

The Existence of God

"A religious knowledge of God, wherever existing, comes by revelation: otherwise we should be committed to the incredible position that a man can know God without his willing to be known"

H R Mackintosh
Quoted by Alistair McGrath

It is said that the study of theology begins with two prepositions namely:

1. That God exists.
2. And that He has revealed himself in his divine Word.

The existence of God is assumed in Scriptures without giving any argument to establish or prove it. Thus our chief ground for belief in the reality of God is found in the Bible, the Word of God.

The evidence that God exists is of course found throughout the pages of Scripture in the form of accounts of what God has done. For example the very first verse of Genesis states the a priori fact that God exists i.e. *"In the beginning God"*, God the first cause of all that is and then proceeds to tell us that *"God created the heavens and the earth."* By the things that are seen and made, by the works which God performs we may see that God exists.

We say the Bible declares the existence of God in such statements as Hebrews 11v 6

For he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them of them that diligently seek him.

Or the opening statement of the Bible;

In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth.

We say that God is seen on almost every page of Holy Writ, revealing Himself in words and actions as;

The upholder of His creation, the ruler of the destinies of individuals and nations, the one who works out his great plan of salvation.

Berkhof reminds us that it is only by faith however that we accept the revelation of God and it is only by faith that we come to any real insight and understanding of its doctrine. But when we say we take the Bibles' declaration of the existence of God by faith we straightaway add that this faith is not unreasonable faith not a blind leap of faith.

Says Berkhof

"But this faith is not blind faith, but a faith that is based on evidence, and that evidence is found primarily in the Scriptures the inspired Word of God and secondly in God's revelation in nature"

It is not unreasonable to regard Scripture as true from cover to cover.

Scripture affirms the existence of God and this is backed up by many secondary and corroborative proofs in the world around us.

It is not unreasonable therefore to believe in the existence of God.

There are a number of classical arguments that while not conclusive are yet corroborative proofs of God's existence. It is to these arguments that we now turn.

The traditional "proofs" for the existence of God that have been constructed by Christian (and some not Christian) philosophers at various points in history are in fact attempts to analyse the evidence especially the evidence from nature, in extremely careful and logically precise ways, in order to persuade people that it is not rational to reject the idea of God's existence. It is true that sin causes people to think irrationally, and these proofs are attempts to cause people to think rationally or correctly about the evidence of God's existence, in spite of their irrational tendencies caused by sin.

Grudem p 143

PART I

THE TRADITIONAL FIVE ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

1 THE ARGUMENT FROM UNIVERSAL BELIEF-- THE HISTORICAL OR ETHNOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (Ethnological, the science of races their manners their religion etc.)

Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse; because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imagination, and their foolish heart was darkened.... And even etc.

Rom 1:19-20

There is a world wide intuition in the heart of man that there is a supreme being who is to be worshipped. Although this intuition expresses itself in many different ways, it is at rock bottom the same in every age and race.

This intuition demands personality, power and perfection in God. Any description which weakens any of these elements leaves the mind unsatisfied.

Evans in Great Doctrines of the Bible says:

Man everywhere believes in the existence of a supreme Being or Beings to whom he is morally responsible and to whom propitiation needs to be made. Such belief may be crudely or even grotesquely stated and manifested, but the reality of the fact is no more invalidated by such crudeness than the existence of a father is invalidated by the crude attempts of the child to draw a picture of its father.

Hutton says:

A haunting presence besets man behind and before, he cannot evade It gives new meaning to his thoughts and new terror to his sins. It becomes intolerable. He is moved to set up some idol, carved out of his own nature that will take its place – a non moral god who will not disturb his dreams of rest."

Plutarch said in his day:

"That a man might travel though the world over and not find a city without its temple or its Gods".

Strong said:

Man's experience of face to face apprehensions of God, in danger and guilt, give some reason to believe that a presentative knowledge of God is the normal condition of humanity, but, as this presentative intuition of God is not in our present state universal, we here claim only that men have a rational intuition of God.

All persons everywhere have a deep inner sense that God exists, that they are his creatures, and that he is their Creator. Paul says that even Gentile unbelievers "*knew God*" but did not honour him as God or give thanks to him. (Rom 1:21) He further says that wicked unbelievers have "*exchanged the truth about God for a lie*" (Rom 1: 25) implying that they actively or wilfully rejected some truth about God's existence and character that they clearly knew. Paul says that what can be known about God is plain to them, and adds that this is because God has shown it to them (Rom 1: 19)

Paul recognises that sin will cause people to deny their knowledge of God: he speaks to those who by their wickedness suppress the truth. (Rom 1: 18) and says that those who do this are without excuse.

Man is not aware of God as Adam was aware of God in the Garden of Eden but is still aware of the presence of God. It is not irrational to believe in God.

We can assume this inner awareness of God when preaching. Men and women deep down know that there is a God. One writer gives this very everyday example i.e. "*Whilst travelling in a car with several friends one in that conversation was firmly denying that they had any inner awareness of God's existence. Shortly after this the car hit a patch of ice*

and spun round in a complete circle at high-speed. Before the car came to rest in a large snowdrift (with no serious damage) that same person was heard to call out "Lord save us, please God help us."

Trouble and adversity is one of the great arguments against atheism.

2. THE ARGUMENT FROM CAUSE AND EFFECT, OR THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (Cosmological i.e. the created order)

It is an acceptable principle that every effect must have an adequate cause. Events everywhere are explained by a cause lying outside themselves.

Every existing thing in the world must have an adequate cause; and if this is so, the universe must also have an adequate cause. The cause of the universe must of necessity be infinitely great. The universe is not self-existent. Events everywhere are explained by a cause lying outside them. To avoid *regressus ad infinitum* we must arrive at a being who is in fact the first cause, one on whom all else depends.

Everything that we see in the universe owes its existence to some producing cause. The universe owes its existence to a cause which is equal to its production as we have said this cause must be infinitely great. Modern science does not encourage the idea of a self-sufficing self-perpetuating universe. Such teaching is the teaching of pantheism. (The belief that nature is God)

Bancroft in his *Elemental Theology* adds;

It is an accepted principle that every effect must have an adequate cause. All elements, therefore, which are an effect, must reside at least potentially within the cause. Certain elements are characteristic of the material universe which argue for the existence of God as we know him through the medium of divine revelation.

1. The element of intelligence or purposeful tendency. Order and harmony are marks of intelligence. By this is meant that order and harmony are invariably conjoined with intelligence. If this is true, and these qualities are found in nature, then the existence of intelligence in nature is proved beyond all doubt. An illustration of this order and harmony in nature is the molecule, which is a definite mass of electrons combined in the most exact arithmetical and geometrical relations.

2. The element of personality. Man, possessed of personal being, argues for the existence of God a personal God. We know that we exist. We cannot rationally doubt that fact, for the knowledge is immediate and carries with it its own certificate of certainty. From this the next step is inescapable. The fact is almost forced upon us that we are not self-caused. This immediately brings with it the correlative (reciprocal) truth that we must have been caused by

someone other than ourselves who must have had sufficient power to produce us as personal spirits. We were caused either by a personal agency or by agency that was not personal. There is no other choice. We must appeal to the axiomatic (self evident) truth of reason that the cause must be adequate to produce the observed effect. A personal effect thus had a personal cause.

3. The element of man's mental, moral, and emotional nature. Man is possessed of mentality and morality. Therefore these qualities must be included in the cause which produced him. Man has an intellectual or moral nature hence his Creator must be an intellectual and moral Being, a Judge, and Lawgiver. Man has an emotional nature; only a Being of goodness, power, love, wisdom and holiness could satisfy such a nature, and these things denote the existence of a personal God.

4. Likewise the fact of conscience in man speaks of a moral Creator.

Elemental Theology p43

3. THE TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT OR THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN (Related to or connected with final causes)

This is a well known argument from design. Natural forces and the adaptation to them of living things argue that there is an order and design behind the world. That is design must argue the existence of a designer. This is sometimes called the Plain Man's Argument. We find it implied in many passages of Scripture. Psalm 19: 1 -4, Job 37-41, Matthew 6: 25-32, Acts 14:15-17, 17: 23-28. The universe displays to us a vast system, connected in all its parts, and developing in a particular direction. There are innumerable instances of the ingenious ways in which the different parts fit into one another, and the more we learn from natural sciences, the more instances we find. For example it is no accident that the earth's axis of rotation is tilted 23.5 degrees to cause the four seasons, or that the earth rotates once every 24 hours producing day and night preventing us getting tired. It is no accident that our atmosphere is the exact thickness and composition to serve as a filter to ultraviolet rays and cosmic rays that are harmful to life.

Consider the brain! The human brain is known to be superior to the most sophisticated modern computers of the world. It is known today that the human brain is composed of about 12 billion neurones giving a total of 120 trillion connections in the human brain -- the most sophisticated and complicated arrangement known to man.

Or what about the eye? When Darwin considered the human eye, he had to write: "*To suppose that the eye could have been formed by natural selection seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree.*"

The chance that the number of letters of the alphabet, thrown together by accident would produce one line of one of Shakespeare's plays is small beyond imagination; the chance that the universe could have taken its present form by the chance coming together of atoms is

incalculably smaller still. The amazing beauty which nature so often displays leads us to believe that the designer of it is not only the greatest of engineers, but all so the greatest of artists.

One of the most well known writers on this subject was William Paley Archdeacon of Carlisle (1743-1805) in his Natural Theology. We sometimes speak of Paley's argument from the watch. Paley describes all the composition parts and movements of the watch and says that these characteristics when present argue for intelligence design. The universe in infinitely more complex terms in the same way demands a designer.

The world everywhere reveals intelligence, order, harmony, and purpose, and this implies the existence of an intelligent and purposeful creator.

We can say that belief in designed is the basis and root of all scientific discovery.

It inspired ...

Newton in the discovery of gravity.

Hervey in the discovery of the circulation of the blood.

Kepler in his observations of the movements of the planets.

4. THE MORAL ARGUMENT

This is drawn from the sense of moral accountability which is deep-seated in man's mental constitution. Man has an inward sense that some actions are right, and others are wrong. He has a conscious pleasure attending the performance of some actions and a conscious dissatisfaction pain and unease attending others. Not only so that when this inward sense of duty and moral obligation has been outraged and he has gone against or counter to conscience there is deep within man some apprehension of the displeasure of a higher power.

Clapperton explains this argument as follows:

1. Conscience implies a moral governor. Man's conscience declares to him that there are certain actions that he ought not to do. He feels the stringent authority of a moral law. Who makes that law? Who has authority enough to make kings tremble? This mysterious inward monitor in the heart of man points with forcible suggestiveness to a Moral Governor.

2. The idea of justice is only explained by the existence of a Just Intelligence ruling the hearts of men.

Science fails to find either equality or justice in nature. Is the Tiger just to the goat that it eats? Are they equal in rights of power or happiness? Yet scientists like the generality of men feel that the oppressed races of men should and must have justice. Man's heart everywhere rises against

unjust cruelty. Why? This strange lesson of giving equal rights of life and enjoyment to all individuals is not taught by nature. But the human mind is bound by its constitution to the conviction that men are equal and only justice is right. The conviction is universal. Men the world over from the Hottentot to the Eskimo all protest against cruel injustice. This universal conviction must have some source some adequate cause. Nothing less than a power that makes for righteousness can be that cause. That is, a just power is the cause; and a power that discriminates just from unjust and advocates righteousness, must be a moral person i.e. God.

The Essentials of Theology p 41

5. THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (That which has to do with the nature and character of beings)

Anselm 1033-1109 was the first to present this argument which was later presented by Descartes the French philosopher 1546-1650. Historically it was the last to appear.

Based on the concept of perfection..... We have the idea of an infinitely perfect being. As we are finite (limited, bounded), the argument runs, the idea of the infinite (without bounds) could not originate with us. The conclusion is the idea must therefore come from God.

The inference to be drawn from the consideration of our ideas of perfection is that these ideas are necessary to the human mind; and from the conditions of human life we have no option but of believing that these necessary ideas and concepts must have some being corresponding to them in the universe outside the mind of man. Sublime and satisfying is the message born to us by this course of reasoning. It assures us that there is Perfect Beauty somewhere; that there is Perfect Truth somewhere; that there is Perfect Righteousness somewhere; and that we are justified in regarding these glorious ideals as resident in the First Cause i.e. God, and in confidently believing that where Perfect beauty and Perfect Truth and Perfect Righteousness are, there is God.

See The Essentials of Theology page 42..

Thus we have stated the classical philosophical arguments for the existence of God. They are at best secondary arguments but are nevertheless helps and guides to our understanding of God's revelation of himself in his inspired Word.

They do help us to see that it is not unreasonable or irrational to believe in God.

PART II

THE ATHEIST CONTENDS THAT THERE IS NO GOD

Scripture knows the existence of the atheist.

Ps 10: 4 *"The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts."*

Ps 14:1 *"The fool hath said in his heart there is no God."*

The atheistic philosopher Bertrand Russell describes the hopeless philosophy of atheism as follows;

That man is the production of causes which had no provision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, of the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labour of the ages all the devotion, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins – all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.

However we can say that before the atheist can positively assert that there is no God, he must presumptuously assume for himself the wisdom and the omnipresence of God.

He must explore the universe, the entire universe to be sure that no God is there.

Dr Chalmers the great Scottish preacher of former years expressed the point as follows;

Before one can positively assert that there is no God, he must arrogate to himself the wisdom and ubiquity/omnipresence of God. He must explore the entire circuit of the universe to be sure that there is no God. He must have interrogated all the generations of mankind and all the hierarchies of heaven to be certain they had never heard of God in short,.....

For man not to know God, he has only to sink beneath the level of our common nature. But to deny God he must be God himself.

WHAT IS AGNOSTICISM?

The term was coined by Huxley in 19th-century from the Greek *gnosko-* to know *a-gnosko* – not to know.

There may be a God, but whether that God is a force or a person is totally unknown and unknowable.

Agnosticism like atheism leads to despair.

James Ore in his Christian View of God and the World, states:

Agnosticism has brought with it a train of baleful results. With the loss of certainty on the highest question of existence there comes inevitably a lowering of the pulse of human endeavour all round – and a lessening of certainty even about morals, for why should these remain unaffected when everything else is going – and as we see in much of the speculative thought of the day, a hopelessness about the future.

Deprive the world of a belief in God and everything becomes an insoluble mystery, mystery a scene of wrecked illusions, no chance of real progress, life in general,

*A tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury
Signifying nothing.*

Macbeth quoted by Ore p 67

WHAT IS MATERIALISM?

Materialism is a method of thought which gives priority to matter.

On this view material atoms constitute the ultimate and fundamental reality of which all things, rational and irrational, are but combinations and phenomena.

All things begin with atoms in motion and all things can be explained in terms of the result of that first primeval motion. In short the whole evolutionary process.

Professor Tyndall, speaking at a meeting of the British Association 1874 boasted that science would one day be able to explain all that has happened and does happen in terms of, “*the ultimately purely natural march of evolution from the atoms of the primeval nebula to the proceedings of the British Association for the Advancement of Science.*”

For the consequences of this view see Professor Joad’s Guide to Modern Thought. Page 39

Modern popular application of this view is that there is no God, no meaning, and wealth, bodily satisfaction, sensuous pleasures, are the only worthwhile things man can hope to obtain.

Eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.

WHAT IS PANTHIESM?

What is pantheism? Simply this, the belief that, the universe is God and God is the universe.

Or in other words God is everything and everything is God.

Pantheists believe that God has no separate and distinct existence apart from the universe.

Pantheists deny the distinction between matter and mind.

The personality of God.....This is the truth that opposes the error of pantheism, which teaches that God is everything and everything is God, and God is the universe; and that he has no separate and distinct existence. The idea is that the aggregate of individual things is God. It may as well be set that the contents of a man's consciousness that any one time was the man himself; or that the waves of the ocean were the ocean itself.

Pantheism denies the distinction between matter and mind, between the infinite and the finite. There is, according to this theory but one substance, one real being; hence the doctrine is called "monism," or the All One Doctrine. It makes the world of matter not only consubstantial, but co eternal with God. This precludes the idea of creation, except as an eternal and necessary process. It denies that the infinite and absolute being himself has intelligence, consciousness, or will. The Infinite comes into existence in the finite. The whole life, consciousness, intelligence, and knowledge of God is the life, consciousness, intelligence, and knowledge of matter. Thus pantheism denies the personality of God, for personality, by consciousness, implies a distinction between the self and the not self; then such distinction, according to pantheism, is a limitation inconsistent with the nature of the infinite God, who therefore is not a person who can say "I" and who can be addressed as "Thou".

Berkhof

We may also note that New-Ageism has a pantheistic notion of God.

New Age is monistic, i.e. that everything is part of the great god soul.

Mark Satin New Age author stays;

Planetary consciousness recognises our oneness with all humanity and in fact that all life, everywhere, and with the planet as a whole.

Also some Christians on the charismatic wing are wandering into this pantheistic view of God.

1. Kenneth Copeland of Toronto blessing fame is one such. He teaches people to believe that when born-again they become Gods. Believers do not have God in them but become part of God.

This is pure pantheism, human beings become part of God and indeed everything is God.

Or as another on this same charismatic wing has said;

For no matter how much we may like to pussyfoot around it, all those who postulate of loving God and really think about it eventually come to a single terrifying idea: God wants us to become himself (or Herself or Itself) We are growing towards godhood. God is the goal of evolution. It is God who was the source of the evolutionary force and God who is the destination.

See page 41 The Trojan Horse Alan Morrison

We can say that the difference between the God revealed to us in the Bible, the true God and the god of pantheism is this;

The God of the Bible is a personal God, a God with his own personality and distinct existence apart from his creation.

The god of the pantheist only exists and is conscious through the world and the universe. For the pantheist god cannot exist apart from the universe. The pantheist says;

“Take away nature and the soul and every sign of God disappears.”

But the Bible teaches that God called the world into existence.

God has created something other than himself a world which is not God exists alongside of him.

Brunner

WHAT IS DEISM?

Perhaps we can say that the opposite extreme of pantheism is what is called Deism.

We hear of the Deist hardly ever by this name today.

This belief admits that there is a powerful deity, so separates him from his own universe to remove him from active control over it.

God for the Deist is merely the first cause, but now far removed in personal, unknowable remote.

Deism emphasises God’s transcendence, but goes too far. Our God is the High and lofty one

who inhabits eternity and yet the God who draws near and can be known. The God of the Deist has no immediate relationship with the world. God made the world but now has no dealings with it. This opinion is sometimes referred to as the absentee landlord view of God.

Thomas Hardy's poem "God Forgotten" is said to be an illustration of Deism.

Deism grew in popularity in England towards the end of the 17th century and during the 18th century. Church leaders such as Tolland Collins and Tindal tended towards Deism.

OTHER DEFECTIVE VIEWS OF GOD

At the idea of a finite God that is a God who is not all-powerful

HG Wells leaned to this view. He wrote his famous Outline of History with no trace of God's sovereign hand being seen.

In contrast Spurgeon said;

When I read the newspaper I look to see my heavenly Father as governor of the world.

In order to get round the problem of evil some today have conceived that God is limited knowledge and power. This view is sometimes known as Open Theism, its teaching is the God has created a sphere that is his creation, over which he wills not to be sovereign. It advocates the view that there are things that go on in the world over which God has no control. Such teaching is of course a denial of Scripture.

We will close this session by quoting the following from Westcott's The Historic Faith:

I believe in God -- to say this is to confess that there is something greater than our minds, greater than our hearts, to which we can aspire with love answering to love: something which thought can touch, so to speak, but neither prove nor measure, which affection can reach after and yet not everywhere embrace.

I believe in God -- to say this is to confess that there is, in spite of every unpunished sin, every fruitless sorrow (as we judge); one purpose of victorious righteousness being fulfilled about us and in us, one purpose able to reconcile justice and mercy in the complete accomplishment of the destiny of creation.

I believe in God -- to say this is to confess that we are not alone, ourselves, our families, our nation, our race, and yet that we are alone: not alone because we are bound to countless forms of finite being visible and invisible, alone, individually alone, because the full harmony of the universe depends upon the presence in due measure of all the parts, even of that feeblest part, though which is inaudible to our ears.

I believe in God -- to say this is to confess that we stand each as children face-to-face with him whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain: to confess that the preservation of the world depends on him who made it: to confess that there is a unity of being of which there is one source and one end, that there is, in the words of St Paul, one God, the father, of whom are all things and we unto him.

These are the thoughts which we have to seek to bring into our life, thoughts of the unsearchable Majesty, and the unfailing Providence of God, of the endless variety and supreme unity of His creation, thoughts which at once pass into prayers. Someone has spoken of the "knees of the soul." So may we bend now on "the Knees of our souls as we contemplate this first great article of our creed, I believe in God.

I believe in God, the Father -- in this connection Father is a gift of the Gospel

Note. We have concerns about Wescott's orthodoxy in all things but felt the above as worthy of reflection.