

Session 5. Existence of God

“It is absurd for the Evolutionist to complain that it is unthinkable for an admittedly unthinkable God to make everything out of nothing, and then pretend that it is more thinkable that nothing should turn itself into everything.” G.K. Chesterton

Session overview

- Explore arguments related to the existence of God
- Scrutinize the atheist’s philosophical problems
 - No moral laws
 - Human life lacks meaning
 - No hope
- Explore Dallas Willard’s three stage approach with some insights drawn from finance
- Brief exploration into Christianity’s philosophical beauty
- Connect one’s view of theism and personal financial decision-making

Key passages

- Arguments related to design: **Colossians 1:26-17, John 1:1-3, 10, Psalm 33:6, 1 Corinthians 8:6**
- Christianity’s philosophical beauty: **Psalm 19:7-11**
- Deeply meaningful life: **1 Peter 2:9, Colossians 1:16, Romans 8:28, Psalm 139:13-14**
- A satisfying hope: **Jeremiah 29:11, 1 Timothy 6:17**

Nature of the theism debate

- God’s perfection
 - God is the only essence in existence, the reason for whose existence is in Himself.
 - All other essences, entities or quantities exist by virtue of something else and in that sense God alone is perfect.
 - God alone is uncaused in essence, infinite in scope, and an independent being in essence.
- Recall an argument is a set of statements that serve as a set of premises leading to a conclusion
- Goal: Arrive at a conclusion regarding which truth claim is most plausible
 - “God does exist”
 - “God does not exist”
- Key: Identify the truth claim that ought to bear the burden of proof

Burden of proof

- Who should bear the burden of proof?
 - Need to prove the argument is true
 - Letting someone else bear that burden
- Easier to be the defendant rather than the prosecutor in a legal case
- Prosecutor bears the responsibility to prove the case beyond a reasonable doubt
- Defendant simply has to rebut the prosecutor’s claim to the point of reasonable doubt
- Rather than trying to prove that God exists (take on role as prosecutor), simply challenge the opponent to prove that God does not exist (take on role as defendant)

Rebut and refute

- Rebuttal: Argument does not have the merit to conclude that it is true
 - Claim: “Black swans do not exist”
 - Easily rebutted by simply noting that every location throughout the world where there may be black swans has not yet been searched carefully

- Refute: Argument is wrong
 - Much higher standard when compared to rebut as rebuttal only requires casting doubt
 - “Black swans do not exist” easily refuted—produce evidence that a black swan exists
 - Providing evidence for the existence of a black swan could be more challenging than just casting doubt on the original claim that black swans do not exist
- Rebut: “God does not exist”
 - Note that one has not examine all the evidence
 - Therefore, the proposition fails to be held absolutely true
- Rebut: “God does exist”
 - Because God is spirit and not constrained by space and time, producing space-time evidence in favor of this proposition is a bit more challenging by definition
 - Ample empirical evidence will be provided supporting the existence of the God referenced in the Bible, it cannot by setup reach epistemic certainty

God’s existence is properly basic belief

- “Belief in God is properly basic; so far as the rationality of the Christian’s personal faith is concerned, the discovery of proofs or arguments is not necessary. When it comes to challenging the rationality of Christian faith, the burden of proof rests with the atheologian.”¹ (Nash)
 - An atheologian is “one who is opposed to a theologian.”²
 - Note Nash is specifically denying the burden of proof.
- “The Christian philosopher has a perfect right to the point of view and prephilosophical assumptions he brings to philosophic work; the fact that these are not widely shared outside the Christian or theistic community is interesting but fundamentally irrelevant.”³ (Plantinga)
- Properly basic beliefs are those that are reasonable even though they are not inferred from other truth claims.

Challenge the internal logic of the atheist

- How would one prove that the atheist's premise is rational?
 - If it is immoral to believe anything without proof, then I must prove this proposition! There is no proof for the statement.
 - The evidence, however, favors theism overwhelmingly.
- Many atheists are deeply skeptical.
 - A skeptic is generally a person who denies that other people have rationally justified beliefs or knowledge
 - There are at least two kinds of skeptics
 - Global skeptic—skeptical of all truth claims
 - Local skeptic—skeptical of only certain knowledge categories, such as religious claims

Atheism’s philosophical problems

There are no moral laws

- Premise > Evil exist.
- Premise > Therefore, good exists.
- Premise > Therefore, there must be a law to decide (Criterion)
- Conclusion > There must be a lawgiver

¹See Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason*, 1988, p. 105.

²See Noah Webster, American Dictionary of the English Language, 1828 or <http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/atheologian>.

³See Alvin Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion, and Naturalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2011. Quote found at <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/704625-the-christian-philosopher-has-a-perfect-right-to-the-point>.

Rational atheist assumes as a premise that God does not exist

- Premise > God does not exist.
- Premise > Therefore, there is no lawgiver.
- Premise > Therefore, there is no law to decide (Criterion)
- Conclusion > Therefore, good and evil categories do not exist.

- Moral outrage to injustice evidences that the vast majority implicitly believe God exists due to their belief that evil exists
- Richard Dawkins states, without God, there is “... no evil and no good. Nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.”
- Kai Nielsen notes, “Pure practical reason, even with a good knowledge of the facts, will not take you to morality.”⁴
- Logically, if God does not exist, then there are no immutable moral laws—impractical perspective for addressing challenging problems
 - Without anchoring one’s life in immutable moral laws, the desire for more wealth has led many to destruction
 - Financial violations of actual laws often start with minor ethical violations of standard financial practice

Life lacks meaning

- Frederich Nietzsche was an atheistic nihilist—life has no meaning
 - Popularized the notion that God is dead
 - Philosophers killed him
- Niccolò Machiavelli: “People should either be caressed or crushed. If you do them minor damage they will get their revenge; but if you cripple them there is nothing they can do. If you need to injure someone, do it in such a way that you do not have to fear their vengeance.”⁵
- Without God, there is no meaning in the quest for meaning
- Most normal humans find life deeply meaningful
- Stephen Jay Gould concludes, “We are here because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures; because the earth never froze entirely during an ice age; because a small and tenuous species, arising in Africa a quarter of a million years ago, has managed, so far, to survive by hook and by crook. We may yearn for a ‘higher answer’ – but none exists.”
- Without meaning
 - Why be charitable to those who cannot benefit you?
 - Life reduced to mere transactional existence (dysfunctional)
 - Quid pro quo everywhere you go

Humans have no hope

- Humans exhibit great hope in life
- Atheistic philosophers conclude that they are deluded
 - Life just is and when you die it is no more
 - There will be no meaning from your life years from now
 - Life today lacks any hope
 - Nothing to offer a world that is longing for hope

⁴See Kai Nielson, “Why Should I Be Moral?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21(1984), p. 90. Quoted in William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith Christian Truth and Apologetics*, Third Edition, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, p. 75.

⁵Quoted in *The Prince*, 1513. See <https://libquotes.com/niccolò-machiavelli/quote/lbg2w6u>.

- Does not accord with life's actual experience
- Investing is anchored solidly in hope
 - If you invest \$10,000, what is it you seek?
 - Is your objective to assist in human flourishing by providing the necessary capital for companies to function so as to provide benefits to the many employees, customers, and suppliers?
 - Most people do not think this way regarding investments
 - Invests in the hope that your \$10,000 investment will one day be worth significantly more and perhaps provide resources for your family when you are in retirement
 - Hope is a key element within financial decisions
 - Without hope, all that is left is to eat, drink, and be merry for soon we die

Three stage approach to God's existence⁶

Stage 1: No physical quantity completely explains its own existence

- Physical realities owe their existence to something that preexisted but does not explain it fully
- There are no known infinite series of causes
- Thus, there must be an initial uncaused cause. There can only be one self-existent cause which is not concurrently within existence.

Stage 2: Argument from and to design⁷

- Foundational premise of the scientific method is the rational intelligibility of the universe
- "In fact, the evidence for God from design is most likely the most popular argument for God."
- Two forms of explanation, mechanism and agency.
 - Mechanism-based explanations involve impersonal causes, conditions, and nature's laws
 - Agency-based explanations involve motives, intentions, and purposes
 - Human eye (2 million working parts), human ear (discriminate between 400,000 different sounds), and the human heart (pumps more than 3 supertankers of blood over a lifetime)
- "Cicero (46 BC, p. 213) remarked, 'If a countless number of copies of the one-and twenty letters of the alphabet, made of gold or what you will, were thrown together into some receptacle and then shaken out on to the ground, [would it] be possible that they should produce the *Annals* of Ennius? ... I doubt whether chance could possibly succeed in producing even a single verse.'"
- Figure 5.1 illustrates intentional design in human artistic endeavors
- The "ubiquitous existence of stunning, gratuitous beauty" is evidence of design (Moreland)
- The human body is comprised of numerous irreducibly complex systems
- "The universe is a razor's edge of precisely balanced life-permitting conditions."(M)
- DNA screams of creative beauty, irreducible complexity, as well as specified complexity. There are about 3 billion bits of information contained in a single strand of human DNA.
- Figure 5.2 illustrates one depiction of one perspective of DNA. Francis Collins, who has been instrumental in DNA research, is reported to have used this figure in a talk he gave.⁸

⁶Based on Dallas Willard, "Language, Being, God, and the Three Stages of Theistic Evidence." Available at <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/individual/language-being-god-and-the-three-stages-of-theistic-evidence>. We use Willard's framework and expand in several ways.

⁷This section draws heavily from J. P. Moreland, *Love your God with all your mind*, NavPress, 2012.

⁸Francis Collins served as the 16th Director of the National Institutes of Health who provided numerous discoveries and provided leadership to the Human Genome Project. See, <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/nih-director/biographical-sketch-francis-s-collins-md-phd>. Collins presents these two pictures in his talks related to faith and

- Figure 5.3 is a picture of the Rose Window at York Minster in England was side-by-side in Collins' talk
- Strong biblical basis for a God-designed universe (**Colossians 1:16-17, John 1:1-3, 10, Psalm 33:6, and 1 Corinthians 8:6**)
- Anthony Flew parable (1955, while still an atheist) versus John Frame's parable (garden)
- "We have established that not all order is evolved and that relative to our data there is a probability of zero that order should emerge from chaos or from nothing into the physical world."

Stage 3: Human events

- "We know, most importantly, that human minds standardly create for a purpose, and that they retain an active interest in, feel intimately invested in, what they create—and all the more so the greater the originality or 'creativity' involved."
 - Every new business venture as it is itself a deeply creative human activity
 - Entrepreneurs involved in its creation nurture it often with deep care
 - Requires continuous creativity, innovation, and adaptation over time
 - Many businesses ultimately fail
 - From a theist perspective, it is reasonable to infer that our universe is in a process of continual creation from a living and active God.
- God's ongoing creation may well include redemption. Though known from eternity past, God intervenes on behalf of humans that have self-inflicted lethal defects commonly known as sin.
- It is obvious from human history that something has gone terribly wrong
- There is a convergence of ethics, justice, love, and forgiveness uniquely found at the cross of Jesus Christ
- Christianity's philosophical beauty
 - Immutable moral law (**Psalm 19:7-11**)
 - Beauty of God's moral law when embraced with gratitude.
 - Hence, this psalm of David attributes more economic value to this law than fine gold and more desirable than the sweetest honey. When first confronted with biblical commands, however, one typically bristles at its strictness. Over time, the deep wisdom and truthfulness of God's law is overwhelming.
 - Deeply meaningful life (**1 Peter 2:9, Colossians 1:16, Romans 8:28, Psalm 139:13-14**)
 - A satisfying hope (**Jeremiah 29:11, 1 Timothy 6:17**)

God's existence and personal finance

- The reality of God's existence has a profound influence on personal financial management
- If the Christian worldview is true, then according to the Apostle Paul, there exist an unavoidable downward spiral facing those who choose an alternative worldview illustrated in Figure 5.4.
- Seven phase downward spiral:⁹ 1) Someone rejects God's general revelation. 2) Person refuses to honor the God they know. 3) He becomes futile in his thinking and his heart is darkened. 4) He exchanges the glory of God for various idols. 5) He gives into his lustful desires. 6) He shatters the image he bears. 7) He loses his mind (making poor financial choices).

science, see for example, <https://religionnews.com/2018/06/19/christian-geneticist-francis-collins-ponders-promise-peril-of-biotechnology/>.

⁹See Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Expository Apologetics Answering Objections with the Power of the Word*, Crossway, Wheaton, IL, 2015, 50-56.

Key Bible Passages

Colossians 1:16-17 ¹⁶For by him [Jesus Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

John 1:1-3, 10 ¹In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ²He was in the beginning with God. ³All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ... ¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

Psalms 33:6 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

1 Corinthians 8:6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

Psalms 19:7-11 ⁷The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

1 Peter 2:9

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Colossians 1:16

For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Psalms 139:13-14

¹³For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

Jeremiah 29:11

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

1 Timothy 6:17

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.