

Welcome to 5pm Church Together. If you have come before, then you will know that one of the things we do together is to think *apologetically* – that is, we try and think about how we make a defence for our faith.

As Christians we are called to make a defence of our faith (1 Peter 3:15), be that because you have intentionally created the opportunity or because the opportunity has fallen in your lap. What we do together here is to try and equip ourselves further to speak about God and his gospel and in that sense prepare ourselves to be ready to give an answer for our hope.

At previous 5pm Church Togethers we have considered:

- What is Apologetics
- What is an Apologist
- What is the Gospel and what can I say to someone about Jesus.
- The place of Reason in faith
- The place of Faith in reason

Over these two weeks we will consider some of the rational ‘proofs’ for the existence of God. These rational ‘proofs’ have been offered in an attempt to answer some of the intellectual barriers that a person may have to faith in God.

Read Psalm 14.

Exercise (in groups of 4):

What does it say about humanity’s search for answers?

What are the cause and effects mentioned in the Psalm?

Truth and God

Post Modernism has been an era which has in many ways stolen truth! It may be more accurate to say that it has stolen people's *confidence* that there can be something that is absolutely true.

Belief in God has ramifications for truth. If God does not exist then the idea of absolute truth (and therefore morality) is much more difficult to sustain. And so it is probably not a surprise that with more and more of the population stating that they don't believe in God (as a higher being or supreme force), that the whole concept of what is true in general comes under attack.

Conversely for those who do believe in God, the concept of truth is very attainable and the pursuit for meaning in life does not seem so far-fetched.

To illustrate. Consider a post in the ground. If we have a point which 'locates truth' symbolically like a post in the ground, then it is much easier to measure and weight up opinion, suggestion, or fact – because you keep coming back to a point of reference. If you remove the point of truth (the post), then it means opinion, suggestion and fact have no point to measure itself against. Truth then because measured by a whole variety of possible things regardless of its veracity (e.g. what is easy or popular or convenient or)



A brief survey of contemporary evangelism program helps establish the point. A program like *Christianity Explained* written in the 1970's assumes a belief in God. It did not need to 'prove' that God existed to those seeking answers. Whereas a more recent program such as *Simply Christianity* written in the early 2000's starts with establishing the truth of the Bible and the historical credibility of the person of Jesus, before turning to look at the cross of Jesus. It does this because early in the presentation the question often asked is 'How do you know this is true?'

Dilemma:

Someone in your sphere of influence approaches you and says:

'I know you believe in God – how can you believe in something you cannot see?'

What would you say?

Apologetics – Arguing for the existence of God

Over these two weeks we are going to talk about ‘theistic proofs’ under some fancy titles such as *ontological*, *cosmological*, *teleological*, *moral* and *experiential* arguments. Arguments which aim to address intellectual barriers to faith.

It is worth pointing out that there are many nuances to these arguments, so for the purposes of *Church Together* we will stick to the basics and try to understand the general argument and the objections that may be raised. Don’t be freaked by the technical language – the language helps us talk about the argument, but we are not suggesting this language be used in gospel conversation.

The Nature of Argument

Before we look at each of the arguments, let’s just consider the nature of arguments.

Argument about ‘fact’ can look at *the fact* in question from three possible directions:

- a) ‘a priori’ (what comes before) – e.g. Ontological
- b) ‘a posteriori’ (comes after the fact) – e.g. Cosmological, Teleological, Moral.
- c) ‘existential’ (experience argument – so the now) – e.g. Religious experience

This might be helpful as we look at the structure of each argument.

Ontological Argument

Fancy word! Ontological is the study of being.

So we are ‘ontologically human’ – our very essence is human. The same cannot be said of a cat! A cat is ontologically feline.

In regards to God, the ontological argument tries to establish **that solely from the definition of a supreme being, God exists.**

No prior knowledge about the world is needed (a priori), no experience is necessary – the argument is valid as an idea or concept.

Proponents: Anselm, Spinoza, Descartes, Leibniz, Plantinga.

Apologetics – Arguing for the existence of God



Anselm (c. 1033 –1109), in considering Psalm 14:1 (and Psalm 53:1) ‘A fool says in this heart: ‘There is no God’’ suggests that an idea of God as a being ‘which none greater can be conceived’ is the ultimate valuable position.

If I can think of the concept of a supreme or perfect being, then that, in itself is evidence that a supreme or perfect being exists. And so further if we then add any further evidence (e.g. by logic) that God exists it only serves to reinforce that which was necessary – that God exists.

His argument applied only to God – as that ultimate object. His purpose in the argument was actually not to prove the existence of God, but was to develop in the believer and deeper understanding of the one they already believed in.

Objections

- Gaunilo (11th Century Benedictine Monk). Just because one can think of something, does not mean that it exists (e.g. If I think of a perfect island, that does not mean it exists)
- Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225 – 1274). The argument assumes we could know the nature of God, that he is a perfect being. Aquinas wanted to say that God’s nature could be learned only after one knows his existence (not visa verse).
- Immanuel Kant (c. 1724 –1804). Existence is not a property that can be part of the definition of any concept. Saying something exists does not give it properties.

Exercise:

- Is there any value in this argument? What?
- In what situation could you use this argument?

Conclusions

The argument may not be as rationally rigorous as the arguments we will come to look at but it does have value.

Philosophically it is sound, because anything less than all powerful and perfect would fall short of notion of God - it allows for something greater. In some ways describes the character of God (although not the characteristics of God). It holds the tension together - God know-about-able but unknowable.

It demonstrates that it is reasonable to believe in God, or to look at the other way, that it is not unreasonable to believe in God.

The argument can also flush out the atheist. If the argument is valid, then the person who wishes to deny that God exists must claim that God's existence is impossible. That is a bold claim.

Otherwise – don't use it!!

➤ QUESTION/COMMENT?

Cosmological Argument ('Cosmos' Greek for world)

The Cosmological Argument starts with the existence of the cosmos or universe and then moves to 'prove' the existence of God from that base. It is often called the *first cause* argument. Why is there something rather than nothing?!

It infers that God is the first or ultimate cause of all that is in existence.

It is an 'a posteriori' argument as it relies on what can be observed.

The basic premise is that everything has a cause. Something or someone must have caused the world to exist. If there is an event of any form, then it must be caused by something, which was caused by something, which was caused by something, which was caused by something and so

Apologetics – Arguing for the existence of God

on – and if you trace that back then eventually you have to arrive at a first cause. And that first cause is God.

Proponents: Aristotle, Maimonides, Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Samuel Clark, Leibniz and Richard Taylor.



Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225 – 1274) offered five ways to ‘prove’ God’s existence – the first three are versions of the Cosmological Argument.¹

1. Motion to a prime mover (i.e. some things undoubtably move, though they cannot cause their own movement – there must be a first (prime) mover)

2. Causation to a first cause (i.e. nothing can cause itself – there must be a first cause)

3. Contingent beings to a necessary being. (i.e. things exist but that does not mean they are necessary – but not everything can be unnecessary. If necessary, there must be a point where necessity comes only from itself.)

Objections:

- David Hume (c. 1711 – 1776). a) We cannot define the unknown. b) That the argument that there must be a first cause is not valid – who said that there had to be a sequence and if there was that it had a beginning? c) Why can the first cause not be from the material world instead of (a being called) God?
- Immanuel Kant (c. 1724 –1804). First cause can only be measured by our experience – we don’t have the experience at the root of the cause, so we cannot speak with any certainty.
- Bertrand Russell (c. 1872 – 2 February 1970). In offering a religious critique said: ‘I should say that the universe is just there, and that’s all.’ – the head in the sand argument!!

¹ The other two are: 4. Graduation to the supreme (i.e. we can notice a graduation in things: some things are colder than others, some things are better than others – there must be a supremist, truest, mostest). 5. Order in nature (i.e. actions in all bodies follow natural laws and are noticed (and those things without action are under the guidance of one who is aware).

Apologetics – Arguing for the existence of God

Exercise:

- Is there any value in this argument? What?

- In what situation could you use this argument?

Conclusions

Why do all things exist? Possible answers: 'Because God exists!' (the believers answer) or 'There is no reason!' (the naturalist answer). Are both valid?

To take away the cause in many ways takes away the effect. If you want to accept that there is an effect it is reasonable to suggest that there is a cause. Our experience of cause and effect now, need not be different to the natural causes of cause and effect that traced back will start somewhere. It is reasonable to call that first cause God.

One of the advantages of the Cosmological argument is that you can answer both the 'how' and the 'why' question (to some degree). Often Atheistic arguments will find it easier to argue the 'how' question (asking for scientific proof).

If the Atheist suggests that it is more probable to not believe, then what answer can be offered for the effects that they can see today?

- *QUESTION/COMMENT?*

Pray for our engagement with the world.