




GIVING REASONS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

Põhjused uskuda Jumala olemasolusse

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1. Three Basic Categories: Truth, God, Jesus
 2. Proofs vs. Good Reasons
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 6. Evidence and God's Existence
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1. Three Basic Categories

- ▶ Break down the apologetic questions into three tiers or logical categories:
 - ▶ Epistemology (Truth/Knowledge)
 - ▶ Theism (God)
 - ▶ Christianity (Jesus)

Truth (And Knowledge)

- ▶ **Truth:** What makes something true is that it matches up to reality (the way things are, what exists).
- ▶ Truth and knowledge are inescapable.
 - ▶ To deny the truth is to affirm it (i.e., “it’s true that there is no truth”).
 - ▶ To deny knowledge is to affirm it (i.e., “I know that you can’t know”).

God

- ▶ Given the inescapability of truth, which worldview or philosophy of life is the true one? Which one best matches up to the way things really are?
- ▶ Three Major Options:
 - ▶ **Theism**: a good, powerful, personal God exists who created a world distinct from himself and made humans with value and dignity.
 - ▶ **Naturalism**: Nature is all there is, and the way to know is through science).
 - ▶ **Eastern Monism** (“Reality is undifferentiated oneness”)/**Pantheism** (“Everything is God”)

God

- ▶ **Theism offers a better explanation than its competitors: the world's beauty, the universe's beginning and fine-tuning for life, the existence of consciousness, human dignity and worth, free will, rationality, and even the problem of evil.**

Jesus


- ▶ If a personal God makes better sense of the world and interpreting human experience, has this God actually done something to help us out of our misery, suffering, and alienation from him, from one another, from our world, and from our own selves?
- ▶ Three Theistic Options:
 - ▶ Judaism
 - ▶ Islam
 - ▶ Christianity

Jesus

- ▶ **Christian apologetics** comes in here, giving a defense of Jesus' uniqueness, his bodily resurrection, the reliability of Scripture, and so on.

2. Proofs vs. Good Reasons

- ▶ Distinguish between “proof” and “good reasons.”
 - ▶ Proof suggests mathematical certainty and can be misleading; “good reasons” suggests plausibility and confident knowledge.
 - ▶ One can’t “prove” with 100% certainty that the earth is older than fifteen minutes or that other minds exist. Yet we have good reasons to know confidently.

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- ▶ Having 100% certainty doesn't guarantee knowledge. It is a *psychological* state. How many times have we been “so certain” only to discover we've been dead wrong?
 - ▶ It's logically possible that what we experience day to day is just an illusion and that we are brains in vats hooked up to electrodes that simulate reality (the virtual rather than the real). But there is no good reason to take this seriously. But we can also bump down “100% certainty” to maybe 97 or 98%!

3. Belief and the Burden of Proof

- ▶ **Atheists also bear the burden of proof - not just theists.**
 - ▶ **Atheists often claim that God's existence is like that of the Tooth Fairy or Santa Claus. But is it? Is the theist guilty until proven innocent?**

The theist's claim to knowledge:
“God exists.”

The atheist's claim to knowledge:
“God does not
exist.”

a. Defining Atheism

- ▶ Historically, an “atheist” has been defined as one who “maintains that there is no God, that is, that the sentence ‘God exists’ expresses a false proposition.”
 - Paul Edwards, ed., “Atheism,”
Encyclopedia of Philosophy

b. Unbelief vs. Disbelief

- ▶ There is a difference between unbelief (lack of belief, such as agnosticism) and disbelief (the rejection of belief in God--atheism).
- ▶ An atheist isn't someone who simply "lacks belief in God"; this would blur the historic distinction between agnostic and atheist.

If evidence for God's existence is

lacking, **agnosticism** (“I

don't know if God exists”) is the

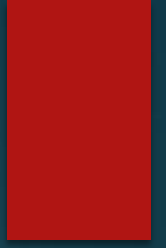
logical course to take,

not atheism.

c. Absence of Evidence

- ▶ Absence of evidence is not (usually) evidence of absence. It's possible that God exists even if arguments for God don't "work"; the atheist must show that God can't exist.

The reason we do not believe in mythical figures like mermaids or Santa Claus is because we have good reasons that they do not exist. We have good reasons for rejecting their existence (e.g., knowing where presents under the Christmas tree come from).



d. Ordinary vs. Ornery Agnostics

- ▶ Distinguish between two types of agnostic - the ordinary and the ornery.
 - ▶ Ordinary agnostic:, “I’d like to know if God exists, but I can’t decide based on the evidence.”
 - ▶ Ornery agnostic : “I don’t know if God exists, and you can’t know either.” (How does he know that no one can know God exists?)

e. Two Types of Ignorance

- ▶ **Distinguish between two types of ignorance - innocent and blameworthy/culpable.**
 - ▶ **To say “I don’t know if God exists” may reveal a failure in my responsibility to seek God (“I don’t want to know”) - a willful**

4. The Imaginary Entity Objection

- ▶ The “celestial teapot” or the “Flying Spaghetti Monster” objection has several problems.



The Imaginary Entity Objection

- ▶ To say that spaghetti monsters or teapots caused the universe is just a silly distraction rather than a substantive argument against God.

The Imaginary Entity Objection

- ▶ **Physical objects like teapots or spaghetti monsters would be part of the universe and couldn't cause it. The one true God transcends the empirical world; teapots and spaghetti monsters don't.**

The Imaginary Entity Objection

- ▶ **This objection proves nothing. It only shows that we can't fully specify the nature of the universe's creator.**
- ▶ **This objection does nothing to disprove the very legitimate conclusion that the finely-tuned universe was designed by a remarkably intelligent being.**

The Imaginary Entity Objection


- ▶ **There is no reason to think that the Flying Spaghetti Monster is a necessary being - one that necessarily exists in all possible worlds.**
- ▶ **There are many arguments for God's existence, and many of these just wouldn't apply to a Flying Spaghetti Monster.**

The Imaginary Entity Objection

- ▶ **There is no reason to posit a Flying Spaghetti Monster at all. Where does this idea come from, and why should it be taken it seriously?**

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY ‘GOD’?”

NT Wright: “Each year I used to see the first year undergraduates individually for a few minutes, to welcome them to the college and make a first acquaintance. Most were happy to meet me; but many commented, often with slight embarrassment, “You won’t be seeing much of me; you see, I don’t believe in god.”



I developed a stock response: “Oh, that’s interesting; which god is it you don’t believe in?” This used to surprise them; they mostly regarded the word “God” as a univocal, always meaning the same thing. So they would stumble out a few phrases about the god they said they did not believe in: a being who lived up in the sky, looking down disapprovingly at the world, occasionally “intervening” to do miracles, sending bad people to hell while allowing good people to share his heaven. Again, I had a stock response for this very common statement of “spy-in-the-sky” theology: “Well, I’m not surprised you don’t believe in that god. I don’t believe in that god either.”

- ▶ -N.T. Wright, “Tom Wright” (Twitter/X):
<https://x.com/profntwright/status/20441418885511295>

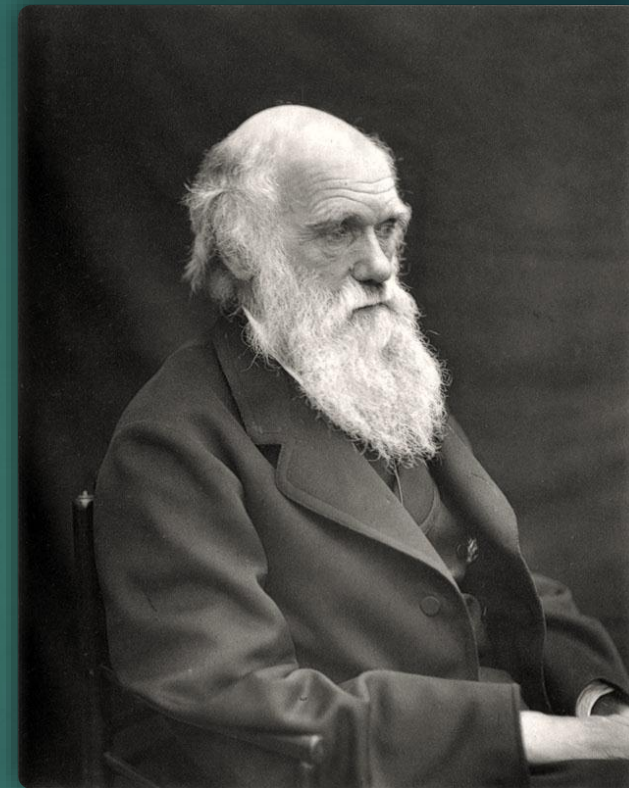
5. Evolution and Creation—Not the Crucial Issue

- ▶ “Creation vs. Evolution” is not the crucial issue; it’s “**God vs. No God.**”

“The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.”

- Lee Iacocca
former CEO, Chrysler

**Charles Darwin
himself maintained
that God began
the evolutionary
process**



Charles Darwin, 1878

a. Philosophical Naturalism?

- ▶ We should distinguish between evolution and the worldview of philosophical naturalism (which are often linked together); guided evolution is not the chief problem, but unguided evolution is.

b. Preliminary Hurdles

- ▶ Several significant steps or hurdles must be overcome before evolution can get going:
 - ▶ A Beginning Of The Universe
 - ▶ A Life-permitting Universe
 - ▶ A Life-producing Universe
 - ▶ A Life-sustaining Universe

6. Evidence and God's Existence


- ▶ If God does exist, we can expect (a) **ACCESSIBILITY**: sufficient evidence for God, but (b) **DENIABILITY**: evidence can be discounted by the unwilling.

a. Accessibility of Evidence for God's Reality

- ▶ Rational evidence of God's reality is available to all (Ps. 19:1-3; Rom. 1:20; Amos 1-2).

b. Deniability of God's Reality

- ▶ The evidence for God's reality can be discounted.
 - ▶ God allows that the abundance of evidence can be explained away if people are unwilling to believe in God.

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- ▶ **Luke 16:31** “If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.”

“A person convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.”

Blaise Pascal: “willing to appear openly to those who seek Him with all their heart, and to be hidden from those who flee from Him with all their heart ...There is enough light for those who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition.”

-Pensées (Eng. Thoughts), #430.



Blaise Pascal

7. Existential Reasons for God

- ▶ Don't focus only on "arguments" and "answers," but also on practical concerns and deep human desires and needs that God alone can fulfill.

Deep Human Needs & Desires

1. Humans have an indefinite and intense craving for true happiness.
2. Only faith in God satisfies this craving.
3. If only faith in God satisfies this craving, then we are justified in having it.
4. Therefore, we are justified in having faith in God.

Deep Human Needs & Desires

- ▶ What are some of these needs and longings?
 - ▶ Security and Significance
 - ▶ Fear of Death and Longing for Immortality
 - ▶ Longing for Justice
 - ▶ Longing for the Transcendent
 - ▶ Experiencing Awe and Wonder
- ▶ Augustine: “You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.” (*Confessions*, 1.1).