was an Italian Dominican friar and priest. ***He was a key figure that further shaped the thought of scholasticism,*** which had become a major force in the theology of the Roman Catholic church of the medieval period. ***He and his associates formulated several arguments for the existence of God, based upon “natural theology”.*** They believed that there was enough information in the way God designed the world, and our minds, to convince any honest seeker that He exists. ***Aquinas proposed five proofs for the existence of God, which became known as “the Five Ways”.*** They were all based upon conclusions drawn from observations of the world. They are:

1.) ***The argument from motion.*** We can observe that things in our world are in motion. We also observe

that everything that is in motion has been moved by something else. This chain of motion could not go on forever, therefore there must have been a first, unmoved mover that caused all other motion. This first unmoved mover is God.

2.) The argument from causation. In the natural world, we observe a series of causes and effects. Every effect has a cause, and every cause had a prior cause. This chain of causes could not go on forever, therefore there must be a first, uncaused cause. This first uncaused cause is God.

3.) The argument from possibility and necessity. We observe many contingent (possible) things, ...things that could either exist or not exist. If everything were contingent (only possible), then at some point there would have been nothing. For contingent things to exist at all, there must be a being that necessarily exists. That is, it exists by its very nature, and could not fail to exist. It has no external cause or creator. This necessary being, a source of all contingent things, is God.

4.) The argument from gradation of perfection. We observe qualities like goodness or perfection in varying degrees among the things we see. There are more or less good things, ...more or less perfect things. To understand these gradations that we observe and judge, there must be a maximum or ultimate standard of goodness and perfection. This perfect being, the cause of all being and perfection is God.

5.) The argument from design. We can observe that unintelligent things in nature seem to act according to purpose or towards an end. This purposeful order suggests an intelligent designer. Since natural things are not intelligent in themselves, but act with intelligence, there must be an intelligent being that has designed and directs them toward these ends. This intelligent being is God.

Some other common arguments for the existence of God include:

6.) The argument from consciousness. The existence of consciousness, self-awareness, and subjective experience cannot be explained from a materialistic basis. The fact that “mind” exists points to a conscious, self-aware Creator, who created us to be conscious like Him.

7.) The argument from desire. People seem to be born with an innate desire for meaning, purpose, and a longing for fulfillment. This is not explainable in terms of a natural, material existence. This longing points to the existence of a higher purpose and reality that can fulfill those desires. God is the ultimate fulfillment that we long for.

8.) The moral argument. Human beings seem to have a universal sense of moral values, i.e., that at least *some things* are right and *other things* are wrong, in every civilization and culture in history. This moral nature cannot be explained from natural causes, or a materialistic world view. The moral nature of humanity points to the existence of a moral God who created us with this moral sensibility.

9.) The argument from miracles. Reports of miracles and supernatural works of power, such as healings and events that are inexplicable from natural causes, have occurred throughout history. Many have been witnessed by multiple people, and the results have been documented and substantiated by objective examination. These miraculous events point to the existence of a being who can act outside and beyond the normal laws of nature, ...God.

10.) The argument from personal experience. History is full of the testimonies of people who claim to have had personal encounters or experiences with God. These experiences have been life-changing, ...providing them with new purpose, meaning, and a change of life for the better. These experiences are evidence that a living God exists.

While none of these arguments may be compelling in themselves, they do provoke some consideration. Together, they provide converging lines of evidence and contemplation that would cause an open-minded person to look more closely and honestly into this question. As we saw in our examination of Romans 1:18-20, even though the knowledge of God is *clearly seen* and *made evident* through the created world, or even within our minds, **there remains another barrier to belief, ...our will. If we don't want to believe, we may choose to resist the truth.** We may choose to not only *reject it*, we may choose to *suppress it* so we can claim ignorance or even innocence.

This was the problem with the scholastic theologians and their idea of “natural theology”. They put too much faith in the power of logic and reason to compel people to believe. They thought that other people should surely “see what they saw”, or “conclude what they concluded”. **They did not take seriously enough the insanity of sin, and the stubborn resistance of self-will.**

The history of theology (and philosophy) is often characterized by back and forth movements of popular ideas that come into vogue, but are eventually shown to be inadequate. **They are often replaced by a school of thought that emphasizes the areas of weakness of the previous belief system.** And so, the optimistic, unrealistic expectation of the *scholastics* that people could and would embrace the “obvious conclusions” of the arguments for the existence of God, was replaced by the Reformation idea of “total depravity”. Often this is presented as there is *nothing* at all in man that is open toward God, ...*nothing* that would draw him to seek or pursue. This seems to go too far. So, for me, I think “natural theology” went too far in its unrealistic expectation that logic and observation were enough to compel people to faith, ...but **the Bible does seem to say that “general revelation” does communicate truth to people, ...and some are drawn to seek deeper. We need more, however. We need “special revelation” and spiritual enlightenment.**