

Welcome back to week 2 of this edition of 5pm Church Together.

Last week we started considering some rational ‘theistic proofs’ for the existence of God with particular reference to those intellectual barriers of faith that a person may suggest.

There are five arguments:

First, the *Ontological Argument* which tries to establish **that solely from the definition of a supreme being, God exists.**

Second, the *Cosmological Argument* (or First Cause Argument) which infers **that God is the first or ultimate cause of all that is in existence.**

Tonight we consider the other three: The *Teleological*, *Moral* and *Experiential*.

Pray

Exercise (in groups of 4):

A work or study colleague asks you:

‘How can you believe that ‘God’ created the world, when it is obvious that the world we know has evolved to this point?’

What would you say?

Teleological Argument (‘Telos’ Greek word for ‘end, purpose’)

The *Teleological Argument* is known as **the argument from design**. The most popular of the traditional theistic arguments because it is closest to what is deemed ‘normal thinking’ and therefore most used in evangelistic contexts.

This argument suggests when you look at the natural world (so an ‘a posteriori’ argument), it is complex and full of the marks of being manifestly designed – and so what we see created could

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not have come into existence by chance or be a random sequence of natural forces. It is at least created by a designer. That designer is God.

Proponents: Thomas Aquinas, William Paley.



William Paley (c. 1743 – 1805 – English Clergyman and advocate for the abolition of the slave trade), suggested that when you see a rock you could conclude that it came into existence by chance (e.g. an accident of wind, waves, heat, cold etc.), but if you considered a watch (or a series of watches) it is highly improbable it came into existence by chance. A watch as a

complex mechanism needs to be formed and assembled by something or someone of intelligence – a watchmaker. The natural world, is also complex and shares the marks of being formed and assembled by something or someone – a designer. The designer is reasonably God.



Objections:

- *David Hume* (c. 1711-1776 - Philosopher) offered three main criticisms:
 - a. The universe is bound to have the appearance of design. In order to exist at all there would need to be various parts working with other parts. Over time, combinations would arise that 'worked' and therefore established themselves to what we see today.
 - b. The universe is in some ways is not particularly like a vast machine (like a watch), rather like a plant or animal.
 - c. Even if persuaded, this theory does not suggest the existence of an infinitely wise or good God.
- *Charles Darwin* (c. 1809 – 1882 - naturalist and evolutionist) suggested that the theory of natural selection (survival of the fittest) could be used to explain what is encountered in the natural world. For him, the waste, suffering and apparent 'stupidity of nature' was better explained by evolution than by intentional design. He also concedes that there is a lot of time required for his evolutionary theory to makes sense.

Exercise:

- Is there any value in this argument? What?

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- In what situation could you use this argument?

Conclusions:

- This argument only ever talks about the probability of God existing – it does not ‘prove’ God’s existence.
- It speaks in the least of an intelligent God, who must therefore be personal.
- This argument does not reject evolutionary theory, rather suggests that in the process of evolution that there is a determining designer.

- QUESTION/COMMENT?

Exercise (in groups of 4):

A non-believing family member challenges you:

‘You believe in God and do good things. I don’t believe in God and do good things. I can’t see why I should believe in God in order to do good?’

What would you say?

The Moral Argument

The *Moral Argument* suggests that there is **a universal sense of moral obligation and that it must come from somewhere (or someone) – and that would be God.**

Form 1: The presence of objective moral laws or values imply the existence of a divine law-giver. That law giver is God. (Newman)

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Form 2: Humanity (in general) feels an obligation to pursue a higher good and this only makes sense if the world was created and controlled (and good able to be attained) by a higher, most holy and omnipotent being. (Kant)



This argument (an 'a posteriori' argument) helps us understand the value of moral obligation. There cannot be any objective moral obligation unless it is determined by someone (or thing) outside of the human individual. As there are clearly binding moral obligations, then it is probably that there is someone (or thing) – that would be God. Morality has to come from somewhere and the natural place to source that, is God.

Proponents: Cardinal Newman, Immanuel Kant, C.S. Lewis.

Objections:

- Moral values could be explained in terms of human needs and desires. Self interest. The structure of human society.

Exercise:

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

Conclusions

- As with the other arguments, this one does not stand alone as a sole 'proof' of the existence of God.
- It does offer a plausible reason for the existence of a god being.
- It does acknowledge what people naturally feel (our morals). The opposite is harder to deny – a. that humans are amoral or b. that humans are more comfortably (or naturally) inclined to do wrong or reject responsibility.

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- If morals are not explained in terms of God then they must be explained in other ways that truly grapple with the purpose of existence.
- It supplements the cosmological and teleological arguments in that it tells us that the one who provides these morals is himself moral.

“You find out more about God from the Moral Law than from the universe in general just as you find out more about a man by listening to his conversation than by looking at a house he built. Now, from this second piece of evidence we conclude that the Being behind the universe is intensely interested in right conduct – in fair play, unselfishness, and decency.” (C.S. Lewis)

➤ QUESTIONS/COMMENTS?

Exercise (in groups of 4):

On the bus/train you meet someone who says:

‘I have met God, I know it – and he told me that I needed to tell the city of Adelaide that time is short, we must repent and turn to him’

What would you say?

The Experiential Argument (in regards to Religious Experience)

The *Experiential Argument* is used by those who argue for the existence of God on the basis of some experience (be that observable or not). Thus it is an existential argument. Observable examples could include miracles, answers to prayer, unlikely coincidences etc.. Unobservable examples could include an inner voice, a feeling of being overcome, visions, mystical or ecstatic experiences etc.



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A personal experience may convince us that God is real – regardless of how subjective that may be to others.

Objections:

- Just about every experience can be explained in multiple ways.
 - Personal experiences are subjective and therefore hard to measure objectively. They are often put down to psychology or philosophy or mysticism rather than objective theology.
 - They can be explained in any faith and can be attributed to many things outside of faith (e.g. delusion, drugs, superstition etc.)
- Question: Should they be disregarded?

Conclusion

- There is value in using experience in talking about God. For one, as Christians, we have our own experiences of God (and often when we talk about them we call them our testimony!)
 - As we have seen in the theistic arguments we have looked at, reasoning does not necessarily give us a definite knowledge of God or what he is like and so perhaps we need to get to know God in other ways – and personally through experience is a way that happens.
 - The experiential argument doesn't give us any specific knowledge about God.
- *QUESTIONS/COMMENTS?*

Apologetics and Proofs of God's existence

Let's bring this together. We have looked at five theistic arguments – so arguments which attempt to offer intellectual 'proof' for the existence of God. None, on their own, are convincing proofs for existence of God. They do (especially when put together) demonstrate that belief in God is reasonable or at least not unreasonable.

That said, these arguments do not really tell us much about God – his character, his nature, his features.

Is there a better way to know God?

1 Corinthians 1:18-25 suggests that intelligent arguments could be wisdom in the world yet may still sound foolish to those who are perishing.

For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. (1 Cor 1:18-25)

Traditional arguments point us away from themselves and toward the necessity of preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus.

Faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ' (Romans 10:17)

Pray for our engagement with the world.