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Lecture Series: The Doctrine of God

Lecture 2: “The Existence of God”

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Definition of God

The Bible does not give us a definition of God. Charles Ryrie says: “If a definition consists of a ‘word or phrase expressing the essential nature of a person or thing,’ then God cannot be defined, for no word or even phrase could express His essential nature” (*Ryrie, Ch. 6, Basic Theology*).

“But if the definition were descriptive, then it is possible to define God, though not exhaustively.” One of the most famous descriptive definitions of God is in the Westminster Confession of Faith: Question: “What is God?” “God is a spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”

PROOFS OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Intuitive proof of the existence of God

All people have an inner sense of the existence of God

Intuitive truths of the senses

Intuitive truths of the intellect

Intuitive truths of our moral nature

Intuitive sense of the knowledge of God

Scripture proof of the existence of God

Everything in Scripture and everything in nature proves clearly that God exists and he is the powerful and wise Creator that Scripture describes him to be.

Genesis 1:1 is a refutation of all the false theories of man:

Refutes atheism—which excludes the existence of God/universe created by God

Refutes pantheism—which says God and the universe are identical

Refutes polytheism—which says there are many gods/One God Created all things

Refutes materialism—which says everything that exists can be explained by natural causes (eternity of matter)

Refutes agnosticism—which says we can have no definite information on creation or other matters relating to God and man.

Refutes humanism—because Genesis teaches that God not man is the ultimate reality.

Refutes evolution—which teaches the progressive development from chaos to cosmos/Tells us that God created all things. This fact is not obvious, because only in the Bible does such revelation appear. All other ancient religious systems and modern philosophies begin not with God, but with pre-existing matter or energy in some form.

Genesis 1:1—the Bible assumes that God exists

Psalm 19:1-6—Clear evidence of God's existence seen in nature

Romans 1: 18-32—Created things give evidence of God's character

The Rational proofs for the existence of God

The following traditional proofs for the existence of God have been constructed by Christian (and some non-Christian) philosophers at various points in history in order to persuade people that it is not rational to reject the idea of God's existence.

Most of the traditional proofs for the existence of God can be classified in four major types of argument:

Cosmological argument. Gets its name from the Greek word *kosmos* meaning “world” or “universe.” This is the argument from effect to cause. There must be an adequate cause for every effect. The cause of such a great universe can only be God.

Presuppositions of the cosmological argument

Every effect has a cause

The effect caused depends on the cause for its existence

Nature cannot originate itself

Development of the cosmological argument

If something now exists (the cosmos) then either it came from nothing or it came from something which must be eternal. The something eternal in the second option could either be the cosmos itself which would have to be eternal, or chance as an eternal principle, or God the eternal Being (see Ryrie).

To say the cosmos is self-created out of nothing is a logical contradiction.

If the cosmos did not generate itself then something eternal caused it.

Three options:

Cosmic process itself is eternal (Steady State Theory)

Refutation:

Big Bang Cosmology (universe had a beginning)

Second Law of Thermodynamics (universe moving toward a state of maximum disorder and minimum energy)

Cosmos caused by an eternal principle of random chance or blind intelligence

Refutation:

“Anthropic principle” (evidence for design found throughout the physical universe)

Mathematical probability of random chance producing the universe is zero

A living, powerful, intelligent Being caused the universe

Living—non-life cannot produce life

Powerful—seen by the very nature of what is formed

Intelligent—order and arrangement of the cosmos

Teleological argument (Subcategory of the cosmological argument) The harmony, order, and design we observe in the universe gives evidence of a designer. The Greek word *telos* means “end” or “goal” or “purpose.” Since the universe seems to be designed with a purpose, there must be an intelligent and purposeful God who created it to function this way. (See: *The Creation Hypothesis: Scientific Evidence for an Intelligent Designer*, J.P. Moreland, editor. See also Charles Colson, *How Now shall We Live? Part II: “Creation: Where did We Come From, And Who Are We?”*)

Examples of the argument from design:

William Paley’s Natural Theology (1802)—illustration of the organization of a watch demanding a watchmaker

Irreducible complexity of living things (eg. Irreducible complexity of the cell. The cell—the very basis of life—is staggeringly complex).

“If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down.”
Charles Darwin, in The Origin of the Species

“To Darwin, the cell was a ‘black box’—its inner workings were utterly mysterious to him. Now, the black box has been opened up and we know how it works. Applying Darwin’s test to the ultra-complex world of molecular machinery and cellular systems that have been discovered over the past 40 years, we can say that Darwin’s theory has ‘absolutely broken down.’” Michael Behe, biochemist and author of Darwin’s Black Box

Illustration of “irreducible complexity”—the mousetrap. You need all parts of a mouse trap from the very beginning for it to work at all. It is therefore irreducible complex. The cell is also irreducibly complex and therefore must be the product of intelligent design.

Other examples of the argument from design: The human eye, the bat, the information content in DNA, the “**anthropic principle**” (the principle states that the physical structure of the universe is exactly what it must be in order to support life)

A few of a multitude of examples of the **anthropic principle**: Earth's orbit around the sun; Existence of water; Structure of the atom; 23 degree angle of the earth on its axis; Distance of the moon from earth; Depth of the ocean floors (The universe is amazingly balanced to allow for life to exist. This cannot be an accident of space, time and chance. It is a wonderful example of the fact that this world has come into existence as a result of intelligent design!)

Moral argument This argument begins from man's sense of right and wrong, and of the need for justice to be done, and argues that there must be a God who is the source of right and wrong and who will someday mete out justice to all people.

The moral argument is one aspect of the basic anthropological argument which says: "how can man, amoral, intelligent, and living being, be explained apart from a moral, intelligent, and living God?" (*For an excellent illustration of the moral argument see: C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, chapters 1-5*).

Ontological argument. This argument begins with the idea of God, who is defined as a being "greater than which nothing can be imagined." It then argues that the characteristic of existence must belong to such a being, since it is greater to exist than not to exist. The stem ont- in "ontological" is derived from a Greek word that means "being." Anselm (1033-1109) is the author of this argument.

Development of the Ontological Argument:

We have an idea of an absolutely perfect being

Existence is an attribute of an absolutely perfect being

Because we have the idea of an absolutely perfect being, and existence is an attribute of perfection, then He must exist.

Validity of these arguments for the existence of God: All of these arguments for the existence of God are valid in that they correctly evaluate the evidence and correctly reason to a true conclusion—in fact, the universe does have God as its cause, and it does show evidence of purposeful design, and God does exist as a being greater than which nothing can be imagined, and God has given us a sense of right and wrong and a sense that his judgement is coming someday. The actual facts referred to in these proofs, therefore, are true, and in that sense the proofs are valid, even though not all people are persuaded by them.

Value of these arguments: The value of these proofs lies mainly in overcoming some of the intellectual objections of unbelievers. They cannot bring unbelievers to saving faith, for that comes through belief in the testimony of Scripture.