

THE ALL-IN CATHOLIC: Arguments For God

Bringing: a greater understanding of Catholic Christian teachings to Catholics & non-Catholics.

“20 Arguments for the existence of God” are taken, and adapted, from the Handbook of Christian Apologetics by Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli. Since there is limited space to explain all these arguments in detail, we tried to summarize them as best as possible. We encourage you to purchase this book for greater explanations and details. It is not a difficult read and most enjoyable as Kreeft and Tacelli unpack many questions we have about God, Jesus, faith, reason, church, the bible, evil, life after death, etc.

1. The argument from change: The result of change cannot exist before the change. A candle cannot appear on its own from a clump of wax. The wax needs a candle maker to change wax into a candle. Just like the world, being in constant change, cannot change without an entity being outside the material world to initiate the change in the beginning, up to today, and into the future. This “entity” we call God.

2. The argument from efficient causality: We have all heard of “cause and effect” - something causes an effect. The best example of this is that nothing can cause itself. Nothing brings itself into being. Everything in the universe is a result of the actions of something else. Therefore, we can conclude God started the ball rolling “in the beginning” because only something outside the material world can start the creation/cause of the material world. A painting does not create the painter. Material cannot create material...therefore God created it.

3. The argument from time and contingency: “from nothing comes nothing” ...nothing cannot create something. What was there before the universe came into being? There had to be something to start the universe into being...that something we call God.

4. The argument from degrees of perfection: In order for us to conclude, as human beings, that something in our existence is better than other things (IE: our life is better, richer and fuller than a stone or bug), then a standard is needed in order to do the comparison. How do we know we are better than a stone, without knowing for sure that humans are better than stones? Who tells us that? The standard we use to determine good, better and best is God because there has to be a “being of all beings” and “a perfection of all perfections”.

5. The design argument: The question is whether everything in the universe is due to random chance or by order and intelligibility? Well, how can one use an orderly and intelligible argument to argue that everything from the beginning is random? The random argument by its own definition cannot be orderly and intelligent and dies by itself. Since the universe appears to operate very efficiently, which suggests intelligibility, then are we willing to risk not acknowledging a being with knowledge who designs?

6. The Kalam argument: A philosophical theology demonstrating the world cannot be infinitely old and therefore must have been created by God.

It argues: 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. The cause is a creator we call God.

7. The argument from contingency: Basically, it is 1. If something exists, there must exist what it takes for that thing to exist. 2. The universe & everything within does exist. 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.

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8. The argument from the world as an interacting whole: The world is given to us as a dynamic, ordered system of many active component elements all working together in which no component part or active element can be self-sufficient or self-explanatory. Therefore: 1. Neither the whole nor the parts can explain their own existence, therefore requiring a unifying efficient cause. 2. The cause must be an ongoing present intelligent cause in order to unify everything. And 3. Such an ordering mind must be independent of the system itself, transcendent and not dependent on the system for its own existence and operation.

9. The argument from miracles: 1. A miracle is an event whose only adequate explanation is the extraordinary and direct intervention of God. Unexplainable by any type of science. 2. There are numerous well-attested miracles (miracle must be religious in meaning to be a miracle). 3. Therefore there are many events whose only adequate explanation, or cause, is the intervention of God. 4. Therefore God exists.

10. The argument from consciousness: 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.

11. The argument from truth: From Augustine comes the following: 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.

12. The argument from the origin of the idea of God: From Descartes: 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 of God (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 the qualities of the idea. 6. But only God has those qualities. 7. Therefore God must be the cause of the ideas. 8. Therefore God exists.

13. The ontological argument: From Anselm (1033-1109): 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.

14. The moral argument: 1. Real moral obligation is a fact - we are 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 because moral obligation cannot be rooted in a material world blind to purpose.

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15. The argument from 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). Conscience is thus explainable only as the voice of God in the soul.

16. The argument from desire: C.S. Lewis states: "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 duckling 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 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 ch 10).

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. Another said that all one has to do is study the thumb, and then would have to conclude there is a God.

18. The argument from religious experience: 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. We must examine these experiences in terms of 1. Consistency of the claims 2. The character of those making the claims, and 3. The effects these experiences have had in their own lives and the lives of others.

19. The common consent argument: 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. True enough, it is conceivable that this side of our nature (the capacity for reverence and worship) 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?

20. Pascal's wager: It is not a proof for the existence of God, but it can help us in our search for God in the absence of such proof. 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 your bet 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, and infinite gain. Therefore, if you win, you win everything, if you lose, you lose everything.

In conclusion, the strengths and limitations of these 20 arguments as noted by Kreeft & Tacelli on page 49 are: "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

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Bringing: a greater understanding of Catholic Christian teachings to Catholics & non-Catholics. of it. Others (the argument from miracles, the argument from religious experience and the common consent argument) only claim 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 a twined rope, make a very strong case."

One last argument: The "if" argument - if there is no God, then we must believe the meaning of life is reduced to only a propagation of the species, and that all "truth" is relative to what an individual or society deems it to be - changeable at any time. If there is God, then we must believe in a purpose to life greater than just the multiplication of homo sapiens, and He being the source and reference for all truth...a compass...a guide...a beacon...a lighthouse...foundation...pillar to help find our way in life. It is in sincerest hope that all will believe in a purpose greater than just mere existence on earth and the random forming of elements to form what is an amazing, stunning, fascinating creature called humans and the universe we live.

After all these arguments, propounded, studied, argued, refined etc. over the centuries, by some of the greatest thinkers in history, the least we can do is acknowledge with intellectual honesty the reasonableness of the totality of these arguments and do more research, thinking, questioning and of course praying.

Leaving you with a quote from GK Chesterton: "If there were no God, there would be no atheists."

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