

# WHEN SKEPTICS ASK

**A Handbook on Christian Evidences**

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REVISED AND UPDATED

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AND RONALD M. BROOKS



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This book is dedicated to all who would seek  
a reason for the hope that is in them.



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# I

## THE NEED TO ANSWER EVERYONE

This past Sunday, a first year college student visited our Sunday morning service and spoke to me afterwards. He said, “I am an atheist.” A few years ago that statement would have left me scrambling for a way to reach him. However, the materials I have received from you have been a great help. With the Lord’s help I was able to answer his arguments and in the end he really had no reason to deny God’s existence, he just didn’t want God to control his life. At the end of our discussion he was standing in the back of our building with tears in his eyes. He hasn’t yet received Christ, but he is now left without reasons to deny that God exists.

Pastor Jones, Letter 11/18/05

In our post-Christian and postmodern world more and more people fit into this category—they need pre-evangelism before they can be evangelized. What is the difference?

Why can’t we just start with evangelizing them? With some people you can. But more and more, pre-evangelism is needed first. Why? Because we are speaking to them from the Word of God, and about the Son of God who died and rose from the dead by the act of God, which brings us the salvation of God—and they do not even believe in God!

Pre-evangelism	Evangelism
Clearing the way for the gospel	Proclaiming the gospel
To those who don't believe in God	To those who believe in God
Preconditions for the gospel	Content is the gospel
Based on reason	Based on revelation
Defends the gospel	Affirms the gospel
Goal is pre-understanding for the gospel	Goal is understanding the gospel

Further, the gospel is not based on just any old idea of God (see chap. 3) but on a theist view of God—an infinite personal God beyond the world who made the world and can intervene in the world in a miraculous way. Well, just how many people in the world believe in that kind of God? Statistics show that only a little over half the world's people have explicit belief in a theistic God. Wow! That means almost half the world needs to be pre-evangelized.

So evangelism and pre-evangelism are different ministries. We know that the Bible tells us all to do evangelism, but what about pre-evangelism? Is that only for a few geniuses and specially gifted people, or should we all be involved? Do we really need to answer every person? There are three simple reasons why we need to be involved in pre-evangelism.

## Unbelievers Have Good Questions

The objections that unbelievers raise are usually not trivial. They often cut deep into the heart of the Christian faith and challenge its very foundations. If miracles are not possible, then why should we believe Christ was God? If God can't control evil, is he really worthy of worship? Face it: if these objections can't be answered, then we may as well believe in fairy tales. These are reasonable questions that deserve reasonable answers.

## Christianity Has Good Answers

Most skeptics have only heard the questions and believed that there were no answers. But we have some great answers to their questions.



Christianity is true. That means that reality will always be on our side, and we just need to find the appropriate evidence to answer whatever question is asked. Fortunately, Christian thinkers have been answering these questions ever since Paul's time, and we can draw on their knowledge to help us find the answers we need.

## God Commands Us to Give Them the Answers

This is the most important reason of all. God told us to do it. In 1 Peter 3:15 we read, “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect” (ESV). This verse says several important things. First, it says that we should be ready. We may never run across someone who asks the tough questions about our faith, but we should still be ready just in case. But being ready is not just a matter of having the right information available; it is also an attitude of readiness and eagerness to share with others the truth of what we believe. Second, we are to give a reason to those who ask the questions. It is not expected that everyone needs pre-evangelism, but many people do need it, and we must be able and willing to give them an answer. Third, giving these answers links doing pre-evangelism with making Christ Lord in our hearts. If he is really Lord, then we should be obedient to him by “destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and . . . taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5). In other words, we should be confronting issues in our own minds and in the expressed thoughts of others that are preventing them from knowing God. That is what pre-evangelism is all about. Finally, it is not merely a matter of what we say but how we say it. It should be done “with gentleness and respect.” We do not want to win the argument and lose the soul. As Colossians 4:6 puts it, “Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person” (ESV).

But these are not the only commands to do pre-evangelism. There is also Jude 3, “Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you

appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.” The people Jude was writing to had been assaulted by false teachers, and he needed to encourage them to protect the faith as it had been revealed through Christ. Jude makes a significant statement in verse 22 about our attitude as we do this when he says, “Have mercy on some, who are doubting.” There is also Titus 1:9, which makes a knowledge of Christian evidences a requirement for church leadership. An elder in the church should be “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.” Paul also gives us an indication of our attitude in this work in 2 Timothy 2:24–25: “The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth.” Anyone attempting to answer the questions of unbelievers will surely be wronged and be tempted to lose patience, but our ultimate goal is that they might come to a knowledge of the truth that Jesus has died for their sins. With so important a task at hand, we must not neglect obedience to this command.

### **But What About . . .**

No doubt some of you have already thought of some reasons why we don’t need to be involved in pre-evangelism. Some even seem to be “biblical” reasons. There is no way that we can answer all those objections, but there are a few common ones that we should take a little time to address.

#### *The Bible Says, “Do Not Answer a Fool according to His Folly.”*

We agree with Proverbs 26:4. We also agree with verse 5, which says, “Answer a fool as his folly deserves, that he not be wise in his own eyes.” Either the author of the book of Proverbs was mad, or the lesson of the passage is that we have to be careful in how and when we choose to confront false ideas. Don’t just argue with people who will not listen to reason, or you will be just as foolish as they.

But if you are able to show people the error of their thinking in a way that they can understand, perhaps they will seek God's wisdom rather than relying on their own.

***Logic Is Not Valid. It Can't Tell Us Anything about God.***

Look at this carefully. It says that logic doesn't apply to these issues. But this is a logical statement about these issues. It is logical because it claims to be true while its opposite is false. That claim, called the law of non-contradiction, is the basis of all logic (see chap. 12).

In order to say that logic doesn't apply to God, you have to apply logic to God in that very statement. So logic is inescapable. You can't deny logic with your words unless you affirm it with the very same words. It is undeniable. When a truth cannot be denied, it must be true. So this objection is false. Logic can tell us some things about God. For instance, since God is truth, he cannot lie (Heb. 6:18). Logic is a valid tool for discovering truth and can be used effectively with non-Christians who don't believe that the Bible is a revelation from God.

***If Pre-Evangelism Is Biblical, Then Why Don't We See It Done in the Bible?***

That's a good question. It may be that we aren't looking for it, or we don't recognize it when we see it. Moses did pre-evangelism. The first chapter of Genesis clearly confronts the mythical accounts of creation known in his day. Elijah did it. The whole scene at Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal is designed to show the superiority of Yahweh. Jesus did it. His meeting with the woman at the well is a good example of confronting social, religious, and moral barriers to faith.

Paul did it a lot. On at least four occasions (Acts 14:8–18; 17:16–34; 24:5–21; 26:1–29), we see Paul making his case for the faith to unbelievers from different religious backgrounds. In addition to this are the commands that we have already discussed and the many times the New Testament authors confront false teachings in their writings. There are many examples of pre-evangelism throughout the Scriptures as God has reached out to the world with the message of his love.

Unbelievers have good questions. Christianity has good answers. And God has told us to give them the answers they are looking for. Not everyone has deep philosophical questions, and God never guarantees our success. Success is his business. But he has told us to be ready. That is what this book is all about.

*Isn't Faith Enough? Why Do We Need to Reason with People?*

Well, besides the fact that (1) the Bible commands it, there are several other reasons for doing so: (2) reason demands it, (3) our culture needs it, and (4) results confirm it.

Socrates said, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” And, we may add, the unexamined faith is not worth having. A blind leap of faith in the dark leaves people right there—in the dark. As someone said well, God wants to reach the heart, but he does not want to bypass the head on the way to the heart. That’s why he made both. Further, our culture is increasingly un-Christian. Hence, people do not believe the preconditions for understanding the gospel. These include (1) the existence of God, (2) the possibility of miracles, (3) the objectivity of truth, and (4) the knowability of history—all of which are discussed later in this book.

*Apologetics Doesn't Work; Only the Holy Spirit Can Save.*

It is true that only the Holy Spirit can save a person (John 3:6; Eph. 2:1–10). But it is not true that the Holy Spirit cannot use evidence and reason.

To assume the God of reason who created human reason in his image would not use reason to reach reasoning people is unreasonable. Indeed, Isaiah said, “‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the LORD” (Isa. 1:18). So, it is not *either* the Holy Spirit *or* reason. Rather, it is the Holy Spirit using reason to save people who must use their reason to understand the gospel they are believing and by which they are saved (Rom. 1:16).

Further, to claim that reason and evidence do not work in the hands of the Holy Spirit to bring people to salvation is contrary to fact. Many notable conversions came about by the pre-evangelistic use of reason and evidence, including St. Augustine (see his *Confessions*) and Frank Morrison (*Who Moved the Stone?*), a skeptical lawyer

who came to Christ after being convinced of the evidence that Jesus rose from the dead. The same thing occurred to Josh McDowell (*New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*) and skeptical attorney Lee Strobel (*The Case for Christ*). Indeed, one of the most famous atheists of contemporary times, Antony Flew, came to believe in God and the plausibility of Christianity by the use of evidence. Flew wrote, “Nor do I claim to have had any personal experience of God or any experience that may be called super-natural or miraculous. In short, my discovery of the divine has been a pilgrimage of reason and not of faith.”<sup>1</sup>

### Suggested Readings

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# 2

## QUESTIONS ABOUT GOD

The existence of a personal, moral God is fundamental to all that Christians believe. We believe Christ is the Son of God, his resurrection is an act of God, the Bible is the Word of God, and Christ is the only way to God. But none of these can be true if there is no God. Further, if there is no moral God, there is no moral being against whom we have sinned; therefore, salvation is not needed. So the first question that must be addressed in pre-evangelism is, “Does God exist?” The second question is very closely related to the first: “If God exists, what kind of God is he?” Both of these questions will be answered in this chapter, and in chapter 3 we will look at questions about other gods.

### Does God Exist?

Traditionally, there have been four basic arguments used to prove God’s existence. They are called the cosmological, teleological, moral, and ontological arguments. But since these are technical terms, let’s just call them the arguments from creation (*cosmos* means creation), design (*telos* means purpose), moral law, and being (*ontos* means being).

### History of the Argument from Creation

Paul said that all people know about God “for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made” (Rom. 1:19–20). Plato is the first thinker known to have developed an argument based on causation. Aristotle followed. Muslim philosophers al-Farabi and Avicenna also used this type of reasoning, as did the Jewish thinker Moses Maimonides. In Christian thought, Augustine, Aquinas, Anselm, Descartes, Leibniz, and others to the present day have found it valuable, making it the most widely noted argument for God’s existence.

#### *Argument from Creation*

The basic idea of this argument is that, since there is a universe, it must have been caused by something beyond itself. It is based on the law of causality, which says that every limited thing is caused by something other than itself. There are two different forms of this argument, so we will look at them separately. The first form says that the universe needed a cause at its beginning; the second form argues that it needs a cause right now to continue existing.

#### THE UNIVERSE WAS CAUSED AT THE BEGINNING

This argument says that the universe had a beginning and that its beginning was caused by something beyond the universe. It is sometimes called the *kalam* (Arabic: eternal) argument.<sup>1</sup> It can be stated this way:

1. The universe had a beginning.
2. Anything that had a beginning must have been caused by something else.
3. Therefore, the universe was caused by something else, which we call “God.”

In order to avoid this conclusion, some people say that the universe is eternal; it never had a beginning—it just always existed. Carl Sagan said, “The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be.”<sup>2</sup> But there are two ways to answer this objection. First, the scientific



evidence strongly supports the idea that the universe had a beginning. The view usually held by those who claim that the universe is eternal, called the Steady State theory, leads some to believe that the universe is spontaneously producing hydrogen atoms from nothing.<sup>3</sup> But it would be simpler to believe that God created the universe from nothing.

Also, the consensus of scientists studying the origin of the universe is that it came into being in a “Big Bang.” One of the main evidences for the universe having a beginning is the second law of thermodynamics, which says the universe is running out of usable energy. But if it is running down, then it could not be eternal. What is winding down must have been wound up. Other evidence for the Big Bang is that we can still find the radiation from it and see the movement that it caused (see chap. 10 for details). Robert Jastrow, founding director of NASA’s Goddard Institute of Space Studies, has said, “A sound explanation may exist for the explosive birth of our universe; but if it does, science cannot find out what the explanation is. The scientist’s pursuit of the past ends in the moment of creation.”<sup>4</sup>

But beyond the scientific evidence that shows the universe began, there is a philosophical reason to believe that the world had a starting point. This argument shows that time cannot go back into the past forever. You see it is impossible to pass through an infinite series of *actual* moments. You might be able to imagine passing through an infinite number of *abstract* dimensionless points on a line by moving your finger from one end to the other, but time is not abstract or imaginary. Time changes are real, and each moment that passes uses up real time that we can’t go back to. It is more like moving your finger across an endless number of books in a library. You would never get to the last book. Even if you thought you had found the last book, there could always be one more added, then another and another. . . . You can never finish an infinite series of real things. If the past is infinite (which is another way of saying, “If the universe had always existed without a beginning”), then we could never have passed through time to get to today. If the past is an infinite series of moments, and right now is where that series stops, then we would have passed through an infinite series and that is impossible. If the world never had a beginning, then we could not have reached today. But we have reached today: so time must have begun at a particular

### Two Kinds of Infinite Series

There are two kinds of infinite series, one is abstract and the other is concrete. An abstract infinite series is a mathematical infinite. For example, as any mathematician knows, there are an infinite number of points on a line between point A and point B, no matter how short (or long) the line may be. Let's say the points are two bookends about three feet apart. Now, as we all know, while there are an infinite number of abstract mathematical points between the two bookends, nevertheless, we cannot get an infinite number of actual books between them, no matter how thin the pages are! Nor does it matter how many feet of distance we place between the bookends; we still cannot get an infinite number of books there. So while abstract, mathematical infinite series are possible, actual, concrete infinite series are not.

In brief, if whatever has a beginning had a cause, and the universe had a beginning, then the universe must have had a cause beyond it. This first cause is called "God."

point in the past, and today has come at a definite time since then. Therefore, the world is a finite event after all, and it needs a cause for its beginning.

Now that we have seen that the universe needs a cause for its *beginning*, let's move on to the second form of the argument. This argument shows that the universe needs a cause for its existence *right now*.

#### THE UNIVERSE NEEDS A CAUSE FOR ITS CONTINUING EXISTENCE

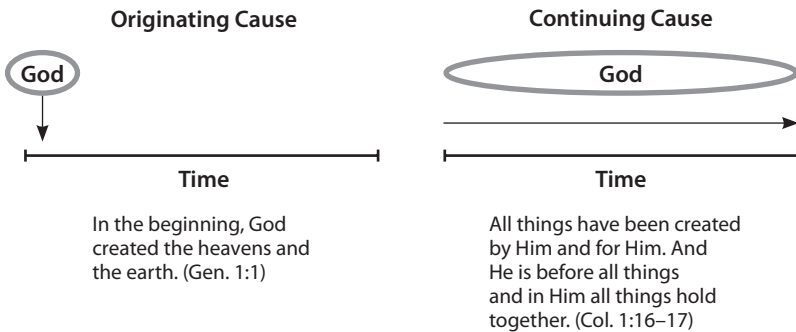
Something is keeping us in existence right now so we don't just disappear. Something has not only caused the world to come into being (Gen. 1:1), but is also continuing and conserving its existence in the present (Col. 1:17). The world needs both an originating cause and a conserving cause. In a sense, this question is the most basic question that can be asked: "Why is there something rather than nothing?" This kind of cosmological argument was used by Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century)<sup>5</sup> and can be put this way:

1. *Finite, changing things exist.* For example, me. I would have to exist to deny that I exist; so either way, I must really exist.

2. *Every finite changing thing must be caused by something else.* If it is limited and it changes, then it cannot be something that exists independently. If it existed independently, or necessarily, then it would have always existed without any kind of change.
3. *There cannot be an infinite regress of these causes.* In other words, you can't go on explaining how this finite thing causes this finite thing, which causes this other finite thing, and on and on, because that really just puts off the explanation indefinitely. It doesn't explain anything. Besides, if we are talking about why finite things are existing right now, then no matter how many finite causes you line up, eventually you will have one that would be both causing its own existence and be an effect of that cause at the same moment. That is nonsense. So no infinite regress can explain why I am existing right now.
4. Therefore, there must be a first uncaused cause of every finite, changing thing that exists.

This argument shows why there must be a present, conserving cause of the world, but it doesn't tell us very much about what kind of God exists. How do we know that this is really the God of the Bible?

### Two Aspects of Creation



### *Argument from Design*

The argument from design, like others that will be mentioned briefly, reasons from some specific aspect of creation to a creator who put it there. It argues from complex design to an intelligent designer.

1. All complex design implies a designer.
2. The universe (especially life) has complex design.
3. Therefore, the universe must have had a designer.

The first premise we know from experience. Anytime we see a complex design, we know by previous experience that it came from the mind of a designer. Watches imply watchmakers; buildings imply architects; paintings imply artists; and coded messages imply an intelligent sender. It is always our expectation because we see it happening over and over. This is another way of stating the principle of causality.

Also, the greater the design, the greater the designer. A factory reflects complex design. Likewise, a thousand monkeys sitting at typewriters would never write *Hamlet*. But Shakespeare did it on the first try. The more complex the design, the greater the intelligence required to produce it.

We ought to mention here that there is a difference between simple patterns and complex design. Snowflakes or quartz crystals have simple patterns repeated over and over, but have completely natural causes. On the other hand, we don't find sentences written in stone unless some intelligent being wrote them. That doesn't happen naturally. The difference is that snowflakes and crystals have a simple

### History of the Argument from Design

"For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wonderful are Your works; and my soul knows it very well" (Ps. 139:13–14). In the late Middle ages, Thomas Aquinas (thirteenth century) presented a form of the argument from design in the fifth of his famous "Five Ways" to prove God. The most famous form of it came from William Paley (1743–1805), who insisted that if someone found a watch in an empty field, that person would rightly conclude that there had been a watchmaker because of the obvious design. The same must be said of the design found in nature. The skeptic David Hume even stated the argument in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, as have several others. Today, the argument takes form in the intelligent design movement of William Dembski and Stephen Meyers.

repeated pattern. But language communicates complex information, not just the same thing over and over. Complex information occurs when the natural elements are given boundary conditions. So when a rock hound sees small round rocks in a stream, it doesn't surprise her because natural erosion rounds them that way. But when she finds an arrowhead, she realizes that some intelligent being has deliberately altered the natural form of the rock. She sees complexity here that cannot be explained by natural forces. Now the design that we are talking about in this argument is complex design, not simple patterns; the more complex that design is, the greater the intelligence required to produce it.

That's where the next premise comes in. The design we see in the universe is complex. The universe is a very intricate system of forces that work together for the mutual benefit of the whole. Life is a very complex development. Even atheist Richard Dawkins, in his book *Blind Watchmaker*, admits that the DNA information in a single-cell animal equals that in a thousand sets of an encyclopedia!<sup>6</sup> No one seeing an encyclopedia lying in the forest would hesitate to think that it had an intelligent cause; so when we find a living creature composed of millions of DNA-based cells, we ought to assume that it likewise has an intelligent cause. Even clearer is the fact that some of these living creatures are intelligent themselves. Even Carl Sagan admits:

The information content of the human brain expressed in bits is probably comparable to the total number of connections among neurons—about a hundred trillion,  $10$  to the  $14$  power bits. If written out in English, say, that information would fill some twenty million volumes, as many as in the world's largest libraries. The equivalent of twenty million books is inside the heads of every one of us. The brain is a very big place in a very small space. The neurochemistry of the brain is astonishingly busy, the circuitry of a machine more wonderful than any devised by humans.<sup>7</sup>

Some have objected to this argument on the basis of chance. They claim that when the dice are rolled, any combination could happen. However, this is not very convincing for several reasons. First, the design argument is not really an argument from chance but from design, which we know from repeated observation to have an intelligent cause. Second, science is based on repeated observation, not

on chance. So this objection to the design argument is not scientific. Finally, even if it were a chance (probability) argument, the chances are a lot higher that there is a designer. One scientist figured the odds for a one-cell animal to emerge by pure chance at 1 in 10 to the 40,000th power.<sup>8</sup> The odds for an infinitely more complex human being to emerge by chance are too high to calculate! The only reasonable conclusion is that there is a great designer behind the design in the world.

### *Argument from Moral Law*

Similar arguments, based on the moral order of the universe rather than the physical order, can be offered. These argue that the cause of the universe must be moral, in addition to being powerful and intelligent.

1. All people are conscious of an objective moral law.
2. Objective moral laws imply a moral lawgiver.
3. Therefore, there must be a supreme moral lawgiver.

In a sense, this argument also follows the principle of causality. But moral laws are different from the natural laws that we have dealt with before. Moral laws don't *describe* what is; they *prescribe* what

### **History of the Moral Argument**

This argument did not gain prominence until the early nineteenth century after the writings of Immanuel Kant. Kant insisted that there was no way to have absolute knowledge about God and he rejected all of the traditional arguments for God's existence. He did, however, approve of the moral approach, not as a proof for God's existence, but as a way to show that God is a necessary postulate for moral living. In other words, we can't know that God exists, but we must act like he exists to make sense of morality. Later thinkers have refined the argument to show that there is a rational basis for God's existence to be found in morality. There have also been attempted disproofs of God's existence on moral grounds based on ideas coming from Pierre Bayle and Albert Camus. The most popular defense of the moral argument is by C. S. Lewis in part 1 of his famous book *Mere Christianity*.

ought to be. They are not simply a description of the way people behave and are not known by observing what people do. If they were, our idea of morality would surely be different. Instead, they tell us what people ought to do, whether they are doing it or not. Thus, any moral “ought” comes from beyond the natural universe. You can’t explain it by anything that happens in the universe, and it can’t be reduced to the things people do in the universe. It transcends the natural order and requires a transcendent cause.

Now some might say that this moral law is not really objective; it is nothing but a subjective judgment that comes from social conventions. However, this view fails to account for the fact that all people hold the same things to be wrong (like murder, rape, theft, and lying). Also, their criticism sounds very much like a subjective judgment, because they are saying that our value judgments are wrong. Now if there is no objective moral law, then there can be no right or wrong value judgments. If our views of morality are subjective, then so are theirs. But if they claim to be making an objective statement about moral law, then they are implying that there is a moral law in the very act of trying to deny it. They are caught both ways. Even their “nothing but” statement requires “more than” knowledge, which shows that they secretly hold to some absolute standard that is beyond subjective judgments. Finally, we find that even those who say that there is no moral order *expect* to be treated with fairness, courtesy, and dignity. If one of them raised this objection, and we replied with, “Oh, shut up. Who cares what you think?,” we might find that that person does believe there are some moral “oughts.” Everyone expects others to follow some moral codes, even those who try to deny them. Moral law is an undeniable fact.

Even the noted scientist Francis Collins, who was the head of the famous human genome project, declared: “After twenty eight years as a believer, the Moral Law still stands out for me as the strongest signpost to God. More than that, it points to a God who cares about human beings, and a God who is infinitely good and holy.”<sup>9</sup>

### *Argument from the Idea of a Perfect (or Necessary) Being*

A fourth argument attempts to prove that God must exist by definition. This is called the ontological argument (from the Greek word

### Same, Different, or Similar?

How much like God are we? How much can an effect tell us about its cause? Some have said that the effect must be exactly the same as its cause. Qualities such as existence or goodness in the effect are the same as those qualities in its cause. If that is true, then we should all be pantheists, because we are all God, eternal and divine. In reaction, some have said that we are entirely different from God—there is no similarity between what he is and what we are. But that would mean that we have no positive knowledge about God. We could only say that God is “not this” and “not that,” but we could never say what he is. The middle road is to say that we are similar to God—the same, but in a different way. Existence, goodness, love, all mean the same thing for both us and for God. We have them in a limited way, and he is unlimited. So we can say what God is, but in some things, we must also say that he is not limited as we are—he is “eternal,” “unchanging,” “nonspatial,” and so on.

*ontos*, being), and was proposed by Anselm. It says that once we get an idea of what God is, that idea necessarily involves existence. There are two main forms of this argument, but let’s talk first about the idea of God as a perfect being.

1. Whatever perfection can be attributed to the most perfect being possible (conceivable) must be attributed to it (otherwise it would not be the most perfect being possible).
2. Existence is a perfection that can be attributed to the most perfect being.
3. Therefore, existence must be attributed to the most perfect being.

Those who opposed this argument, like Anselm’s contemporary, the monk named Gaunilion, argued that one can have an idea of a perfect island without there being a perfect island. Anselm replied with what amounts to another argument—namely God is a necessary being, but an island is not. His argument can be stated this way: God is by definition an absolutely necessary being. But by its very nature a necessary being must necessarily exist (since the only way a necessary being can exist is to exist necessarily).



Therefore, God necessarily exists. Since Immanuel Kant's critique of the argument from perfection (that existence is not a perfection), philosophers have been more intrigued with the second form of the ontological argument—the argument from the idea of a necessary being.

However, critics have shown that this argument assumes, but does not prove, the existence of a necessary being. It amounts only to saying something like the following argument: If God exists, we must conceive of him as a necessary being. But it does not prove that a necessary being actually exists. It is like saying: *if* there are triangles, then they must have three sides. Of course, there may not be any triangles. You see, the argument never really gets past that initial “if.” It never gets around to proving the big question that it claims to answer. The only way to make it prove that God exists is to smuggle in the argument from creation. It can be useful, though, because it shows that, if there is a God, he exists in a necessary way. That makes this idea of God different from some other ways to conceive of him, as we will see later.

Now for the one million dollar question: If all these arguments have some validity, but rely on the principle of causality, what is the best way to prove that God exists? If you answer, “The argument from creation,” you are on the right track. But what if we can combine all of these arguments into a cohesive whole that proves what kind of being God is as well as his existence? That is what we will do in the following pages.

### **All Roads Lead to a Cause**

We have seen that all of the traditional arguments ultimately rest on the idea of causality. The argument from being needs the confirmation that something exists in which perfection and being is found. The argument from design implies that the design was caused. Likewise, morality, justice, and truth as principles of an argument all assume that there is some cause for these things. This leads us back to the argument from creation as the basic argument that proves God's existence. As one student said, it is the “causemological” argument.

## What Kind of God Exists?

If we want to show that God exists and that he is the God of the Bible, then we need to show that all of the things in the arguments mentioned above are true. Each one contributes something to our knowledge of God, and, taken together, they form a picture that can only fit the one true God.<sup>10</sup>

### *God Is Powerful*

The argument from creation proves not only that God exists, but also that he has power. Only a God with incredible power could create and sustain the whole universe. His energy would have to be greater than all the energy that was ever available in the whole creation, for he not only caused all things, but he also holds them together and keeps them in existence and still sustains his own existence. That is more power than we can imagine. And since God is infinite (see below), he must be infinitely powerful (omnipotent).

### *God Is Intelligent*

Even Carl Sagan admits that the design of the universe is far beyond anything that humanity could devise. The argument from design shows us that whatever caused the universe not only had great power, but also great intelligence. God knows things—things that we cannot understand. And since God is infinite, he must be infinitely knowing (omniscient). He knows everything that is and everything that could be.

### *God Is Morally Perfect*

The existence of a moral law in the mind of a moral lawgiver shows us that God is a moral being, a morally perfect being. He is neither beyond morality (like some kings think they are) nor beneath morality (like a rock). He is moral by his very nature. This means that he knows the difference between right and wrong. But we can take this one step further: he is not only moral; he is also good. We know that part of what he created was persons who were morally good like he is (Gen. 1:27). And even in our fallen state we

are still in his image (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9). The fact that persons always expect to be treated better than things shows that. Even those denying that people have value at least expect others to value their opinion as a person. But whatever creates good things must be good itself (a cause can't give what it hasn't got). So God is not only moral; he is good.

But God is more than moral; he is morally perfect. His nature sets the standard for morality. And nothing can be imperfect unless it is judged by a perfect standard, which God is. Therefore, God is the morally perfect standard by which all moral imperfections are judged.

### *God Is Necessary*

The argument from the idea of a necessary being may not prove that God exists (see above), but it sure does tell us a lot about God once we know that he does exist (by the argument from creation). God is a necessary being; that is, he cannot not be. What he is, he must be. He cannot be otherwise than he is.

### *God Is Changeless*

Since God is a necessary being, he must also be changeless, for a necessary being cannot change into anything other than he is. What he is, he is necessarily. So, a necessary being cannot change.

### *God Is Eternal*

Further, a necessary being must be eternal, for a necessary being cannot come into being or cease to be. So, it could not have any beginning or end. It must be eternal.

### *God Is Infinite*

Also, a necessary being must be infinite (without limits), for it has nothing that could limit it; it must be what it is. But if nothing can limit it, then it must be unlimited by anything else. And it is not limited by its own being: there is no potentiality in it since it has no potentiality to not exist. So, it must be unlimited (infinite) in its being.

### *God Is Indivisible (Simple)*

Nothing can be divided unless it has the potential to be divided, which is a change. But God has no potentiality and cannot change. Therefore, God cannot be divided. He is an absolutely simple and indivisible being.

### *God Is Unique*

We have said that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good, infinite, uncreated, unchanging, eternal, and unique. But how many beings like that can there be? He is a class of one by definition. If there were two unlimited beings, how could you tell them apart? They have no limits to define where one stops and the other begins—but neither one can “stop” or “begin” anyway. There can only be one infinite being and no other.

### *God Is Lord over Creation*

The argument from creation does more than prove that God exists; it also proves that he is the Creator. There is no way to distinguish two infinite creatures, but God is distinct from the finite world that he has made. The whole point of the argument from creation is that the universe cannot explain its own existence—that it is not God. The same point can be made if we consider an individual. I exist, but I have no way to account for my existence in myself. It is painfully clear that my being is not necessary—I could cease to exist at any moment and the world would go right on without me. Only by recognizing an infinite being, a necessary cause for my being—one who gives me being—can I make sense of my existence. And as the all-powerful, all-knowing Creator, he has control over the creation. Not only does God exist, but his creation also exists distinct from him.

### *God Is the Same as Yahweh in the Bible*

Is this the God of the Bible? At the burning bush, God told Moses his name and said, “I AM WHO I AM” (Exod. 3:14). This signifies that the central characteristic of the God of the Bible is existence.

His very nature is existence. Popeye can say, “I am what I am.” But only God can say, “I AM WHO I AM.” He is the “I AM.” The Bible also calls God eternal (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:2), unchanging (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:18), infinite (1 Kings 8:27; Isa. 66:1), all-good (Ps. 86:5; Luke 18:19), and all-powerful (Heb. 1:3; Matt. 19:26). Since these beings are the same in all these respects, and there can’t be two infinite beings, this God that the theistic arguments point to is the same as the God described in the Bible.

### Some Objections

#### *If Everything Needs a Cause, Then What Caused God?*

This question comes up a lot. The problem is that people don’t listen well to what has been said. We didn’t say that everything needs a cause; we said everything *that has a beginning* needs a cause. Only finite, contingent things need a cause. God didn’t have a beginning; he is infinite and he is necessary. God is the uncaused cause of all finite things. If God needed a cause, this would begin an infinite regress of causes that would never answer the question. As it is, we can’t ask, “Who caused God?” because God is the first cause. Nobody made God because he is the unmade Maker. He is the uncaused cause. You can’t go back any further than a first.<sup>11</sup>

#### *If God Created All Things, Then How Did He Create Himself?*

Again, only finite, contingent beings need causes. Necessary beings don’t. We never said that God is a self-caused being. That would be impossible. However, we can turn this objection into an argument for God. There are only three possible kinds of being: self-caused, caused by another, and uncaused. Which are we? Self-caused is impossible with respect to existence; we can’t bring ourselves into existence. Uncaused would mean that we are necessary, eternal, infinite beings, which we are not; so we must be caused by another. If we are caused by another, what kind of being is he? Again, self-caused is impossible; if he were caused by another, that leads to an impossible infinite regress, so he must be uncaused.

### *No Statements about Existence Are Necessary*

Some critics have attempted an ontological disproof of God by saying that we just can't talk about God in terms of necessary truths. However, the statement itself appears to be a necessary statement about God saying that such statements can't be made. Now either it is a necessarily true statement or it is not. If it is, then the act of asserting it proves it to be false, for it says that such statements are impossible. If it is not necessarily true, then some necessary statements are possible and the objection vanishes. Let's just be fair: if they can make negative statements about existence (God does not exist), then why can't we make positive ones?

### *The Moral Law Is Either Beyond God or Arbitrary*

Bertrand Russell asked where God derived the moral law. He said that either it is beyond God and he is subject to it (and hence, not the ultimate good), or it is an arbitrary selection of codes that originated in God's will. So either God is not ultimate or he is arbitrary; in either case he is not fit to be worshiped. Russell fails to exhaust the possibilities, however, and we can sidestep the horns of his dilemma. Our contention is that the moral law is rooted in God's morally perfect good nature. This is not an ultimate beyond God, but within him. And it is impossible for God to will something that is not in accordance with his nature. God is good and cannot will evil arbitrarily. So there is no dilemma.

### *Can God Make a Rock So Big That He Can't Move It?*

This is another meaningless question. No, God cannot do what is logically impossible, and it is impossible to create a creature that is greater than the Creator. God is infinite, and he can only make finite things. And no finite rock is impossible for God to move. If he can make it, then he can move it. The same applies to questions like, "Can God make a square circle?" It is like asking, "What is the smell of blue?" It is a category mistake—colors don't smell, and circles can't be square. These are logical impossibilities. They contradict themselves when we try to think about them. God's omnipotence does not mean that he can do what is impossible, only that he has

the power to do anything that is actually possible, even if it is impossible for us. Any mountain that God makes, he can control, put where he wants, and disintegrate if he likes. You can't ask for more power than that.

***If God Has No Limits, Then He Must Be Both Good and Evil, Existence and Nonexistence, Strong and Weak***

When we say that God is unlimited, we mean that he is unlimited in his perfections. Now evil is not a perfection; it is an imperfection. The same is true of nonexistence, weakness, ignorance, finitude, temporality, and any other characteristic that implies limitation or imperfection. We might say that God is "limited" in that he can't enter into limitations, like time, space, weakness, evil—at least not as God. He is only "limited" by his unlimited perfection.

***If God Is a Necessary Being, Then the Existence of the World Is Necessary Too***

This wrongly assumes that a necessary being must *do* all that it does necessarily, but our definition was only that it must *be* all that it is. All that is in God's nature is necessary, but anything that he does extends beyond his nature and is done by his free will. One cannot even say that it was necessary for him to create. His love may have given him the *desire* to create, but it did not *demand* that he do so. He must be as he is, but he can do what he pleases as long as it doesn't contradict his nature.

***If God Is Eternal, When Did He Create the World?***

This question is confused. God did not create *in* time; he is the creator *of* time. There was no time "before" the world began. Time began with the world. So, the only thing there was prior to time was eternity. Thus, God did not pick a moment in time to create, because there were no moments of time before he made time.

Another silly question is to ask what God was doing with all his time before he created? St. Augustine had a silly answer to this silly question: God was preparing hell for those who ask silly questions like this. His serious answer was that God as eternal was before and

beyond all time. So he had no time on his hands, nor did he have to pick a moment in time to create.

*If God Knows Everything, and His Knowledge Can't Change, Then Everything Is Predetermined and There Is No Free Will*

God's knowledge is not necessarily incompatible with free will, for God knows for sure what we will freely do. There is no problem in saying that God created people with free will so that they could return his love freely, even though he knows that some will not make that decision. God is responsible for the *fact* of freedom, but humans are responsible for the *acts* of freedom. In his knowledge, God might persuade people to make certain decisions, but there is no reason to suppose that he coerces any decision so as to destroy freedom. As all-loving, God works persuasively, but not coercively.

*God Is Nothing but a Psychological Crutch, a Wish of What We Hope Is True*

This kind of argument makes a serious error. How can humans know that God is “nothing but” a projection, unless they have “more than” knowledge? To be sure that human consciousness is the limit of reality and that there is nothing beyond it, one must go beyond the limits of human consciousness. But if one can go beyond, then there weren't limits. This objection says that nothing exists outside our minds, but we must go beyond the boundaries of our own minds to say that. If the objection were true, it must be false. It defeats itself.

Contrary to Sigmund Freud, we do not create God the Father. Rather, atheists kill the Father. Indeed, this is exactly what the famous atheist Friedrich Nietzsche said: “God is dead. God remains dead, and we *have killed him*.”<sup>12</sup> But, as former Freudian psychologist Paul Vitz noted after an extensive study of great atheists: they all either had no father or a dysfunctional father and were projecting their anger on God. He wrote, “Therefore, in the Freudian framework, atheism is an illusion caused by the Oedipal desire to kill the father (God) and replace him with oneself.”<sup>13</sup>



## Conclusion

It was a long, hard climb, but we have a solid argument that *the* God, not just *a* God, exists. At this point we are tempted to fold our hands and sit back as if there were no other questions that could possibly be asked. However, we have only established that this God exists; we have not shown that anything the Bible says he did or said is true. That's what the rest of the book is about. Also, we have not done anything to distinguish this concept of God from any other concept of God. This task will be taken up in the next chapter.

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