Seven Arguments in Support of the Existence of God **[1]**

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Recently a controversial blasphemy poster campaign [2] was launched in New Zealand. The campaign slogan is "Religion is Garbage", and while it is aimed at all religions and religious denominations, it especially targets Christianity (including cults, hypocrisies and what I am going to call "objective Christianity"). Due to the nature (and intent) of this campaign, there has been much discussion around it. In response to the many, many commentators who appear to express what I can only call flippant atheistic views, I thought it good to respond by summarising a talk which William Lane Craig [3] gave at an apologetics conference in Cape Town earlier this year (something which I have been wanting to do for some time now anyway). What follows below is my summary of his seven points for claiming that it is reasonable to believe in God, and not just any god, but the God of the Bible.

Each of these topics has individually been the subject of books. Dr Craig admitted that he could but try to summarise the arguments in an hour-long talk. What I present here is further summarised, so please consider it only as such, rather than as exhaustive arguments. What I present here is essentially a summarised transcript (i.e. I have added to or altered very little, but have also reduced a structured talk down to point form) of the talk concerned. Note that six of these arguments are "general" and one is specific to Christianity. I also personally do not claim to be authoritative on any of these subjects or arguments. *Note that none of these arguments are uncontested silver bullets which prove the existence of God. If they were, there would be no need for further debate. Rather, these arguments provide support in favour of the existence of God on philosophical, scientific and spiritual grounds.*

A Summary of Seven Arguments in Support of the Existence of God

There are at least seven arguments why it is reasonable to believe that there is a God. These arguments are "signposts of transcendence", pointing out from the physical and material world, indicating that there is some grand, infinite being which we call God who exists outside of the universe.

Contingency Argument: Why does anything exist at all?

Everything that we know in the physical world had a reason or cause for being. So what was the cause of being for the natural world and, by extension, the universe? There are two reasons whereby something can exist:

- *Necessity*: Something exists by its own nature. This is usually applied to abstract concepts, like numbers.
- *External cause*: Something exists through the causation of something or someone else. Examples are galaxies, babies, machines etc.

The universe is not an abstract concept, but concrete. Abstract concepts (by definition) also do not have causal effects on their own, but physical concepts can. So what existed before the universe, when it did not exist? What was the causally prior state in which the universe did not exist? If nothing existed before the universe, how could the universe have had a cause? But if we consider the possibility that everything that exists is not just physical, then the principal (of causality) holds. But something which could create the universe would have to be greater than the universe and exist outside of it. This points to an external, transcendent, personal cause:

- External: The cause is greater than the universe.
- Transcendent: The cause is outside of the universe and cannot be physical or material.
- Personal: A conscious, intelligent mind.

Now the argument:

1. Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature, or in an external cause.
2. The universe exists.
3. If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is an external, transcendent, personal cause.
4. The explanation of the universe is an external, transcendent, personal cause.

This implies that there exists an unembodied mind (God) that created the universe.

Cosmological Argument: The origin of the universe

The age-old question is: where did the universe come from? Has it merely always existed (i.e. is infinite), or was there a beginning? There are philosophical and scientific reasons to doubt that the universe is eternal.

- Philosophical: The concept of ("quantifiable") infinity is self-contradictory and therefore only an idea. It is not found in nature. But if the universe was infinite, there would be an infinite number of past events. But past events are real things. And because nothing in the universe can be infinite, it follows that there can only be a finite number of past events.
- Scientific: Astronomy and astrophysics agree that the universe has a finite age. But could everything have come from nothing? This idea defies all logic: only nothing can come from nothing. Something had to create everything.

Now the argument:

1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore the universe has a cause.

But the cause must be without a cause, because infinite regression is not allowed (otherwise our

premise breaks down). The cause is also timeless and changeless, because it created time (which is an internal part of the universe). This cause is also not physical, because it created the physical realm when there was none. Finally, it must also be personal, because how can something which is timeless arbitrarily give rise to something else if there is no free will to do so? The mechanics otherwise just do not make sense.

Teleological Argument: The fine-tuning of the universe (a.k.a. the Goldilocks argument)

The possible existence of intelligent life depends on a complex and delicate balance of initial conditions which simply resulted from the origins of the universe as we now scientifically understand it. These dependencies are finely tuned or precise independent constants necessary for life. They are independent of the laws of nature. Examples include: the gravitational constant, entropy, the strength of the atomic weak force, the cosmological constant, the balance of matter and anti-matter at the beginning of the universe, the ratios of these values to each other, etc. So the argument:

1. Fine-tuning of the universe is due to physical necessity, chance or design.
    - Physical necessity is implausible, because the constants are independent of the laws of nature.
    - That everything luckily worked out by chance is improbable, because the (compounded) probabilities are too incomprehensibly small.
3. Thus, an intelligent mind created the universe.

A counter to this argument is the notion of an infinite number of universes (the multiverse theory), but there is no evidence[1] to support this theory.

Moral Argument

Please note that this argument does not say that one needs to be religious in order to be moral.

Objective morality is the notion that right and wrong exist independently of whether or not someone believes them to be. The argument is:

1. If God did not exist, objective moral values and duties would not exist.
2. Objective moral values and duties do exist.
3. Therefore, God exists

The point of contention here is (2). Some people do not believe that objective morals exist, but that all notions of morality are results of biological and social evolution to protect the human species. This means that, from a naturalistic point of view, there is nothing inherently *wrong* with rape, incest and the like. Similarly, there is no such thing as love or compassion. Indeed, there is no such thing as good or evil: they are merely subjective concepts which evolved to keep the species going. But what if objective morals do exist? What if morals were not evolved, but discovered? What if there are such things as "good" and "evil"? Rape, child abuse, etc., then, are not simply socially unacceptable, but morally wrong. Indeed, it can then be said that they are *objectively* morally wrong.

Ontological Argument: The possibility of God's existence

The ontological argument was, in its original form, formulated in ~~1011~~ 1078/9 by Anselm of Canterbury. It is very abstract and technical, but perhaps the closest we have to a mathematical "proof" for the existence for God. Before I present the actual argument, however, it is necessary to define a few terms:

- "*Possible world*": a way the world might have been; a complete description of a world.
- "*Actual world*": the description of the world that is true.
- "*Other possible worlds*": descriptions of the world which might have been true, but are not true (an example would be the existence of unicorns).
- "*Something exists in some possible world*": possible description of reality in which that "something" is described,
- "*Something exists in every possible world*": no matter which description of the world is true, the "something" will be included in that description (an example would be numbers, which as an abstract concept we expect to transcend physical worlds).

It is now necessary to assert that God is (by definition) the greatest Being conceivable. If anything grander than God exists, then that thing would be, in fact, God. This means that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good and would exist in every possible world. Now, the argument goes as follows:

1. It is possible that a maximally great being (God) exists.
2. If it is possible that some maximally great being exists, then a maximally great being exists in some possible world.
3. If a maximally great being exists in some possible world, it exists in every possible world.
4. If a maximally great being exists in every possible world, then a maximally great being exits in the actual world.
5. Therefore, a maximally great being exists in the actual world.
6. Therefore a maximally great being exists.
7. Therefore, God exists.

Interestingly, points (2)–(7) are relatively uncontroversial. The point of contention with philosophers and logicians is (1). It is up to atheist to prove that the idea of God is wholly impossible. Otherwise, even if there is the slightest "improbable" chance that God exists, He does.

The historical facts concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus

The historical person of Jesus undoubtedly had a profound effect on human history. The reason for this was His unprecedented claims of divine authority, which led to His condemnation and execution by Jewish authorities. But the proof of His claims of divine authority lay in His resurrection from the dead. If Jesus did rise from the dead, the divine miracle provides proof for what He claimed and said (and, by implication, for the existence of God). The resurrection of Jesus is not just a matter of blind faith, but is based on three facts which are held by most (objective) New Testament scholars:

- **The empty tomb**: Most scholars hold to the Biblical statements regarding the empty tomb as historic and correct. Those who object do so on philosophical or theological grounds.
- **The post-mortem appearances**: On separate occasions, and under different circumstances, different people saw Jesus after His death. Those who saw Him included not only believers, but unbelievers, skeptics and His enemies as well.
- **The belief of the disciples in the resurrection**: The original disciples suddenly and sincerely came to believe in the resurrection. They had little to hope in prior to this, as
    - Their leader was dead, something not expected by Jewish hopes for the Messiah; and
    - Jewish beliefs precluded the belief of the resurrection of the dead, either at all or before the end of the world.

Yet the original disciples suddenly became convinced of the resurrection. Otherwise the rise of early Christianity cannot be explained. Contrary claims have been universally rejected by contemporary scholars: there is no widely accepted naturalistic explanation for an alternative to the resurrection. It thus follows from an inductive argument that God exists:

1. There are three established facts (those just mentioned).
2. The hypothesis: God raised Jesus from the dead is the best possible explanation of these

facts.
3. The hypothesis entails that the God revealed by Jesus exists.
4. The God revealed by Jesus does exist.

Immediate Experience of God

This last argument is not so much an argument for the existence of God, but the claim that we can know that God exists wholly apart from arguments simply by immediately experiencing Him. For this one needs to accept that God is an experienced reality, which makes the existence of God a *proper basic belief*. A proper basic belief is one which is not based on others, but serves as a foundation for others. It cannot be proven. Examples of other proper basic beliefs are the reality of the past, the existence of the external world2 and the presence of other minds apart from your own. None of these can be proven, but it is perfectly rational to believe in them. It is rational, because they are grounded in experience. Now, the argument is:

1. Beliefs which are appropriately grounded may be rationally accepted as basic beliefs (not grounded on arguments).
2. Belief that (the biblical) God exists is appropriately grounded.
3. Therefore, belief that (the biblical) God exists may be rationally accepted as a basic belief not grounded on argument.

It now becomes apparent that there is a real danger that arguments for God may distract our attention from God Himself. Rather than trying to reason out God, He will make His existence evident to those who seek Him. We must not be blinded by external arguments. To this end we can say that God is a personal reality.

Conclusion

Here I have summarised seven arguments in favour of the existence of God. They present a "powerful, cumulative case for thinking that the physical world is not all that there is". It is good to consider these arguments (as well as their counters), rather than just assuming one side of the argument or the other.

In concluding, I want to quote Dr William Lane Craig: having considered these and other arguments, "I am therefore an enthusiastic, Christian theist."

- 1. As far as I, the writer, am concerned, the multiverse theory cannot be proved, because it is outside the universe and therefore cannot be observed. Speculation about a multiverse cannot be science, only pseudoscience or philosophy.
- 2. Think about *The Matrix* for these two points. The film considers the possibility that these proper basic beliefs are incorrect inside the Matrix (but note that they do hold outside of the Matrix).

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