

Chapter 3: The Doctrine of God: His Existence

In the Preface to this book I distinguished what we're aiming to cover (Bible doctrine) from Christian apologetics. This chapter will be about as far as we drift into that latter discipline, the intellectual defense of the Christian faith. A subject like the existence of God cannot be divorced from rational arguments in support of his existence. Some brief contact with apologetics is thus necessary for this chapter.

Scripture and the Existence of God

Scripture presents no defense of the existence of God. It merely asserts and presumes it on the basis of creation and life experienced by people. By way of example, in Rom 1:19-20 Paul writes, "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (ESV). The argument here is that creation testifies to a Creator. The idea is presented as a self-evident truth. Anyone who would deny this is deliberately suppressing the self-evident truth (Rom 1:18). The alternative is to suggest that creation made itself and is its own creator. This is an absurd thought to biblical writers, who view it as proof of a hard-hearted worship of the created thing over the Creator (Rom. 1:23, 25, 28, 32). To the writers of Scripture, only a foolish person would say there is no God (Psa 10:3-4; 14:1; 53:1). Anyone who would seek a relationship with God must believe that he exists (Heb 11:6).

Some of the attributes of God we'll consider in later chapters presume the existence of God in more or less direct ways. If God is eternal (Deut 33:27; Psa 90:2; Job 36:26), then logically he has no beginning and therefore not only exists, but has always existed. If God had no beginning (John 1:1-3; implied in Gen 1:1), then he exists of his own nature and power without having been caused. God himself asserts his own existence via the revelation of his name: "I AM that I AM" (Exod 3:14). John 5:26 tells us that God has life in himself.

Traditional Logical Arguments for God's Existence

For our purposes, it's worth noting some of the ways God's existence has been argued for based on reason alone over the centuries. All of these arguments have strengths and weaknesses, and so have been the subject of philosophical debate for centuries. None of them on their own presents an unassailable case for God. Collectively, though, when considered in light of each other, a rational basis for the existence of God can and has been established and defended by many intellectuals for a very long time.

1. The Ontological Argument

This argument for God's existence gets its name from the world ontology, which refers to the nature of being or existence. The argument posits that, if we can conceive of a Being who is actually greater than what we can conceive, then that Being must exist, since it is greater to exist than not exist. As Geisler explains,

1. God is by definition an absolutely perfect being.
2. But existence is a perfection.
3. Therefore, God must exist.

If God did not exist, then he would be lacking one perfection, namely, existence. But if God lacked any perfection, then he would not be absolutely perfect. But God is *by definition* an absolutely perfect being. Therefore, an absolutely perfect being (God) must exist.¹

This argument consequently has some overlap with the next argument.

2. The Cosmological Argument

This argument for God's existence begins with the observation that everything in the universe (and any other universe that theoretically gave rise to this one) must have had a cause. The only thing greater than the universe (and other theoretical universes) is God. Therefore, God must exist. In other words, this argument proceeds from the idea that everything that exists has its origin in something greater that existed previously. It concludes that everything finite has a cause, and that cause must be infinite and uncaused itself. Only an intelligent, purposeful, uncreated, uncaused Being could be the ultimate source of everything, and only God fits that description.

3. The Teleological Argument

"Teleological" comes from the Greek word "telos," which means "end" (as in goal, purpose). This argument is related to the cosmological argument, for it essentially argues that the intelligent design of the universe speaks of design purpose, which in turn suggests there must have been a Creator. Because the universe is "fine tuned" to enable life as we know it on earth, this "fine tuning" must require a Designer, who is God.

4. The Moral Argument

The moral argument asserts that there can only be absolute, objective evil if there is absolute, objective good. One can only have absolute, objective good if there is an external standard, an absolutely good moral Lawgiver, who is God. Since it is agreed that there is absolute evil, this

¹ Norman L. Geisler, *God, Evidence For*, Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 278.

requires the existence of absolute good, which requires the existence of a moral source to be or create the standard of absolute good.

Another Logical Approach to God's Existence

As suggested above, these arguments are not without problems. Theistic philosophers—those professional philosophers who believe there is a God—have pointed out certain weaknesses. This is because of the slippery nature of logic in certain respects. Geisler notes, “An ontological type argument moving from thought alone to reality is always invalid for it is always *logically* possible that nothing ever existed including God.”² The other arguments are *a posteriori* arguments—an argument that begins with, or is dependent upon, a sense experience that then goes in search of an explanation. For example, we see (and otherwise experience) the design in creation and reason that there must be a Designer. We see (and otherwise experience) some evil that everyone agrees is evil, and so we look for an explanation of the good that makes evil what it is; we look for a Lawgiver.

The above means that the teleological and moral arguments are ultimately based on the cosmological argument, the argument from design. This argument is based on what philosophers call the principle of sufficient reason, the idea that everything must have a cause.³ Inevitably, the search for an external cause leads to an ultimate cause (which theists say is God) or an infinite regress of causes to resist a first uncaused Cause (God). This in turn means any “first uncaused cause” argument needs adjustment in its claim: “that every finite, contingent, and changing thing has a cause. If this principle is sound and leads to an infinite, necessary, and unchanging Being, then this Being will not need a cause. God will be the Uncaused Cause of everything else that exists.”⁴

It is this need for adjustment that has prompted a different approach to reasoning toward the existence of God. Geisler has articulated his own approach, offering a ten-point approach to logically demonstrating God's existence. What follows in these points is drawn from (in abbreviated form) Geisler's approach and his explanation of its various elements:⁵

(1) Some things undeniably exist (e.g., I cannot deny my own existence). That is, not one can deny their own existence without being existent to utter the denial.

(2) My nonexistence is possible. While our existence is contingent on various factors, and we may logically come to not exist, while we do exist our existence is undeniable.

² Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), 238.

³ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 238–250.

(3) Whatever has the possibility not to exist is currently caused to exist by another.

This is true because potentiality is not actuality. “What is but could possibly not be is only a potential existence. It has existence but it also has the possibility of nonexistence. Now the very existence of this potential existent is either self-caused, caused by another, or uncaused; there are no other possibilities. But it cannot be self-caused since this is impossible. Neither can it be uncaused. For if it were uncaused, then mere possibility would be the ground of actuality. But nothing cannot produce something. It must be concluded, then, that whatever has the possibility for nonexistence must be caused to exist by another.”

(4) There cannot be an infinite regress of current causes of existence. “Since all causality of existence is current and simultaneous, it can be readily seen why an infinite regress is impossible. It is not necessarily contradictory to speak of an infinite regress of causes of becoming, because no cause is simultaneously existing and not existing. But a chain of causes, however short or long, wherein every cause is simultaneously both actual and potential with regard to existence, is clearly impossible.”

(5) Therefore, a first uncaused cause of my current existence exists. This conclusion follows from the preceding first four points.

(6) This uncaused cause must be infinite, unchanging, all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-perfect. The uncaused Cause must be pre-existent to everything that exists (infinite), unchanging in its nature. “By power we mean what can effect a change in another, that is, what can cause something else to be or not be in some way. But this is precisely what the uncaused cause is, namely, that which is causing the very being of all that exists. . . . Further, this infinite cause of all that is must be all-knowing. It must be knowing because knowing beings exist. I am a knowing being, and I know it. I cannot meaningfully deny that I can know without engaging in an act of knowledge. . . . The cause of knowing, however, is infinite. Therefore, it must know infinitely. It is also simple, eternal, and unchanging. Hence, whatever it knows—and it knows anything it is possible to know—it must know simply, eternally, and in an unchanging way.”

(7) This infinitely perfect Being is appropriately called “God.” “By ‘God’ we mean what is worthy of worship, that is, what has ultimate worthship. Or, in other words, ‘God’ is the Ultimate who is deserving of an ultimate commitment.”

(8) Therefore, God exists. “What in religion is known as the ultimate object of worship or commitment (viz.. God) is by reason known to exist. Hence, what philosophy leads to (via the above argument) is not an abstract unmoved Mover but a real concrete Ground for our being and personal object whom we can love ‘with all our soul, strength, heart, and mind.’ The God the heart needs, the head has good reason to believe really exists.”

(9) This God who exists is identical to the God described in the Christian Scriptures.

“The God described in the Bible is said to be eternal (Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2), changeless (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:18), infinite (I Kings 8:27; Isa. 66:1), all-loving (John 3:16; I John 4:16), and all-powerful (Heb. 1:3; Matt. 19:26).”

(10) Therefore, the God described in the Bible exists. If there is only one Being that matches this description, and the God described in the Bible matches that description, this conclusion follows.

The existence of God is foundational to the rest of God’s attributes. It is to those qualities that we now turn.

