

Twenty Arguments For The Existence Of God

More Featured Writing

1. [The Argument from Change](#)
2. [The Argument from Efficient Causality](#)
3. [The Argument from Time and Contingency](#)
4. [The Argument from Degrees of Perfection](#)
5. [The Design Argument](#)
6. [The Kalam Argument](#)
7. [The Argument from Contingency](#)
8. [The Argument from the World as an Interacting Whole](#)
9. [The Argument from Miracles](#)
10. [The Argument from Consciousness](#)
11. [The Argument from Truth](#)
12. [The Argument from the Origin of the Idea of God](#)
13. [The Ontological Argument](#)
14. [The Moral Argument](#)
15. [The Argument from Conscience](#)
16. [The Argument from Desire](#)
17. [The Argument from Aesthetic Experience](#)
18. [The Argument from Religious Experience](#)
19. [The Common Consent Argument](#)
20. [Pascal's Wager](#)

In this section you will find arguments of many different kinds for the existence of God. And we make to you, the reader, an initial appeal. We realize that many people, both believers and nonbelievers, doubt that God's existence can be demonstrated or even argued about. You may be one of them. You may in fact have a fairly settled view that it cannot be argued about. But no one can reasonably doubt that attention to these arguments has its place in any book on apologetics. For very many have believed that such arguments are possible, and that some of them actually work.

They have also believed that an effective rational argument for God's existence is an important first step in opening the mind to the possibility of faith—in clearing some of the roadblocks and rubble that prevent people from taking the idea of divine revelation seriously. And in this they have a real point. Suppose our best and most honest reflection on the nature of things led us to see the material universe as self-sufficient and uncaused; to see its form as the result of random motions, devoid of any plan or purpose. Would you then be impressed by reading in an ancient book that there exists a God of love, or that the heavens proclaim his glory? Would you be disposed to take that message seriously? More likely you would excuse yourself from taking seriously anything claimed as a communication from the Creator. As one person put it: I cannot believe that we are children of God, because I cannot believe there is anyone to do the adopting.

It is this sort of cramped and constricted horizon that the proofs presented in this chapter are trying to expand. They are attempts to confront us with the radical insufficiency of what is finite and limited, and to open minds to a level of being beyond it. If they succeed in this—and we can say from experience that some of the proofs do succeed with many people—they can be of very great value indeed.

You may not feel that they are particularly valuable to you. You may be blessed with a vivid sense of God's presence; and that is something for which to be profoundly grateful. But that does not mean you have no obligation to ponder these arguments. For many have not been blessed in that way. And the proofs are designed for them—or some of them at least—to give a kind of help they really need. You may even be asked to provide help.

Besides, are any of us really in so little need of such help as we may claim? Surely in most of us there is something of the skeptic. There is a part of us tempted to believe that nothing is ultimately real beyond what we can see and touch; a part looking for some reason, beyond the assurances of Scripture, to believe that there is more. We have no desire to make exaggerated claims for these demonstrations, or to confuse "good reason" "with scientific proof." But we believe that there are many who want and need the kind of help these proofs offer more than they might at first be willing to admit.

A word about the organization of the arguments. We have organized them into two basic groups: those which take their data from without—cosmological arguments—and those that take it from within—psychological arguments. The group of cosmological arguments begins with our versions of Aquinas's famous "five ways." These are not the simplest of the arguments, and therefore are not the most convincing to many people. Our order is not from the most to the least effective. The first argument, in particular, is quite abstract and difficult.

Not all the arguments are equally demonstrative. One (Pascal's Wager) is not an argument for God at all, but an argument for faith in God as a "wager." Another (the ontological argument) we regard as fundamentally flawed; yet we include it because it is very famous and influential, and may yet be saved by new formulations of it. Others (the argument from miracles, the argument from religious experience and the common consent argument) claim only strong probability, not demonstrative certainty. We have included them because they form a strong part of a cumulative case. We believe that only some of these arguments, taken individually and separately, demonstrate the existence of a being that has some of the properties only God can have (no argument proves all the divine attributes); but all twenty taken together, like twined rope, make a very strong case.

1. The Argument from Change

The material world we know is a world of change. This young woman came to be 5'2", but she was not always that height. The great oak tree before us grew from the tiniest acorn. Now when something comes to be in a certain state, such as mature size, that state cannot bring itself into being. For until it comes to be, it does not exist, and if it does not yet exist, it cannot cause anything.

As for the thing that changes, although it can be what it will become, it is not yet what it will become. It actually exists right now in this state (an acorn); it will actually exist in that state (large oak tree). But it is not actually in that state now. It only has the potentiality for that state.

Now a question: To explain the change, can we consider the changing thing alone, or must other things also be involved? Obviously, other things must be involved. Nothing can give itself what it does not have, and the changing thing cannot have now, already, what it will come to have then. The result of change cannot actually exist before the change. The changing thing begins with only the potential to change, but it needs to be acted on by other things outside if that potential is to be made actual. Otherwise it cannot change.

Nothing changes itself. Apparently self-moving things, like animal bodies, are moved by desire or will—something other than mere molecules. And when the animal or human dies, the molecules remain, but the body no longer moves because the desire or will is no longer present to move it.

Now a further question: Are the other things outside the changing thing also changing? Are its movers also moving? If so, all of them stand in need right now of being acted on by other things, or else they cannot change. No matter how many things there are in the series, each one needs something outside itself to actualize its potentiality for change.

The universe is the sum total of all these moving things, however many there are. The whole universe is in the process of change. But we have already seen that change in any being requires an outside force to actualize it. Therefore, there is some force outside (in addition to) the universe, some real being transcendent to the universe. This is one of the things meant by "God."

Briefly, if there is nothing outside the material universe, then there is nothing that can cause the universe to change. But it does change. Therefore there must be something in addition to the material universe. But the universe is the sum total of all matter, space and time. These three things depend on each other. Therefore this being outside the universe is outside matter, space and time. It is not a changing thing; it is the unchanging Source of change.

2. The Argument from Efficient Causality

We notice that some things cause other things to be (to begin to be, to continue to be, or both). For example, a man playing the piano is causing the music that we hear. If he stops, so does the music.

Now ask yourself: Are all things caused to exist by other things right now? Suppose they are. That is, suppose there is no Uncaused Being, no God. Then nothing could exist right now. For remember, on the no-God hypothesis, all things need a present cause outside of themselves in order to exist. So right now, all things, including all those things which are causing things to be, need a cause. They can give being only so long as they are given being. Everything that exists, therefore, on this hypothesis, stands in need of being caused to exist.

But caused by what? Beyond everything that is, there can only be nothing. But that is absurd: all of reality dependent—but dependent on nothing! The hypothesis that all being is caused, that there is no Uncaused Being, is absurd. So there must be something uncaused, something on which all things that need an efficient cause of being are dependent.

Existence is like a gift given from cause to effect. If there is no one who has the gift, the gift cannot be passed down the chain of receivers, however long or short the chain may be. If everyone has to borrow a certain book,

but no one actually has it, then no one will ever get it. If there is no God who has existence by his own eternal nature, then the gift of existence cannot be passed down the chain of creatures and we can never get it. But we do get it; we exist. Therefore there must exist a God: an Uncaused Being who does not have to receive existence like us—and like every other link in the chain of receivers.

Question 1: Why do we need an uncaused cause? Why could there not simply be an endless series of things mutually keeping each other in being?

Reply: This is an attractive hypothesis. Think of a single drunk. He could probably not stand up alone. But a group of drunks, all of them mutually supporting each other, might stand. They might even make their way along the street. But notice: Given so many drunks, and given the steady ground beneath them, we can understand how their stumblings might cancel each other out, and how the group of them could remain (relatively) upright. We could not understand their remaining upright if the ground did not support them—if, for example, they were all suspended several feet above it. And of course, if there were no actual drunks, there would be nothing to understand.

This brings us to our argument. Things have got to exist in order to be mutually dependent; they cannot depend upon each other for their entire being, for then they would have to be, simultaneously, cause and effect of each other. A causes B, B causes C, and C causes A. That is absurd. The argument is trying to show why a world of caused causes can be given—or can be there—at all. And it simply points out: If this thing can exist only because something else is giving it existence, then there must exist something whose being is not a gift. Otherwise everything would need at the same time to be given being, but nothing (in addition to "everything") could exist to give it. And that means nothing would actually be.

Question 2: Why not have an endless series of caused causes stretching backward into the past? Then everything would be made actual and would actually be—even though their causes might no longer exist.

Reply: First, if the kalam argument ([argument 6](#)) is right, there could not exist an endless series of causes stretching backward into the past. But suppose that such a series could exist. The argument is not concerned about the past, and would work whether the past is finite or infinite. It is concerned with what exists right now.

Even as you read this, you are dependent on other things; you could not, right now, exist without them. Suppose there are seven such things. If these seven things did not exist, neither would you. Now suppose that all seven of them depend for their existence right now on still other things. Without these, the seven you now depend on would not exist—and neither would you. Imagine that the entire universe consists of you and the seven sustaining you. If there is nothing besides that universe of changing, dependent things, then the universe—and you as part of it—could not be. For everything that is would right now need to be given being but there would be nothing capable of giving it. And yet you are and it is. So there must in that case exist something besides the universe of dependent things—something not dependent as they are.

And if it must exist in that case, it must exist in this one. In our world there are surely more than seven things that need, right now, to be given being. But that need is not diminished by there being more than seven. As we imagine more and more of them—even an infinite number, if that were possible—we are simply expanding the set of beings that stand in need. And this need—for being, for existence—cannot be met from within the

imagined set. But obviously it has been met, since contingent beings exist. Therefore there is a source of being on which our material universe right now depends.

3. The Argument from Time and Contingency

1. We notice around us things that come into being and go out of being. A tree, for example, grows from a tiny shoot, flowers brilliantly, then withers and dies.
2. Whatever comes into being or goes out of being does not have to be; nonbeing is a real possibility.
3. Suppose that nothing has to be; that is, that nonbeing is a real possibility for everything.
4. Then right now nothing would exist. For
5. If the universe began to exist, then all being must trace its origin to some past moment before which there existed—literally—nothing at all. But
6. From nothing nothing comes. So
7. The universe could not have begun.
8. But suppose the universe never began. Then, for the infinitely long duration of cosmic history, all being had the built—in possibility not to be. But
9. If in an infinite time that possibility was never realized, then it could not have been a real possibility at all. So
10. There must exist something which has to exist, which cannot not exist. This sort of being is called necessary.
11. Either this necessity belongs to the thing in itself or it is derived from another. If derived from another there must ultimately exist a being whose necessity is not derived, that is, an absolutely necessary being.
12. This absolutely necessary being is God.

Question1: Even though you may never in fact step outside your house all day, it was possible for you to do so. Why is it impossible that the universe still happens to exist, even though it was possible for it to go out of existence?

Reply: The two cases are not really parallel. To step outside your house on a given day is something that you may or may not choose to do. But if nonbeing is a real possibility for you, then you are the kind of being that cannot last forever. In other words, the possibility of nonbeing must be built—in, "programmed," part of your very constitution, a necessary property. And if all being is like that, then how could anything still exist after the passage of an infinite time? For an infinite time is every bit as long as forever. So being must have what it takes to last forever, that is, to stay in existence for an infinite time. Therefore there must exist within the realm of being something that does not tend to go out of existence. And this sort of being, as Aquinas says, is called "necessary."

4. The Argument from Degrees of Perfection

We notice around us things that vary in certain ways. A shade of color, for example, can be lighter or darker than another, a freshly baked apple pie is hotter than one taken out of the oven hours before; the life of a person who gives and receives love is better than the life of one who does not.

So we arrange some things in terms of more and less. And when we do, we naturally think of them on a scale approaching most and least. For example, we think of the lighter as approaching the brightness of pure white, and the darker as approaching the opacity of pitch black. This means that we think of them at various "distances" from the extremes, and as possessing, in degrees of "more" or "less," what the extremes possess in full measure.

Sometimes it is the literal distance from an extreme that makes all the difference between "more" and "less." For example, things are more or less hot when they are more or less distant from a source of heat. The source communicates to those things the quality of heat they possess in greater or lesser measure. This means that the degree of heat they possess is caused by a source outside of them.

Now when we think of the goodness of things, part of what we mean relates to what they are simply as beings. We believe, for example, that a relatively stable and permanent way of being is better than one that is fleeting and precarious. Why? Because we apprehend at a deep (but not always conscious) level that being is the source and condition of all value; finally and ultimately, being is better than nonbeing. And so we recognize the inherent superiority of all those ways of being that expand possibilities, free us from the constricting confines of matter, and allow us to share in, enrich and be enriched by, the being of other things. In other words, we all recognize that intelligent being is better than unintelligent being; that a being able to give and receive love is better than one that cannot; that our way of being is better, richer and fuller than that of a stone, a flower, an earthworm, an ant, or even a baby seal.

But if these degrees of perfection pertain to being and being is caused in finite creatures, then there must exist a "best," a source and real standard of all the perfections that we recognize belong to us as beings.

This absolutely perfect being—the "Being of all beings," "the Perfection of all perfections"—is God.

Question 1: The argument assumes a real "better." But aren't all our judgments of comparative value merely subjective?

Reply: The very asking of this question answers it. For the questioner would not have asked it unless he or she thought it really better to do so than not, and really better to find the true answer than not. You can speak subjectivism but you cannot live it.

5. The Design Argument

This sort of argument is of wide and perennial appeal. Almost everyone admits that reflection on the order and beauty of nature touches something very deep within us. But are the order and beauty the product of intelligent design and conscious purpose? For theists the answer is yes. Arguments for design are attempts to vindicate this answer, to show why it is the most reasonable one to give. They have been formulated in ways as richly varied as the experience in which they are rooted. The following displays the core or central insight.

1. The universe displays a staggering amount of intelligibility, both within the things we observe and in the way these things relate to others outside themselves. That is to say: the way they exist and coexist display an intricately beautiful order and regularity that can fill even the most casual observer with

wonder. It is the norm in nature for many different beings to work together to produce the same valuable end—for example, the organs in the body work for our life and health. (See also [argument 8](#).)

2. Either this intelligible order is the product of chance or of intelligent design.
3. Not chance.
4. Therefore the universe is the product of intelligent design.
5. Design comes only from a mind, a designer.
6. Therefore the universe is the product of an intelligent Designer.

The first premise is certainly true—even those resistant to the argument admit it. The person who did not would have to be almost pathetically obtuse. A single protein molecule is a thing of immensely impressive order; much more so a single cell; and incredibly much more so an organ like the eye, where ordered parts of enormous and delicate complexity work together with countless others to achieve a single certain end. Even chemical elements are ordered to combine with other elements in certain ways and under certain conditions. Apparent disorder is a problem precisely because of the overwhelming pervasiveness of order and regularity. So the first premise stands.

If all this order is not in some way the product of intelligent design—then what? Obviously, it "just happened." Things just fell out that way "by chance." Alternatively, if all this order is not the product of blind, purposeless forces, then it has resulted from some kind of purpose. That purpose can only be intelligent design. So the second premise stands.

It is of course the third premise that is crucial. Ultimately, nonbelievers tell us, it is indeed by chance and not by any design that the universe of our experience exists the way it does. It just happens to have this order, and the burden of proof is on believers to demonstrate why this could not be so by chance alone.

But this seems a bit backward. It is surely up to nonbelievers to produce a credible alternative to design. And "chance" is simply not credible. For we can understand chance only against a background of order. To say that something happened "by chance" is to say that it did not turn out as we would have expected, or that it did turn out in a way we would not have expected. But expectation is impossible without order. If you take away order and speak of chance alone as a kind of ultimate source, you have taken away the only background that allows us to speak meaningfully of chance at all. Instead of thinking of chance against a background of order, we are invited to think of order—overwhelmingly intricate and ubiquitous order—against a random and purposeless background of chance. Frankly, that is incredible. Therefore it is eminently reasonable to affirm the third premise, not chance, and therefore to affirm the conclusion, that this universe is the product of intelligent design.

Question 1: Hasn't the Darwinian theory of evolution shown us how it is possible for all the order in the universe to have arisen by chance?

Reply: Not at all. If the Darwinian theory has shown anything, it has shown, in a general way, how species may have descended from others through random mutation; and how survival of these species can be accounted for by natural selection—by the fitness of some species to survive in their environment. In no way does it—can it—account for the ubiquitous order and intelligibility of nature. Rather, it presupposes order. To quote a famous phrase: "The survival of the fittest presupposes the arrival of the fit." If Darwinians wish to

extrapolate from their purely biological theory and maintain that all the vast order around us is the result of random changes, then they are saying something which no empirical evidence could ever confirm; which no empirical science could ever demonstrate; and which, on the face of it, is simply beyond belief.

Question 2: Maybe it is only in this region of the universe that order is to be found. Maybe there are other parts unknown to us that are completely chaotic—or maybe the universe will one day in the future become chaotic. What becomes of the argument then?

Reply: Believers and nonbelievers both experience the same universe. It is this which is either designed or not. And this world of our common experience is a world of pervasive order and intelligibility. That fact must be faced. Before we speculate about what will be in the future or what may be elsewhere in the present, we need to deal honestly with what is. We need to recognize in an unflinching way the extent—the overwhelming extent—of order and intelligibility. Then we can ask ourselves: Is it credible to suppose that we inhabit a small island of order surrounded by a vast sea of chaos—a sea which threatens one day to engulf us?

Just consider how in the last decades we have strained fantastically at the limits of our knowledge; we have cast our vision far beyond this planet and far within the elements that make it up. And what has this expansion of our horizons revealed? Always the same thing: more—and not less—intelligibility; more—and not less—complex and intricate order. Not only is there no reason to believe in a surrounding chaos, there is every reason not to. It flies in the face of the experience that all of us—believers and nonbelievers—share in common.

Something similar can be said about the future. We know the way things in the universe have behaved and are behaving. And so, until we have some reason to think otherwise, there is every reason to believe it will continue on its orderly path of running down. No speculation can nullify what we know.

And, anyway, exactly what sort of chaos is this question asking us to imagine? That effect precedes cause? That the law of contradiction does not hold? That there need not be what it takes for some existing thing to exist? These suggestions are completely unintelligible; if we think about them at all, it is only to reject them as impossible. Can we imagine less order? Yes. Some rearrangement of the order we experience? Yes. But total disorder and chaos? That can never be considered as a real possibility. To speculate about it as if it were is really a waste of time.

Question 3: But what if the order we experience is merely a product of our minds? Even though we cannot think utter chaos and disorder, maybe that is how reality really is.

Reply: Our minds are the only means by which we can know reality. We have no other access. If we agree that something cannot exist in thought, we cannot go ahead and say that it might nevertheless exist in reality. Because then we would be thinking what we claim cannot be thought.

Suppose you claim that order is just a product of our minds. This puts you in a very awkward position. You are saying that we must think about reality in terms of order and intelligibility, but things may not exist that way in fact. Now to propose something for consideration is to think about it. And so you are saying: (a) we must think about reality in a certain way, but (b) since we think that things may not in fact exist that way, then (c) we

need not think about reality the way we must think about it! Are we willing to pay that high a price to deny that the being of the universe displays intelligent design? It does not, on the face of it, seem cost effective.

6. The Kalam Argument

The Arabic word *kalam* literally means "speech," but came to denote a certain type of philosophical theology—a type containing demonstrations that the world could not be infinitely old and must therefore have been created by God. This sort of demonstration has had a long and wide appeal among both Christians and Muslims. Its form is simple and straightforward.

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause for its coming into being.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause for its coming into being.

Grant the first premise. (Most people—outside of asylums and graduate schools would consider it not only true, but certainly and obviously true.)

Is the second premise true? Did the universe—the collection of all things bounded by space and time—begin to exist? This premise has recently received powerful support from natural science—from so-called Big Bang Cosmology. But there are philosophical arguments in its favor as well. Can an infinite task ever be done or completed? If, in order to reach a certain end, infinitely many steps had to precede it, could the end ever be reached? Of course not—not even in an infinite time. For an infinite time would be unending, just as the steps would be. In other words, no end would ever be reached. The task would—could—never be completed.

But what about the step just before the end? Could that point ever be reached? Well, if the task is really infinite, then an infinity of steps must also have preceded it. And therefore the step just before the end could also never be reached. But then neither could the step just before that one. In fact, no step in the sequence could be reached, because an infinity of steps must always have preceded any step; must always have been gone through one by one before it. The problem comes from supposing that an infinite sequence could ever reach, by temporal succession, any point at all.

Now if the universe never began, then it always was. If it always was, then it is infinitely old. If it is infinitely old, then an infinite amount of time would have to have elapsed before (say) today. And so an infinite number of days must have been completed—one day succeeding another, one bit of time being added to what went before—in order for the present day to arrive. But this exactly parallels the problem of an infinite task. If the present day has been reached, then the actually infinite sequence of history has reached this present point: in fact, has been completed up to this point—for at any present point the whole past must already have happened. But an infinite sequence of steps could never have reached this present point—or any point before it.

So, either the present day has not been reached, or the process of reaching it was not infinite. But obviously the present day has been reached. So the process of reaching it was not infinite. In other words, the universe began to exist. Therefore, the universe has a cause for its coming into being, a Creator.

Question 1: Christians believe they are going to live forever with God. So they believe the future will be endless. How come the past cannot also be endless?

Reply: The question really answers itself. Christians believe that their life with God will never end. That means it will never form an actually completed infinite series. In more technical language: an endless future is potentially—but never actually—infinite. This means that although the future will never cease to expand and increase, still its actual extent will always be finite. But that can only be true if all of created reality had a beginning.

Question 2: How do we know that the cause of the universe still exists? Maybe it started the universe going and then ceased to be.

Reply: Remember that we are seeking for a cause of spatio-temporal being. This cause created the entire universe of space and time. And space and time themselves must be part of that creation. So the cause cannot be another spatio—temporal being. (If it were, all the problems about infinite duration would arise once again.) It must somehow stand outside the limitations and constraints of space and time.

It is hard to understand how such a being could "cease" to be. We know how a being within the universe ceases to be: it comes in time to be fatally affected by some agency external to it. But this picture is proper to us, and to all beings limited in some way by space and time. A being not limited in these ways cannot "come" to be or "cease" to be. If it exists at all, it must exist eternally.

Question 3: But is this cause God—a he and not a mere it?

Reply: Suppose the cause of the universe has existed eternally. Suppose further that this cause is not personal: that it has given rise to the universe, not through any choice, but simply through its being. In that case it is hard to see how the universe could be anything but infinitely old, since all the conditions needed for the being of the universe would exist from all eternity. But the kalam argument has shown that the universe cannot be infinitely old. So the hypothesis of an eternal impersonal cause seems to lead to an inconsistency.

Is there a way out? Yes, if the universe is the result of a free personal choice. Then at least we have some way of seeing how an eternal cause could give rise to a temporally limited effect. Of course, the kalam argument does not prove everything Christians believe about God, but what proof does? Less than everything, however, is far from nothing. And the kalam argument proves something central to the Christian belief in God: that the universe is not eternal and without beginning; that there is a Maker of heaven and earth. And in doing so, it disproves the picture of the universe most atheists wish to maintain: self—sustaining matter, endlessly changing in endless time.

7. The Argument from Contingency

The basic form of this argument is simple.

1. If something exists, there must exist what it takes for that thing to exist.
2. The universe—the collection of beings in space and time—exists.
3. Therefore, there must exist what it takes for the universe to exist.
4. What it takes for the universe to exist cannot exist within the universe or be bounded by space and time.

5. Therefore, what it takes for the universe to exist must transcend both space and time.

Suppose you deny the first premise. Then if X exists, there need not exist what it takes for X to exist. But "what it takes for X to exist" means the immediate condition(s) for X's existence. You mean that X exists only if Y. Without Y, there can be no X. So the denial of premise 1 amounts to this: X exists; X can only exist if Y exists; and Y does not exist. This is absurd. So there must exist what it takes for the universe to exist. But what does it take?

We spoke of the universe as "the collection of beings in space and time." Consider one such being: yourself. You exist, and you are, in part at least, material. This means that you are a finite, limited and changing being, you know that right now, as you read this book, you are dependent for your existence on beings outside you. Not your parents or grandparents. They may no longer be alive, but you exist now. And right now you depend on many things in order to exist—for example, on the air you breathe. To be dependent in this way is to be contingent. You exist if something else right now exists.

But not everything can be like this. For then everything would need to be given being, but there would be nothing capable of giving it. There would not exist what it takes for anything to exist. So there must be something that does not exist conditionally; something which does not exist only if something else exists; something which exists in itself. What it takes for this thing to exist could only be this thing itself. Unlike changing material reality, there would be no distance, so to speak, between what this thing is and that it is. Obviously the collection of beings changing in space and time cannot be such a thing. Therefore, what it takes for the universe to exist cannot be identical with the universe itself or with a part of the universe.

Question 1: But why should we call this cause "God"? Maybe there is something unknown that grounds the universe of change we live in.

Reply: True. And this "unknown" is God. What we humans know directly is this sensible changing world. We also know that there must exist whatever it takes for something to exist. Therefore, we know that neither this changing universe as a whole nor any part of it can be itself what it takes for the universe to exist. But we have now such direct knowledge of the cause of changing things. We know that there must exist a cause; we know that this cause cannot be finite or material—that it must transcend such limitations. But what this ultimate cause is in itself remains, so far, a mystery.

There is more to be said by reason; and there is very much more God has made known about himself through revelation. But the proofs have given us some real knowledge as well: knowledge that the universe is created; knowledge that right now it is kept in being by a cause unbounded by any material limit, that transcends the kind of being we humans directly know. And that is surely knowledge worth having. We might figure out that someone's death was murder and no accident, without figuring out exactly who did it and why, and this might leave us frustrated and unsatisfied. But at least we would know what path of questioning to pursue; at least we would know that someone did it.

So it is with the proofs. They let us know that at every moment the being of the universe is the creative act of a Giver—A Giver transcending all material and spiritual limitations. Beyond that, they do not tell us much about what or who this Giver is—but they point in a very definite direction. We know that this Ultimate Reality—the Giver of being—cannot be material. And we know the gift which is given includes personal being:

intelligence, will and spirit. The infinite transcendent cause of these things cannot be less than they are, but must be infinitely more. How and in what way we do not know. To some extent this Giver must always remain unknown to human reason. We should never expect otherwise. But reason can at least let us know that "someone did it." And that is of great value.

8. The Argument from the World as an Interacting Whole

Norris Clarke, who taught metaphysics and philosophy of religion for many years at Fordham, has circulated privately an intriguing version of the design argument. We present it here, slightly abridged and revised; for your reflection.

Starting point. This world is given to us as a dynamic, ordered system of many active component elements. Their natures (natural properties) are ordered to interact with each other in stable, reciprocal relationships which we call physical laws. For example, every hydrogen atom in our universe is ordered to combine with every oxygen atom in the proportion of 2:1 (which implies that every oxygen atom is reciprocally ordered to combine with every hydrogen atom in the proportion of 1:2). So it is with the chemical valences of all the basic elements. So too all particles with mass are ordered to move toward every other according to the fixed proportions of the law of gravity.

In such an interconnected, interlocking, dynamic system, the active nature of each component is defined by its relation with others, and so presupposes the others for its own intelligibility and ability to act. Contemporary science reveals to us that our world—system is not merely an aggregate of many separate, unrelated laws, but rather a tightly interlocking whole, where relationship to the whole structures and determines the parts. The parts can no longer be understood apart from the whole; its influence permeates them all.

Argument. In any such system as the above (like our world) no component part or active element can be self—sufficient or self—explanatory. For any part presupposes all the other parts—the whole system already in place—to match its own relational properties. It can't act unless the others are there to interact reciprocally with it. Any one part could be self—sufficient only if it were the cause of the whole rest of the system—which is impossible, since no part can act except in collaboration with the others.

Nor can the system as a whole explain its own existence, since it is made up of the component parts and is not a separate being, on its own, independent of them. So neither the parts nor the whole are self—sufficient; neither can explain the actual existence of this dynamically interactive system.

Three Conclusions

1. Since the parts make sense only within the whole, and neither the whole nor the parts can explain their own existence, then such a system as our world requires a unifying efficient cause to posit it in existence as a unified whole.
2. Any such cause must be an intelligent cause, one that brings the system into being according to a unifying idea. For the unity of the whole—and of each one of the overarching, cosmic—wide, physical laws uniting elements under themselves—is what determines and correlates the parts. Hence it must be somehow actually present as an effective organizing factor. But the unity, the wholeness, of the whole transcends any one part, and therefore cannot be contained in any one part. To be actually present all at

once as a whole this unity can only be the unity of an organizing unifying idea. For only an idea can hold together many different elements at once without destroying or fusing their distinctness. That is almost the definition of an idea. Since the actual parts are spread out over space and time, the only way they can be together at once as an intelligible unity is within an idea. Hence the system of the world as a whole must live first within the unity of an idea.

Now a real idea cannot actually exist and be effectively operative save in a real mind, which has the creative power to bring such a system into real existence. Hence the sufficient reason for our ordered world—system must ultimately be a creative ordering Mind. A cosmic—wide order requires a cosmic—wide Orderer, which can only be a Mind.

3. Such an ordering Mind must be independent of the system itself, that is, transcendent; not dependent on the system for its own existence and operation. For if it were dependent on—or part of—the system, it would have to presuppose the latter as already existing in order to operate, and would thus have to both precede and follow itself. But this is absurd. Hence it must exist and be able to operate prior to and independent of the system.

Thus our material universe necessarily requires, as the sufficient reason for its actual existence as an operating whole, a Transcendent Creative Mind.

9. The Argument from Miracles

1. A miracle is an event whose only adequate explanation is the extraordinary and direct intervention of God.
2. There are numerous well-attested miracles.
3. Therefore, there are numerous events whose only adequate explanation is the extraordinary and direct intervention of God.
4. Therefore God exists.

Obviously if you believe that some extraordinary event is a miracle, then you believe in divine agency, and you believe that such agency was at work in this event. But the question is: Was this event a miracle? If miracles exist, then God must exist. But do miracles exist?

Which events do we choose? In the first place, the event must be extraordinary. But there are many extraordinary happenings (e.g., numerous stones dropping from the sky in Texas) that do not qualify as miracles. Why not? First, because they could be caused by something in nature, and second, because the context in which they occur is not religious. They qualify as mere oddities, as "strange happenings"; the sort of thing you might expect to read in *Believe It or Not*, but never hear about from the pulpit. Therefore the meaning of the event must also be religious to qualify as a miracle.

Suppose that a holy man had stood in the center of Houston and said: "My dear brothers and sisters! You are leading sinful lives! Look at yourselves—drunken! dissolute! God wants you to repent! And as a sign of his displeasure he's going to shower stones upon you!" Then, moments later—thunk! thunk! thunk!—the stones began to fall. The word "miracle" might very well spring to mind.

Not that we would have to believe in God after witnessing this event. But still, if that man in Texas seemed utterly genuine, and if his accusations hit home, made us think "He's right," then it would be very hard to consider what happened a deception or even an extraordinary coincidence.

This means that the setting of a supposed miracle is crucially important. Not just the physical setting, and not just the timing, but the personal setting is vital as well—the character and the message of the person to whom this event is specially tied. Take, for example, four or five miracles from the New Testament. Remove them completely from their context, from the teaching and character of Christ. Would it be wrong to see their religious significance as thereby greatly diminished? After all, to call some happening a miracle is to interpret it religiously. But to interpret it that way demands a context or setting which invites such interpretation. And part of this setting usually, though not always, involves a person whose moral authority is first recognized, and whose religious authority, which the miracle seems to confirm, is then acknowledged.

Abstract discussions of probability usually miss this factor. But setting does play a decisive role. Many years ago, at an otherwise dull convention, a distinguished philosopher explained why he had become a Christian. He said: "I picked up the New Testament with a view to judging it, to weighing its pros and cons. But as I began to read, I realized that I was the one being judged." Certainly he came to believe in the miracle—stories. But it was the character and teaching of Christ that led him to accept the things recounted there as genuine acts of God.

So there is not really a proof from miracles. If you see some event as a miracle, then the activity of God is seen in this event. There is a movement of the mind from this event to its proper interpretation as miraculous. And what gives impetus to that movement is not just the event by itself, but the many factors surrounding it which invite—or seem to demand—such interpretation.

But miraculous events exist. Indeed, there is massive, reliable testimony to them across many times, places and cultures.

Therefore their cause exists.

And their only adequate cause is God.

Therefore God exists.

The argument is not a proof, but a very powerful clue or sign. (For further discussion, see chap. 5 on miracles from [Handbook of Christian Apologetics](#). 📖)

10. The Argument from Consciousness

When we experience the tremendous order and intelligibility in the universe, we are experiencing something intelligence can grasp. Intelligence is part of what we find in the world. But this universe is not itself intellectually aware. As great as the forces of nature are, they do not know themselves. Yet we know them and ourselves. These remarkable facts—the presence of intelligence amidst unconscious material processes, and the conformity of those processes to the structure of conscious intelligence—have given rise to a variation on the first argument for design.

1. We experience the universe as intelligible. This intelligibility means that the universe is graspable by intelligence.

2. Either this intelligible universe and the finite minds so well suited to grasp it are the products of intelligence, or both intelligibility and intelligence are the products of blind chance.
3. Not blind chance.
4. Therefore this intelligible universe and the finite minds so well suited to grasp it are the products of intelligence.

There are obvious similarities here to the design argument, and many of the things we said to defend that argument could be used to defend this one too. For now we want to focus our attention on step 3.

Readers familiar with C. S. Lewis's *Miracles* will remember the powerful argument he made in chapter three against what he called "naturalism": the view that everything—including our thinking and judging—belongs to one vast interlocking system of physical causes and effects. If naturalism is true, Lewis argued, then it seems to leave us with no reason for believing it to be true; for all judgments would equally and ultimately be the result of nonrational forces.

Now this line of reflection has an obvious bearing on step 3. What we mean by "blind chance" is the way physical nature must ultimately operate if "naturalism" is true—void of any rational plan or guiding purpose. So if Lewis's argument is a good one, then step 3 stands: blind chance cannot be the source of our intelligence.

We were tempted, when preparing this section, to quote the entire third chapter of *Miracles*. This sort of argument is not original to Lewis, but we have never read a better statement of it than his, and we urge you to consult it. But we have found a compelling, and admirably succinct version (written almost twenty years before *Miracles*) in H. W. B. Joseph's *Some Problems in Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1931). Joseph was an Oxford don, senior to Lewis, with whose writings Lewis was certainly familiar. And undoubtedly this statement of the argument influenced Lewis's later, more elaborate version.

If thought is laryngeal motion, how should any one think more truly than the wind blows? All movements of bodies are equally necessary, but they cannot be discriminated as true and false. It seems as nonsensical to call a movement true as a flavour purple or a sound avaricious. But what is obvious when thought is said to be a certain bodily movement seems equally to follow from its being the effect of one. Thought called knowledge and thought called error are both necessary results of states of brain. These states are necessary results of other bodily states. All the bodily states are equally real, and so are the different thoughts; but by what right can I hold that my thought is knowledge of what is real in bodies? For to hold so is but another thought, an effect of real bodily movements like the rest. . . These arguments, however, of mine, if the principles of scientific [naturalism]... are to stand unchallenged, are themselves no more than happenings in a mind, results of bodily movements; that you or I think them sound, or think them unsound, is but another such happening; that we think them no more than another such happening is itself but yet another such. And it may be said of any ground on which we may attempt to stand as true, *Labitur et labetur in omne volubilis aevum* ["It flows and will flow swirling on forever" (Horace, *Epistles*, I, 2, 43)]. (*Some Problems in Ethics*, pp. 14—15)

11. The Argument from Truth

This argument is closely related to the argument from consciousness. It comes mainly from Augustine.

1. Our limited minds can discover eternal truths about being.

2. Truth properly resides in a mind.
3. But the human mind is not eternal.
4. Therefore there must exist an eternal mind in which these truths reside.

This proof might appeal to someone who shares a Platonic view of knowledge—who, for example, believes that there are Eternal Intelligible Forms which are present to the mind in every act of knowledge. Given that view, it is a very short step to see these Eternal Forms as properly existing within an Eternal Mind. And there is a good deal to be said for this. But that is just the problem. There is too much about the theory of knowledge that needs to be said before this could work as a persuasive demonstration.

12. The Argument from the Origin of the Idea of God

This argument, made famous by Rene Descartes, has a kinship to the ontological argument (13). It starts from the idea of God. But it does not claim that real being is part of the content of that idea, as the ontological argument does. Rather it seeks to show that only God himself could have caused this idea to arise in our minds.

It would be impossible for us to reproduce the whole context Descartes gives for this proof (see his third Meditation), and fruitless to follow his scholastic vocabulary. We give below the briefest summary and discussion.

1. We have ideas of many things.
2. These ideas must arise either from ourselves or from things outside us.
3. One of the ideas we have is the idea of God—an infinite, all-perfect being.
4. This idea could not have been caused by ourselves, because we know ourselves to be limited and imperfect, and no effect can be greater than its cause.
5. Therefore, the idea must have been caused by something outside us which has nothing less than the qualities contained in the idea of God.
6. But only God himself has those qualities.
7. Therefore God himself must be the cause of the idea we have of him.
8. Therefore God exists.

Consider the following common objection. The idea of God can easily arise like this: we notice degrees of perfection among finite beings—some are more perfect (or less imperfect) than others. And to reach the idea of God, we just project the scale upward and outward to infinity. Thus there seems to be no need for an actually existing God to account for the existence of the idea. All we need is the experience of things varying in degrees of perfection, and a mind capable of thinking away perceived limitations.

But is that really enough? How can we think away limitation or imperfection unless we first recognize it as such? And how can we recognize it as such unless we already have some notion of infinite perfection? To recognize things as imperfect or finite involves the possession of a standard in thought that makes the recognition possible.

Does that seem farfetched? It does not mean that toddlers spend their time thinking about God. But it does mean that, however late in life you use the standard, however long before it comes explicitly into consciousness, still, the standard must be there in order for you to use it. But where did it come from? Not from your experience of yourself or of the world that exists outside you. For the idea of infinite perfection is already presupposed in our thinking about all these things and judging them imperfect. Therefore none of them can be the origin of the idea of God; only God himself can be that.

13. The Ontological Argument

The ontological argument was devised by Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), who wanted to produce a single, simple demonstration which would show that God is and what God is. Single it may be, but far from simple. It is, perhaps, the most controversial proof for the existence of God. Most people who first hear it are tempted to dismiss it immediately as an interesting riddle, but distinguished thinkers of every age, including our own, have risen to defend it. For this very reason it is the most intensely philosophical proof for God's existence; its place of honor is not within popular piety, but rather textbooks and professional journals. We include it, with a minimum of discussion, not because we think it conclusive or irrefutable, but for the sake of completeness.

Anselm's Version

1. It is greater for a thing to exist in the mind and in reality than in the mind alone.
2. "God" means "that than which a greater cannot be thought."
3. Suppose that God exists in the mind but not in reality.
4. Then a greater than God could be thought (namely, a being that has all the qualities our thought of God has plus real existence).
5. But this is impossible, for God is "that than which a greater cannot be thought."
6. Therefore God exists in the mind and in reality.

Question 1: Suppose I deny that God exists in the mind?

Reply: In that case the argument could not conclude that God exists in the mind and in reality. But note: the denial commits you to the view that there is no concept of God. And very few would wish to go that far.

Question 2: Is it really greater for something to exist in the mind and in reality than in the mind alone?

Reply: The first premise of this argument is often misunderstood. People sometimes say: "Isn't an imaginary disease better than a real one?" Well it certainly is better—and so a greater thing—for you that the disease is not real. But that strengthens Anselm's side of the argument. Real bacteria are greater than imaginary ones, just because they have something that imaginary ones lack: real being. They have an independence, and therefore an ability to harm, that nothing can have whose existence is wholly dependent on your thought. It is this greater level of independence that makes them greater as beings. And that line of thinking does not seem elusive or farfetched.

Question 3: But is real being just another "thought" or "concept"? Is "real being" just one more concept or characteristic (like "omniscience" or "omnipotence") that could make a difference to the kind of being God is?

Reply: Real being does make a real difference. The question is: Does it make a conceptual difference? Critics of the argument say that it does not. They say that just because real being makes all the difference it cannot be one more quality among others. Rather it is the condition of there being something there to have any qualities at all. When the proof says that God is the greatest being that can be "thought," it means that there are various perfections or qualities that God has to a degree no creature possibly could, qualities that are supremely admirable. But to say that such a being exists is to say that there really is something which is supremely admirable. And that is not one more admirable quality among others.

Is it greater to exist in reality as well as in the mind? Of course, incomparably greater. But the difference is not a conceptual one. And yet the argument seems to treat it as if it were—as if the believer and the nonbeliever could not share the same concept of God. Clearly they do. They disagree not about the content of this concept, but about whether the kind of being it describes really exists. And that seems beyond the power of merely conceptual analysis, as used in this argument, to answer. So question 3, we think, really does invalidate this form of the ontological argument.

Modal Version

Charles Hartshorne and Norman Malcolm developed this version of the ontological argument. Both find it implicitly contained in the third chapter of Anselm's Proslogion.

1. The expression "that being than which a greater cannot be thought" (GCB, for short) expresses a consistent concept.
2. GCB cannot be thought of as: a. necessarily nonexistent; or as b. contingently existing but only as c. necessarily existing.
3. So GCB can only be thought of as the kind of being that cannot not exist, that must exist.
4. But what must be so is so.
5. Therefore, GCB (i.e., God) exists.

Question: Just because GCB must be thought of as existing, does that mean that GCB really exists?

Reply: If you must think of something as existing, you cannot think of it as not existing. But then you cannot deny that GCB exists; for then you are thinking what you say cannot be thought—namely, that GCB does not exist.

Possible Worlds Version

This variation on the modal version has been worked out in great detail by Alvin Plantinga. We have done our best to simplify it.

Definitions:

Maximal excellence: To have omnipotence, omniscience and moral perfection in some world.

Maximal greatness: To have maximal excellence in every possible world.

1. There is a possible world (W) in which there is a being (X) with maximal greatness.
2. But X is maximally great only if X has maximal excellence in every possible world.
3. Therefore X is maximally great only if X has omnipotence, omniscience and moral perfection in every possible world.
4. In W, the proposition "There is no omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect being" would be impossible—that is, necessarily false.
5. But what is impossible does not vary from world to world.
6. Therefore, the proposition, "There is no omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect being" is necessarily false in this actual world, too.
7. Therefore, there actually exists in this world, and must exist in every possible world, an omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect being.

14. The Moral Argument

1. Real moral obligation is a fact. We are really, truly, objectively obligated to do good and avoid evil.
2. Either the atheistic view of reality is correct or the "religious" one.
3. But the atheistic one is incompatible with there being moral obligation.
4. Therefore the "religious" view of reality is correct.

We need to be clear about what the first premise is claiming. It does not mean merely that we can find people around who claim to have certain duties. Nor does it mean that there have been many people who thought they were obliged to do certain things (like clothing the naked) and to avoid doing others (like committing adultery). The first premise is claiming something more: namely, that we human beings really are obligated; that our duties arise from the way things really are, and not simply from our desires or subjective dispositions. It is claiming, in other words, that moral values or obligations themselves—and not merely the belief in moral values—are objective facts.

Now given the fact of moral obligation, a question naturally arises. Does the picture of the world presented by atheism accord with this fact? The answer is no. Atheists never tire of telling us that we are the chance products of the motion of matter—a motion which is purposeless and blind to every human striving. We should take them at their word and ask: Given this picture, in what exactly is the moral good rooted? Moral obligation can hardly be rooted in a material motion blind to purpose.

Suppose we say it is rooted in nothing deeper than human willing and desire. In that case, we have no moral standard against which human desires can be judged. For every desire will spring from the same ultimate source—purposeless, pitiless matter. And what becomes of obligation? According to this view, if I say there is an obligation to feed the hungry, I would be stating a fact about my wants and desires and nothing else. I would be saying that I want the hungry to be fed, and that I choose to act on that desire. But this amounts to an admission that neither I nor anyone else is really obliged to feed the hungry—that, in fact, no one has any real obligations at all. Therefore the atheistic view of reality is not compatible with there being genuine moral obligation.

What view is compatible? One that sees real moral obligation as grounded in its Creator, that sees moral obligation as rooted in the fact that we have been created with a purpose and for an end. We may call this view, with deliberate generality, "the religious view." But however general the view, reflection on the fact of moral obligation does seem to confirm it.

Question 1: The argument has not shown that ethical subjectivism is false. What if there are no objective values?

Reply: True enough. The argument assumes that there are objective values; it aims to show that believing in them is incompatible with one picture of the world, and quite compatible with another. Those two pictures are the atheistic-materialistic one, and the (broadly speaking) religious one. Granted, if ethical subjectivism is true, then the argument does not work. However, almost no one is a consistent subjectivist. (Many think they are, and say they are—until they suffer violence or injustice. In that case they invariably stand with the rest of us in recognizing that certain things ought never to be done.) And for the many who are not—and never will be—subjectivists, the argument can be most helpful. It can show them that to believe as they do in objective values is inconsistent with what they may also believe about the origin and destiny of the universe. If they move to correct the inconsistency, it will be a move toward the religious view and away from the atheistic one.

Question 2: This proof does not conclude to God but to some vague "religious" view. Isn't this "religious" view compatible with very much more than traditional theism?

Reply: Yes indeed. It is compatible, for example, with Platonic idealism, and many other beliefs that orthodox Christians find terribly deficient. But this general religious view is incompatible with materialism, and with any view that banishes value from the ultimate objective nature of things. That is the important point. It seems most reasonable that moral conscience is the voice of God within the soul, because moral value exists only on the level of persons, minds and wills. And it is hard, if not impossible, to conceive of objective moral principles somehow floating around on their own, apart from any persons.

But we grant that there are many steps to travel from objective moral values to the Creator of the universe or the triune God of love. There is a vast intellectual distance between them. But these things are compatible in a way that materialism and belief in objective values are not. To reach a personal Creator you need other arguments (cf. arguments 1-6), and to reach the God of love you need revelation. By itself, the argument leaves many options open, and eliminates only some. But we are surely well rid of those it does eliminate.

15. The Argument from Conscience

Since moral subjectivism is very popular today, the following version of, or twist to, the moral argument should be effective, since it does not presuppose moral objectivism. Modern people often say they believe that there are no universally binding moral obligations, that we must all follow our own private conscience. But that very admission is enough of a premise to prove the existence of God.

Isn't it remarkable that no one, even the most consistent subjectivist, believes that it is ever good for anyone to deliberately and knowingly disobey his or her own conscience? Even if different people's consciences tell them to do or avoid totally different things, there remains one moral absolute for everyone: never disobey your own conscience.

Now where did conscience get such an absolute authority—an authority admitted even by the moral subjectivist and relativist? There are only four possibilities.

1. From something less than me (nature)
2. From me (individual)
3. From others equal to me (society)
4. From something above me (God)

Let's consider each of these possibilities in order.

1. How can I be absolutely obligated by something less than me—for example, by animal instinct or practical need for material survival?
2. How can I obligate myself absolutely? Am I absolute? Do I have the right to demand absolute obedience from anyone, even myself? And if I am the one who locked myself in this prison of obligation, I can also let myself out, thus destroying the absoluteness of the obligation which we admitted as our premise.
3. How can society obligate me? What right do my equals have to impose their values on me? Does quantity make quality? Do a million human beings make a relative into an absolute? Is "society" God?
4. The only source of absolute moral obligation left is something superior to me. This binds my will, morally, with rightful demands for complete obedience.

Thus God, or something like God, is the only adequate source and ground for the absolute moral obligation we all feel to obey our conscience. Conscience is thus explainable only as the voice of God in the soul. The Ten Commandments are ten divine footprints in our psychic sand.

Addendum on Religion and Morality

In drawing this connection between morality and religion, we do not want to create any confusion or misunderstanding. We have not said that people can never discover human moral goods unless they acknowledge that God exists. Obviously they can. Believers and nonbelievers can know that knowledge and friendship, for example, are things that we really ought to strive for, and that cruelty and deceit are objectively wrong. Our question has been: which account of the way things really are best makes sense of the moral rules we all acknowledge—that of the believer or that of the non-believer?

If we are the products of a good and loving Creator, this explains why we have a nature that discovers a value that is really there. But how can atheists explain this? For if atheists are right, then no objective moral values can exist. Dostoyevsky said, "If God does not exist, everything is permissible." Atheists may know that some things are not permissible, but they do not know why.

Consider the following analogy. Many scientists examine secondary causes all their lives without acknowledging the First Cause, God. But, as we have seen, those secondary causes could not be without the First Cause, even though they can be known without knowing the First Cause. The same is true of objective moral goods. Thus the moral argument and the various metaphysical arguments share a certain similarity in structure.

Most of us, whatever our religious faith, or lack of it, can recognize that in the life of someone like Francis of Assisi human nature is operating the right way, the way it ought to operate. You need not be a theist to see that St. Francis's life was admirable, but you do need to be a theist to see why. Theism explains that our response to this believer's life is, ultimately, our response to the call of our Creator to live the kind of life he made us to live.

There are four possible relations between religion and morality, God and goodness.

1. Religion and morality may be thought to be independent. Kierkegaard's sharp contrast between "the ethical" and "the religious," especially in *Fear and Trembling*, may lead to such a supposition. But (a) an amoral God, indifferent to morality, would not be a wholly good God, for one of the primary meanings of "good" involves the "moral"—just, loving, wise, righteous, holy, kind. And (b) such a morality, not having any connection with God, the Absolute Being, would not have absolute reality behind it.
2. God may be thought of as the inventor of morality, as he is the inventor of birds. The moral law is often thought of as simply a product of God's choice. This is the Divine Command Theory: a thing is good only because God commands it and evil because he forbids it. If that is all, however, we have a serious problem: God and his morality are arbitrary and based on mere power. If God commanded us to kill innocent people, that would become good, since good here means "whatever God commands." The Divine Command Theory reduces morality to power. Socrates refuted the Divine Command Theory pretty conclusively in Plato's *Euthyphro*. He asked Euthyphro, "Is a thing pious because the gods will it, or do the gods will it because it is pious?" He refuted the first alternative, and thought he was left with the second as the only alternative.
3. But the idea that God commands a thing because it is good is also unacceptable, because it makes God conform to a law higher than himself, a law that overarches God and humanity alike. The God of the Bible is no more separated from moral goodness by being under it than he is by being over it. He no more obeys a higher law that binds him, than he creates the law as an artifact that could change and could well have been different, like a planet.
4. The only rationally acceptable answer to the question of the relation between God and morality is the biblical one: morality is based on God's eternal nature. That is why morality is essentially unchangeable. "I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (Lev. 11:44). Our obligation to be just, kind, honest, loving and righteous "goes all the way up" to ultimate reality, to the eternal nature of God, to what God is. That is why morality has absolute and unchangeable binding force on our conscience.

The only other possible sources of moral obligation are:

- a. My ideals, purposes, aspirations, and desires, something created by my mind or will, like the rules of baseball. This utterly fails to account for why it is always wrong to disobey or change the rules.
- b. My moral will itself. Some read Kant this way: I impose morality on myself. But how can the one bound and the one who binds be the same? If the locksmith locks himself in a room, he is not really locked in, for he can also unlock himself.
- c. Another human being may be thought to be the one who imposes morality on me—my parents, for example. But this fails to account for its binding character. If your father commands you to deal drugs, your moral obligation is to disobey him. No human being can have absolute authority over another.

d. "Society" is a popular answer to the question of the origin of morality "this or that specific person" is a very unpopular answer. Yet the two are the same. "Society" only means more individuals. What right do they have to legislate morality to me? Quantity cannot yield quality; adding numbers cannot change the rules of a relative game to the rightful absolute demands of conscience.

e. The universe, evolution, natural selection and survival all fare even worse as explanations for morality. You cannot get more out of less. The principle of causality is violated here. How could the primordial slime pools gurgle up the Sermon on the Mount?

Atheists often claim that Christians make a category mistake in using God to explain nature; they say it is like the Greeks using Zeus to explain lightning. In fact, lightning should be explained on its own level, as a material, natural, scientific phenomenon. The same with morality. Why bring in God?

Because morality is more like Zeus than like lightning. Morality exists only on the level of persons, spirits, souls, minds, wills—not mere molecules. You can make correlations between moral obligations and persons (e.g., persons should love other persons), but you cannot make any correlations between morality and molecules. No one has even tried to explain the difference between good and evil in terms, for example, of the difference between heavy and light atoms.

So it is really the atheist who makes the same category mistake as the ancient pagan who explained lightning by the will of Zeus. The atheist uses a merely material thing to explain a spiritual thing. That is a far sillier version of the category mistake than the one the ancients made; for it is possible that the greater (Zeus, spirit) caused the lesser (lightning) and explains it; but it is not possible that the lesser (molecules) adequately caused and explains the greater (morality). A good will might create molecules, but how could molecules create a good will? How can electricity obligate me? Only a good will can demand a good will; only Love can demand love.

16. The Argument from Desire

1. Every natural, innate desire in us corresponds to some real object that can satisfy that desire.
2. But there exists in us a desire which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature can satisfy.
3. Therefore there must exist something more than time, earth and creatures, which can satisfy this desire.
4. This something is what people call "God" and "life with God forever."

The first premise implies a distinction of desires into two kinds: innate and externally conditioned, or natural and artificial. We naturally desire things like food, drink, sex, sleep, knowledge, friendship and beauty; and we naturally shun things like starvation, loneliness, ignorance and ugliness. We also desire (but not innately or naturally) things like sports cars, political office, flying through the air like Superman, the land of Oz and a Red Sox world championship.

Now there are differences between these two kinds of desires. We do not, for example, for the most part, recognize corresponding states of deprivation for the second, the artificial, desires, as we do for the first. There is no word like "Ozlessness" parallel to "sleeplessness." But more importantly, the natural desires come from within, from our nature, while the artificial ones come from without, from society, advertising or fiction. This

second difference is the reason for a third difference: the natural desires are found in all of us, but the artificial ones vary from person to person.

The existence of the artificial desires does not necessarily mean that the desired objects exist. Some do; some don't. Sports cars do; Oz does not. But the existence of natural desires does, in every discoverable case, mean that the objects desired exist. No one has ever found one case of an innate desire for a nonexistent object.

The second premise requires only honest introspection. If someone denies it and says, "I am perfectly happy playing with mud pies, or sports cars, or money, or sex, or power," we can only ask, "Are you, really?" But we can only appeal, we cannot compel. And we can refer such a person to the nearly universal testimony of human history in all its great literature. Even the atheist Jean-Paul Sartre admitted that "there comes a time when one asks, even of Shakespeare, even of Beethoven, 'Is that all there is?'"

The conclusion of the argument is not that everything the Bible tells us about God and life with God is really so. What it proves is an unknown X, but an unknown whose direction, so to speak, is known. This X is more: more beauty, more desirability, more awesomeness, more joy. This X is to great beauty as, for example, great beauty is to small beauty or to a mixture of beauty and ugliness. And the same is true of other perfections.

But the "more" is infinitely more, for we are not satisfied with the finite and partial. Thus the analogy (X is to great beauty as great beauty is to small beauty) is not proportionate. Twenty is to ten as ten is to five, but infinite is not to twenty as twenty is to ten. The argument points down an infinite corridor in a definite direction. Its conclusion is not "God" as already conceived or defined, but a moving and mysterious X which pulls us to itself and pulls all our images and concepts out of themselves.

In other words, the only concept of God in this argument is the concept of that which transcends concepts, something "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived" (1 Cor. 2:9). In other words, this is the real God.

C. S. Lewis, who uses this argument in a number of places, summarizes it succinctly:

Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for these desires exists. A baby feels hunger; well, there is such a thing as food. A dolphin wants to swim; well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire; well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. (Mere Christianity, Bk. III, chap. 10, "Hope")

Question 1: How can you know the major premise—that every natural desire has a real object—is universally true, without first knowing that this natural desire also has a real object? But that is the conclusion. Thus you beg the question. You must know the conclusion to be true before you can know the major premise.

Reply: This is really not an objection to the argument from desire only, but to every deductive argument whatsoever, every syllogism. It is the old saw of John Stuart Mill and the nominalists against the syllogism. It presupposes empiricism—that is, that the only way we can ever know anything is by sensing individual things and then generalizing, by induction. It excludes deduction because it excludes the knowledge of any universal truths (like our major premise). For nominalists do not believe in the existence of any universals—except one (that all universals are only names).

This is very easy to refute. We can and do come to a knowledge of universal truths, like "all humans are mortal," not by sense experience alone (for we can never sense all humans) but through abstracting the common universal essence or nature of humanity from the few specimens we do experience by our senses. We know that all humans are mortal because humanity, as such, involves mortality, it is the nature of a human being to be mortal; mortality follows necessarily from its having an animal body. We can understand that. We have the power of understanding, or intellectual intuition, or insight, in addition to the mental powers of sensation and calculation, which are the only two the nominalist and empiricist give us. (We share sensation with animals and calculation with computers; where is the distinctively human way of knowing for the empiricist and nominalist?)

When there is no real connection between the nature of a proposition's subject and the nature of the predicate, the only way we can know the truth of that proposition is by sense experience and induction. For instance, we can know that all the books on this shelf are red only by looking at each one and counting them. But when there is a real connection between the nature of the subject and the nature of the predicate, we can know the truth of that proposition by understanding and insight—for instance, "Whatever has color must have size," or, "A Perfect Being would not be ignorant."

Question 2: Suppose I simply deny the minor premise and say that I just don't observe any hidden desire for God, or infinite joy, or some mysterious X that is more than earth can offer?

Reply: This denial may take two forms. First, one may say, "Although I am not perfectly happy now, I believe I would be if only I had ten million dollars, a Lear jet, and a new mistress every day." The reply to this is, of course, "Try it. You won't like it." It's been tried and has never satisfied. In fact, billions of people have performed and are even now performing trillions of such experiments, desperately seeking the ever-elusive satisfaction they crave. For even if they won the whole world, it would not be enough to fill one human heart.

Yet they keep trying, believing that "If only... Next time ..." This is the stupidest gamble in the world, for it is the only one that consistently has never paid off. It is like the game of predicting the end of the world: every batter who has ever approached that plate has struck out. There is hardly reason to hope the present ones will fare any better. After trillions of failures and a one hundred percent failure rate, this is one experiment no one should keep trying.

A second form of denial of our premise is: "I am perfectly happy now." This, we suggest, verges on idiocy or, worse, dishonesty. It requires something more like exorcism than refutation. This is Merseult in Camus's *The Stranger*. This is subhuman, vegetation, pop psychology. Even the hedonist utilitarian John Stuart Mill, one of the shallowest (though cleverest) minds in the history of philosophy, said that "it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied."

Question 3: This argument is just another version of Anselm's ontological argument (13), which is invalid. You argue to an objective God from a mere subjective idea or desire in you.

Reply: No, we do not argue from the idea alone, as Anselm does. Rather, our argument first derives a major premise from the real world of nature: that nature makes no desire in vain. Then it discovers something real in human nature—namely, human desire for something more than nature—which nature cannot explain, because

nature cannot satisfy it. Thus, the argument is based on observed facts in nature, both outer and inner. It has data.

17. The Argument from Aesthetic Experience

There is the music of Johann Sebastian Bach.

Therefore there must be a God.

You either see this one or you don't.

18. The Argument from Religious Experience

Some sort of experience lies at the very core of most people's religious faith. Most of our readers have very likely had such an experience. If so, you realize, in a way no one else can, its central importance in your life. That realization is not itself an argument for God's existence; in fact, in the light of it you would probably say that there is no need for arguments. But there is in fact an argument for God's existence constructed from the data of such experiences. It is not an argument which moves from your own personal experience to your own affirmation that God exists. As we said, you most probably have no need for such an argument. Instead, this argument moves in another direction: from the widespread fact of religious experience to the affirmation that only a divine reality can adequately explain it.

It is difficult to state this argument deductively. But it might fairly be put as follows.

1. Many people of different eras and of widely different cultures claim to have had an experience of the "divine."
2. It is inconceivable that so many people could have been so utterly wrong about the nature and content of their own experience.
3. Therefore, there exists a "divine" reality which many people of different eras and of widely different cultures have experienced.

Does such experience prove that an intelligent Creator-God exists? On the face of it this seems unlikely. For such a God does not seem to be the object of all experiences called "religious." But still, he is the object of many. That is, many people understand their experience that way; they are "united with" or "taken up into" a boundless and overwhelming Knowledge and Love, a Love that fills them with itself but infinitely exceeds their capacity to receive. Or so they claim. The question is: Are we to believe them?

There is an enormous number of such claims. Either they are true or not. In evaluating them, we should take into account:

1. the consistency of these claims (are they self-consistent as well as consistent with what we know otherwise to be true?);
2. the character of those who make these claims (do these persons seem honest, decent, trustworthy?);
and

3. the effects these experiences have had in their own lives and the lives of others (have these persons become more loving as a result of what they experienced? More genuinely edifying? Or, alternatively, have they become vain and self-absorbed?).

Suppose someone says to you: "All these experiences are either the result of lesions in the temporal lobe or of neurotic repression. In no way do they verify the truth of some divine reality." What might your reaction be? You might think back over that enormous documentation of accounts and ask yourself if that can be right. And you might conclude: "No. Given this vast number of claims, and the quality of life of those who made them, it seems incredible that those who made the claims could have been so wrong about them, or that insanity or brain disease could cause such profound goodness and beauty."

It is impossible to lay down ahead of time how investigation into this record of claims and characters will affect all individuals. You cannot say ahead of time how it will affect you. But it is evidence; it has persuaded many; and it cannot be ignored. Sometimes—in fact, we believe, very often—that record is not so much faced as dismissed with vivid trendy labels.

19. The Common Consent Argument

This proof is in some ways like the argument from religious experience (18) and in other ways like the argument from desire (16). It argues that:

1. Belief in God—that Being to whom reverence and worship are properly due—is common to almost all people of every era.
2. Either the vast majority of people have been wrong about this most profound element of their lives or they have not.
3. It is most plausible to believe that they have not.
4. Therefore it is most plausible to believe that God exists.

Everyone admits that religious belief is widespread throughout human history. But the question arises: Does this undisputed fact amount to evidence in favor of the truth of religious claims? Even a skeptic will admit that the testimony we have is deeply impressive: the vast majority of humans have believed in an ultimate Being to whom the proper response could only be reverence and worship. No one disputes the reality of our feelings of reverence, attitudes of worship, acts of adoration. But if God does not exist, then these things have never once—never once—had a real object. Is it really plausible to believe that?

The capacity for reverence and worship certainly seems to belong to us by nature. And it is hard to believe that this natural capacity can never, in the nature of things, be fulfilled, especially when so many testify that it has been. True enough, it is conceivable that this side of our nature is doomed to frustration; it is thinkable that those millions upon millions who claim to have found the Holy One who is worthy of reverence and worship were deluded. But is it likely?

It seems far more likely that those who refuse to believe are the ones suffering from deprivation and delusion—like the tone-deaf person who denies the existence of music, or the frightened tenant who tells herself she doesn't hear cries of terror and distress coming from the street below and, when her children

awaken to the sounds and ask her, "Why is that lady screaming, Mommy?" tells them, "Nobody's screaming: it's just the wind, that's all. Go back to sleep."

Question 1: But the majority is not infallible. Most people were wrong about the movements of the sun and earth. So why not about the existence of God?

Reply: If people were wrong about the theory of heliocentrism, they still experienced the sun and earth and motion. They were simply mistaken in thinking that the motion they perceived was the sun's. But if God does not exist, what is it that believers have been experiencing? The level of illusion goes far beyond any other example of collective error. It really amounts to collective psychosis.

For believing in God is like having a relationship with a person. If God never existed, neither did this relationship. You were responding with reverence and love to no one; and no one was there to receive and answer your response. It's as if you believe yourself happily married when in fact you live alone in a dingy apartment.

Now we grant that such mass delusion is conceivable, but what is the likely story? If there were no other bits of experience which, taken together with our perceptions of the sun and earth, make it most likely that the earth goes round the sun, it would be foolish to interpret our experience that way. How much more so here, where what we experience is a relationship involving reverence and worship and, sometimes, love. It is most reasonable to believe that God really is there, given such widespread belief in him—unless atheists can come up with a very persuasive explanation for religious belief, one that takes full account of the experience of believers and shows that their experience is best explained as delusion and not insight. But atheists have never done so.

Question 2: But isn't there a very plausible psychological account of religious belief? Many nonbelievers hold that belief in God is the result of childhood fears; that God is in fact a projection of our human fathers: someone "up there" who can protect us from natural forces we consider hostile.

Reply A: This is not really a naturalistic explanation of religious belief. It is no more than a statement, dressed in psychological jargon, that religious belief is false. You begin from the assumption that God does not exist. Then you figure that since the closest earthly symbol for the Creator is a father, God must be a cosmic projection of our human fathers. But apart from the assumption of atheism, there is no compelling evidence at all that God is a mere projection.

In fact, the argument begs the question. We seek psychological explanation only for ideas we already know (or presume) to be false, not those we think to be true. We ask, "Why do you think black dogs are out to kill you? Were you frightened by one when you were small?" But we never ask, "Why do you think black dogs aren't out to kill you? Did you have a nice black puppy once?"

Reply B: Though there must be something of God that is reflected in human fathers (otherwise our symbolism for him would be inexplicable), Christians realize that the symbolism is ultimately inadequate. And if the Ultimate Being is mysterious in a way that transcends all symbolism, how can he be a mere projection of what the symbol represents? The truth seems to be—and if God exists, the truth is—the other way around: our earthly fathers are pale projections of the Heavenly Father. It should be noted that several writers (e.g., Paul

Vitz) have analyzed atheism as itself a psychic pathology: an alienation from the human father that results in rejection of God.

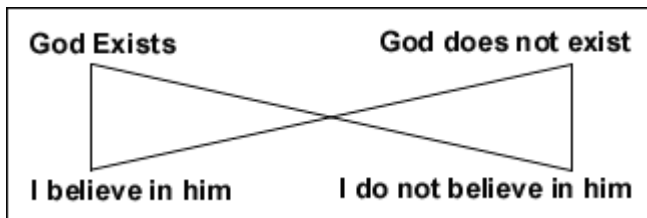
20. Pascal's Wager

Suppose you, the reader, still feel that all of these arguments are inconclusive. There is another, different kind of argument left. It has come to be known as Pascal's Wager. We mention it here and adapt it for our purposes, not because it is a proof for the existence of God, but because it can help us in our search for God in the absence of such proof.

As originally proposed by Pascal, the Wager assumes that logical reasoning by itself cannot decide for or against the existence of God; there seem to be good reasons on both sides. Now since reason cannot decide for sure, and since the question is of such importance that we must decide somehow, then we must "wager" if we cannot prove. And so we are asked: Where are you going to place your bet?

If you place it with God, you lose nothing, even if it turns out that God does not exist. But if you place it against God, and you are wrong and God does exist, you lose everything: God, eternity, heaven, infinite gain. "Let us assess the two cases: if you win, you win everything, if you lose, you lose nothing."

Consider the following diagram:



The vertical lines represent correct beliefs, the diagonals represent incorrect beliefs. Let us compare the diagonals. Suppose God does not exist and I believe in him. In that case, what awaits me after death is not eternal life but, most likely, eternal nonexistence. But now take the other diagonal: God, my Creator and the source of all good, does exist; but I do not believe in him. He offers me his love and his life, and I reject it. There are answers to my greatest questions, there is fulfillment of my deepest desires; but I decide to spurn it all. In that case, I lose (or at least seriously risk losing) everything.

The Wager can seem offensively venal and purely selfish. But it can be reformulated to appeal to a higher moral motive: If there is a God of infinite goodness, and he justly deserves my allegiance and faith, I risk doing the greatest injustice by not acknowledging him.

The Wager cannot—or should not—coerce belief. But it can be an incentive for us to search for God, to study and restudy the arguments that seek to show that there is Something—or Someone—who is the ultimate explanation of the universe and of my life. It could at least motivate "The Prayer of the Skeptic": "God, I don't know whether you exist or not, but if you do, please show me who you are."

Pascal says that there are three kinds of people: those who have sought God and found him, those who are seeking and have not yet found, and those who neither seek nor find. The first are reasonable and happy, the

second are reasonable and unhappy, the third are both unreasonable and unhappy. If the Wager stimulates us at least to seek, then it will at least stimulate us to be reasonable. And if the promise Jesus makes is true, all who seek will find (Mt 7:7-8), and thus will be happy.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why might someone think that the whole question of this chapter, whether God's existence can be proved, is trivial, unimportant, distracting or wrongheaded? How might such a person's argument(s) be answered?
2. Could there be an argument for God's existence that does not fit into either of the two categories here, cosmological (external) or psychological (internal)?
3. How psychologically forceful and how psychologically impotent is a valid argument for God's existence to an atheist? What does the answer to that question depend on? (There are many answers to this question; mention as many as you can. Which do you think is the most important one?)
4. How can anything be "outside" the universe if "the universe" = "everything in space and time and matter?" What is meant by "outside" here? Can you give any analogy or parallel situation where a term is used like this?
5. Why are there more than twenty arguments for and only one against God (the problem of evil)? (See chap. 6.)
6. What commonsense meaning of cause do these cosmological arguments use (especially 2)? What alternative meanings of cause have some philosophers preferred? How do they change or invalidate the cosmological argument(s)? How could these alternatives be refuted? (Hume's is the most famous.)
7. Does the answer to question 2 after argument 2 prove that God is creating the world right now?
8. Would alternative theories of time change or invalidate any of the cosmological arguments?
9. Does the simple answer to question 1 after argument 4 refute subjectivism? If not, where is the error in it? If so, why are there so many subjectivists?
10. Why is the design argument the most popular?
11. What is the relation between intelligibility and intelligence? Are intelligibility, design and order interchangeable concepts?
12. Isn't there a tiny chance that the universe just happened by chance? A quintillion monkeys typing for a quintillion years will eventually produce Hamlet by chance. Couldn't this book have been caused by an explosion in a print factory?
13. Regarding argument 10, how do we know the universe is not conscious or aware?
14. Does the answer to question 3 of argument 6 prove God is a person?
15. Sartre wrote: "There can be no eternal truth because there is no eternal Consciousness to think it." What is the implied premise of his argument and of proof 11?
16. Does argument 12 presuppose "innate ideas"? If not, how and when did the idea of God get into our minds?
17. Why is it that you can tell a lot about a philosopher's metaphysics by knowing whether or not he or she accepts the ontological argument? What do Anselm, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz and Hegel have in common? What doctrine of Thomistic metaphysics enables Thomas to criticize Anselm's argument?
18. Can you refute the modal and possible worlds versions of the ontological argument?
19. Can an atheist believe in real moral obligation (argument 14)? If so, how? Do most atheists believe in real moral obligation?
20. Is the argument from conscience any stronger if you admit objective moral laws?
21. How would you formulate the relationship between religion and morality? Between God and morality?

22. Does everyone have the desire mentioned in premise 2 of argument 16? If so, must atheists suppress and ignore it?
 23. Would nominalists be able to escape argument 16? (C.f., question 1.)
 24. Can you formulate argument 17 logically?
 25. Why is religious experience any more of an argument for the real existence of God than any common delusion, illusion, fantasy or dream for its object? Are we arguing here from idea to reality, as in the ontological argument?
 26. Why is the common consent argument hardly ever used today, whereas it was very popular in the past?
 27. Is Pascal's Wager dishonest? Why or why not? Read Pascal's version of it in the Pensees; what do you find there that is significant that is not included here?
 28. Do you know of, or can you imagine, any other argument for God's existence?
 29. Which of these twenty arguments do you find the most powerful?
 30. How would an atheist answer each one of these twenty arguments? (Remember, there are only three ways of answering any argument.)
-

From the Handbook of Christian Apologetics by Peter Kreeft and Fr. Ronald Tacelli, SJ (Intervarsity Press, 1994)