

Introduction to Christian Apologetics

Edwin Chong
Fall 2007

Faith EFC, Fall'07

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.
Romans 12:2 (NIV)

Faith EFC, Fall'07

2

Overview

- # What is apologetics?
- # Why is apologetics important?
- # Faith and reason
- # Implications of atheism
- # Theistic arguments

Text and Prerequisites

- # William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, Revised Edition, Crossway Books, 1994.
- # Partly reflects my own “tastes” in Christian apologetics.
- # This class assumes TTP-like training.
- # In particular, Christian maturity. (Otherwise could be “shocking” to some!)

Introduction

Faith EFC, Fall'07

What is Apologetics?

- # Greek *apologia*: a defense
- # A branch of Christian theology that seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.
- # Primarily a theoretical discipline.
 - *Not* training in the art of answering questions, or debating, or evangelism.

Faith EFC, Fall'07

6

That's Apologetics?

- # Bound to be disappointing to some.
- # Many are just not interested in the rational justification of Christianity.
- # What's more "useful" is to know answers to questions like, "..."
- # Practical matters are logically secondary to the theoretical issues and cannot occupy the center of attention. (Of course, practical matters must occupy *some* of our attention!)

Why Theoretical Issues?

- # Christians need to grasp a wider picture of Western thought and culture, rather than concentrate exclusively on their immediate evangelistic contacts.
- # If we don't confront these issues, what lies ahead for us in the US is already evident in Europe: utter secularism.
- # Quote from Craig: "Throughout Europe, evangelism is immeasurably more difficult ..."
(p. xii)

Anti-Christianity

- # Francis Schaeffer: We are living in a post-Christian era, when the thought-forms of society are fundamentally anti-Christian.
- # Charles Malik: The greatest danger confronting American evangelical Christianity is ...
- # J. Gresham Machen's warning in 1913.

Role of Christian Education

- # Some say, Christian education is for producing pastors, not scholars.
- # John La Shell quote on science.
- # Same goes with philosophy and Biblical criticism.
- # Craig: "What good does it do to preach ..." (p. xiv)

Christian Laity

- # What about Christian laypersons?
- # Machen: “The Church is perishing today through the lack of thinking, not through an excess of it.”
- # Many Christian parents have children who have left the faith. Why?

Offensive and Defensive

- # Two basic approaches to apologetics:
 - Offensive (positive): Seeks to present a positive case for Christian truth claims.
 - Defensive (negative): Seeks to nullify objections to those claims.
- # Two basic subdivisions:
 - Natural theology
 - Christian evidences

Offensive Apologetics

- # Natural theology: Provide arguments and evidences in support of theism.
 - Ontological, cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments.
- # Christian evidences: Show why a specifically Christian theism is true.
 - Fulfilled prophecy, radical claims of Christ, historical reliability of the gospels.

Defensive Apologetics

- # Natural theology: Address objections to theism.
 - Problem of evil, hiddenness of God.
- # Christian evidences: Defend against objections to Biblical theism.
 - Objections posed by modern Biblical criticism and contemporary science.

Craig's Approach

- # Mainly offensive.
- # Sometimes blends offensive and defensive apologetics.
 - Problem of evil (defensive) and moral argument (offensive).
 - Resurrection of Christ (offensive) and criticism to the historical reliability of the NT (defensive)
- # Often new and difficult for students.

But Why Such Depth?

- # The story of John Loftus.

Faith and Reason

Faith EFC, Fall'07

How do We Know that Christianity is True?

- # By leap of faith?
- # On the authority of Word of God?
- # Religious experience?
- # Is a rational foundation of faith necessary, without which faith is unjustified and irrational?

Faith EFC, Fall'07

18

Historical Overview

- # Medieval:
 - Augustine (354–430)
 - Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274)
- # The Enlightenment
 - John Locke (1632–1704)
 - Henry Dodwell (1700–1784)
- # Contemporary
 - Karl Barth (1886–1968)
 - Rudolph Bultmann (1884–1976)
 - Wolfhart Pannenberg
 - Alvin Plantinga

Augustine (354–430)

- # Augustine's writings difficult to interpret.
- # His views evolved over time.
- # Two main "prongs":
 - Faith based on authority of Scripture and Church.
 - Reason supports understanding.

Augustine on Faith

- # “I should not believe the gospel except as moved by the authority of the Catholic Church.”
- # Scripture is held in even higher esteem.
- # One must believe before one can know.
- # Isaiah 7:9, “Unless you believe you shall not understand.”
- # *Fides quaerens intellectum.*

Augustine on Reason

- # It is our duty to consider what men and books we ought to believe to worship God rightly.
- # Even the authority of Scriptures should be believed based on *indicia* (signs), such as miracles and prophesy.

Augustine's Inconsistency?

- # Augustine's apparent inconsistency is best explained by the medieval understanding of *authority*.
- # Authority included not just theological truths, but the whole tradition of past knowledge.
- # Akin to historical apologetics.

Augustine: Seeing and Believing

- # Augustine distinguishes between what is *seen* to be true and what is *believed* to be true.
- # See: based on physical perception or rational demonstration.
- # Believe: based on testimony of others.
- # Example: *Belief* in God and authority of Scripture is based on testimony.

Augustine: Authority

- # But why accept the authority of Biblical writers of the past?
- # Cannot say, “because that’s what the Bible says” ... circular!
- # Two choices:
 - *Historical* method: establish reliability of sources. (Not available to Augustine.)
 - Turn to the *present* miracle of the Church as basis for authority of Scriptures. (Augustine’s choice.) [*City of God*]

Augustine: Present Church

- # Authority of Scripture not based on *authority* of Church, but *miracle* of Church: “whole world believing in Christianity without the benefit of the gospel miracles” (which were in the past).
- # Present miracle → authority of Scripture → testimony of Biblical writers → Christian beliefs.
- # Seems to put “seeing” (present) above “believing” (past).

Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274)

- # Summa contra gentiles: greatest apologetic work of the Middle Ages.
- # Thomas builds on Augustine.
- # Distinguishes between truths based on:
 - Reason: can be known with certainty. Example: existence of God.
 - Faith: not based on reason, cannot be certain. Examples: doctrine of Trinity, eschatological resurrection of the dead.
- # Roughly equivalent to Augustine's "seeing" and "believing."

Thomas and Augustine

- # Like Augustine, the bottomline is that Thomas bases "faith" on authority, which in turn is established on reason.
- # Fulfilled prophecies and miracles → authority of Scripture → testimony of Biblical writers → Christian beliefs.
- # But why believe historically fulfilled prophecies and miracles? No good answer ... rely on Augustine's "miracle of Church."
- # Thomas quote (p. 21).

John Locke (1632–1704)

- # *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689)
- # Ardent rationalist: religious belief warranted if and only if it has a rational foundation.
- # Matters of “faith” must also be tested/guaranteed based on rational proofs.
- # Locke quote (p. 23).
- # Rejected “religious enthusiasm.”

Locke on Beliefs

- # Why believe in Christ? Chief reason is miracles.
- # Locke’s views shaped religious thought in the 18th century, both Deist and orthodox.
- # Reason given priority even in matters of faith.

Henry Dodwell (1700–1784)

- # *Christianity Not Founded on Argument* (1742).
- # Rejected prevailing theological rationalism as un-Christian.
- # So out of step with his times, he was thought to be an atheist.
- # Dodwell's basis for faith: inner working of the Holy Spirit in the believer's heart.
- # Had impact on later thinkers: Wesleys, Whitefield, English revivalists.

Contemporary Thinkers

- # Rehashed many of the previous views.
- # Two extremes:
 - "Faith" supported only by "reason"
 - "Reason" has no place to play in "faith"
- # Barth and Bultmann
- # Pannenberg
- # Plantinga

Barth and Bultmann

- # There can be no approach to God whatsoever via human reason.
- # Only approach: God's revelation in Christ.
- # Basis: God is "wholly other" and therefore transcends all categories of human thought and logic.
- # No analogy exists between him and the creature.
- # No natural theology.

Leap of Faith?

- # Barth emphasizes that personal encounter with the Word of God results entirely from the sovereign divine initiative.
- # Lost in sin, man cannot even take a leap of faith!
- # Only the work of the Holy Spirit can effect faith.

Reason Contrary to Faith

- # Bultmann considers rational evidence to be contrary to faith.
- # For faith to be faith, it must exist in an evidential vacuum.
- # The very authority of the Word of God strips away all demands for criteria.
- # Bultmann quote, p. 26: “As though God had to justify himself to man ...”

Wolfhart Pannenberg

- # Rigorously evidential approach.
- # *Revelation as History* (1961):
Revelation to be understood in terms of God's acts in history, not as some self-authenticating Word.
- # Perhaps in reaction to anti-evidentialism of Barth and Bultmann.

Testing and Verification

- # Christianity must submit to the same procedures of testing and verification that are employed in the secular sciences.
- # If the historical foundation for faith were removed, then Christianity should be abandoned. (Of course, he's confident that this will not occur!)

Alvin Plantinga

- # Appeals to the "Reformed objection to natural theology."
- # Rejects theological rationalism.
- # Sides with the anti-evidentialists.
- # Hugely influential.

Background: Foundationalism

- # René Descartes (1596–1650)
- # Start with a “foundation” (a set of properly basic beliefs).
- # Rational = either foundational or follows from foundation via reason (usually meaning logical or empirical method).
- # What qualifies to be foundational?
- # Propositions that are either *indubitable* or *incorrigible*.

Properly Basic Beliefs

- # Basic beliefs can be “improper” (because those beliefs were formed under improper circumstances).
- # Examples of “improper”: mentally unsound, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, confusion, ...

Belief in God: Properly Basic?

- # Is belief in God properly basic?
- # Evidentialists: No, because it is not indubitable or incorrigible.
- # Calvin, Plantinga: Yes; who says it has to be indubitable or incorrigible?
- # In fact, there are many beliefs we have that are neither indubitable or incorrigible. Examples?
- # So belief in God does not require evidence!

Plantinga: Fideist?

- # What does “rational” mean?
- # Foundationalism: a form of rationalism.
- # Plantinga’s epistemology is still foundationalist.
- # So belief in God, being properly basic, is *rational*.
- # Note: rational does not imply true.

Defeaters to Beliefs

- # Some beliefs are *defeasible*: they can be defeated by other incompatible beliefs (called *defeaters*).
- # Plantinga: Belief in God is defeasible.
- # Confronted with a potential defeater to belief in God, to remain rational the believer must have a proper response. Example: Problem of evil.
- # These are called *defeater-defeaters*.

Intrinsic Defeater Defeaters

- # Some beliefs have, by themselves, stronger warrant than their defeaters. Such beliefs are *intrinsic defeater-defeaters*.
- # Under some circumstances, belief in God is an intrinsic defeater-defeater.
- # Under what circumstances?
- # Plantinga's answer: the implanted, natural sense of God (*sensus divinitatis*), deepened and accentuated by the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Do we *know* that God exists?

- # If belief in the existence of God is (at least for some) properly basic, then can we say we *know* it?
- # Knowledge = warranted true belief.
- # Three components:
 - Belief
 - Truth
 - Warrant
- # Warrant: controversial.

Plantinga on Knowing God

- # Plantinga: You can *know* that God exists!
- # What is the *warrant* for belief in God?
- # Plantinga: a belief is warranted for a person if his cognitive faculties are functioning as God designed them to.

Knowing Christianity to be True: Craig's Model

Faith EFC, Fall'07

Back to the Original Question

- # How do we know that Christianity is true?
- # Craig: Must distinguish between *knowing* Christianity to be true and *showing* Christianity to be true.
- # Craig's model:
 - Role of Holy Spirit
 - Role of argument and evidence

Faith EFC, Fall'07

48

Role of Holy Spirit

- # Fundamental way in which we *know* Christianity to be true: self-authenticating witness of the Holy Spirit.
- # NT teaches this with respect to both believer and unbeliever.

The Believer

- # A believer automatically becomes an adopted son of God and is indwelt with the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:26, 4:6; Rom 8:15-16).
- # Paul uses the term *plerophoria* (complete confidence, full assurance) to indicate the believer's knowledge of truth as a result of the Holy Spirit (Col 2:2; 1 Thes 1:5).
- # John: Holy Spirit gives us conviction of truth of Christianity (1 John 2:20, 27), echoing Jesus (John 14:26).
- # Craig: these "truths" being spoken of are basic Christian truths, not subtleties in Christian doctrine (too many Christians differ in doctrine).

Not Self-Authenticating?

- # But what about 1 John 4:1-3?
- # John is not talking about testing the witness of the Spirit in our own hearts, but about testing people who claim to be speaking by the Spirit, referred to earlier in 1 John 2:18-19.

The Unbeliever

- # The Spirit doesn't indwell the unbeliever. But God has a different ministry of the Holy Spirit for the unbeliever: John 16:7-11.
- # Convicts unbeliever of:
 - Own sin
 - God's righteousness
 - Condemnation before God.
- # So unbeliever can be said to know such truths as "God exists," "I am guilty before God", etc.

Why Need the Spirit?

- # If not for the work of the Spirit, no one would become a Christian (Rom 3:10-11). (See also John 6:44)
- # Man cannot himself understand spiritual things (1 Cor 2:14) and is hostile to God (Rom 8:7).
- # So here Craig is going along with Plantinga.

Role of Argument and Evidence

- # Holy Spirit gives ultimate assurance of Christianity; so argument and evidence play a subsidiary role.
- # Martin Luther distinguishes between two uses of reason: *magisterial* and *ministerial*.
- # Magisterial: reason stands above Christian claims as a magistrate.
- # Ministerial: reason submits to and serves Christianity as a minister.
- # Reason in Craig's model: ministerial, not magisterial.
- # Anselm: Ours is a faith that seeks understanding.

Not Magisterial?

- # Some would argue that without a magisterial role, how could we determine which is right: Bible, Koran, or Baghavad-Gita?
- # Recall also Loftus's "outsider test."
- # A magisterial role would consign most Christians to irrationality.
- # Also, a magisterial role would imply that a person who was given poor arguments for Christianity is justified to reject it.

Theistic Arguments

Theistic Arguments

- # Pascal: all else being equal, rational to believe that God exists.
- # In fact, all else are not equal!
- # Craig: Five arguments for the existence of God.
- # Plantinga: Two dozen or so arguments.

Arguments

- # Statements leading to a conclusion.
- # Deductive and inductive arguments.
- # What makes a good argument?
 - Validity
 - Soundness
 - Not question-begging

Syllogism

- # Common form of argument:
 - All P are Q. ← Major premise
 - R is P. ← Minor premise
 - Therefore, R is Q. ← Conclusion
- # Other variations.

Plausibility

- # All syllogisms are *valid*.
- # But are all *sound*?
- # Soundness = premises are more plausible than their negation.
- # We “should” believe in the conclusion of a sound argument.

Refuting Arguments

- # Plausibility: subjective.
- # Failure of an argument does not imply that the conclusion is false.
- # Logical fallacies.

Logical Fallacy I

- # Argument:
 - Either you think for yourself or you simply accept what the Bible says.
 - You accept what the Bible says.
 - Therefore, you do not think for yourself.
- # Fallacy: Affirming a disjunct.

Logical Fallacy II

- # Argument:
 - Either you reject the Bible or you are irrational.
 - You don't reject the Bible.
 - Therefore, you are irrational.
- # Fallacy: False dilemma.
- # Gen. 3:1

Logical Fallacy III

- # Argument:
 - The Bible was written by people.
 - People are not God.
 - Therefore, the Bible is not God's word.
- # Fallacy: Equivocation.

Logical Fallacy IV

- # Argument:
 - The Bible claims that God performs miracles.
 - But miracles cannot happen.
 - Therefore, the Bible is false.
- # Fallacy: Begging the question.

Logical Fallacy V

- # Argument:
 - The Bible speaks of God seeing.
 - Seeing entails having eyes.
 - Therefore, God has eyes.
- # Fallacy: False analogy.

For More Fallacies

- # See my paper, “Logical Fallacies in Attacks Against the Bible: Eleven Examples,” at:
www.engr.colostate.edu/~echong/pubs/apologetics

Most Common Fallacies by Christians

- # Equivocation and false analogy
- # Begging the question
- # Argumentum ad baculum
- # Well poisoning
- # Non sequitur

Absurdity of Life without God

Faith EFC, Fall'07

Range of Responses

- # I don't believe that God exists.
- # Nobody knows if God exists.
- # I don't need the concept of God.
- # The idea of God doesn't make sense.
- # I don't care.
 - Even atheist philosophers, e.g., Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, recognized that the whether God exists makes a tremendous difference!

Faith EFC, Fall'07

70

The Human Predicament

- # Craig: The issue of the “human predicament” should be raised prior to the question of God’s existence.
- # Also called “cultural apologetics.”
- # Not concerned with epistemological issues.
- # Instead, examines the disastrous consequences for human existence, society, and culture if Christianity were false.
- # Akin to existentialism.

Historical Background

- # Blaise Pascal (1623-62) [*Pensées*]
- # Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821-81)
- # Søren Kierkegaard (1813-55)
- # Francis Schaeffer (1912-84)

Implications of Atheism

- # If atheism is true, then ultimately life is meaningless.
- # If atheism is true, then ultimately we must live without hope.
- # If theism is true, then not only does life have meaning and hope, but there is also the possibility to know God and his love personally.

Quote from Norman Levitt

- # Victor J. Stenger, *Has Science Found God? The Latest Results in the Search for Purpose in the Universe*, Prometheus Books, 2003.
- # Quote from back of book by Norman Levitt, Professor of Mathematics, Rutgers University, and author of *Prometheous Bedeviled: Science and the Contradictions of Contemporary Culture*.

Life is Meaningless?

- # Quote from Stenger again.
- # For an atheist, life may have *relative* meaning, but not *ultimate* meaning.
- # For an atheist, life may have *subjective* purpose, but not *objective* purpose.

No Hope?

- # Quote from Bertrand Russell, *Selected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, Random House, 1927, p. 3.

Are atheists really depressed? Or immoral?

- ‡ Craig's description of life without God is meant to describe how things really are, not necessarily how atheists feel about it.
- ‡ In fact, many atheists behave like theists!
- ‡ Examples: Albert Camus, Bertrand Russell

Theistic Arguments

Standard Arguments

- # Ontological Argument
- # Cosmological Argument
- # Teleological Argument
- # Moral Argument
- # Resurrection Argument

Further Reading

- # William Lane Craig, *God Are You There? Five Reasons God Exists and Three Reasons It Makes a Difference*, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries (RZIM), 2002.
- # Charles Taliaferro, *Does the Idea of God Make Sense?*, RZIM, 2002.
- # James Beilby and David K. Clark, *Why Bother with Truth? Arriving at Knowledge in a Skeptical Society*, RZIM, 2000.

Theistic Arguments: Ontological Argument

Faith EFC, Fall'07

Ontological Argument

- # Basic idea: God exists because, as God, he *must!*
- # Not used much by Craig.

Faith EFC, Fall'07

82

The Argument

- # God is the greatest conceivable being.
- # Existing (in reality) is greater than just being an idea.
- # Therefore, God exists.
- # (A *deductive* argument.)

Some History

- # Ontological argument first proposed by Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) [*Proslogion*, Chapter 2, 1078]
- # Later alternative argument by Rene Descartes (1596–1650).
 - More intuitive than formal



Discussion

- # The ontological argument is still hotly debated today.
- # Plantinga has defended a version of the argument that is widely considered to be the difficult to defeat.
- # Main problem: is *existence* a property?

Theistic Arguments: Cosmological Argument

Cosmological Argument

- # God makes sense of the *origin of the universe*.
- # *Kalam* cosmological argument.
[Craig 1979]
- # *Kalam*: An Arabic term meaning “argue” or “discuss” or “speak.”
More broadly, means “natural theology” or “philosophical theism.”
- # Used by Islamic philosophers about a thousand years ago.

The Argument

- # Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
- # The universe began to exist.
- # Therefore, the universe has a cause.
- # (A *deductive* argument.)

Universe Began to Exist

- # The Big Bang.
 - Astrophysical evidence suggests a point around 15 billion years ago when the universe began to exist.
- # Nonexistence of actual infinities.

Actual Infinities

- # If the universe did not begin to exist, then the number of past events in history is infinite.
- # David Hilbert: "The infinite is nowhere to be found in reality. It neither exists in nature nor provides a legitimate basis for rational thought. The role that remains for infinite to play is solely that of an idea."
- # Operations involving infinity cannot be put in correspondence with the real world (e.g., subtraction and cardinality of sets).
- # Past events are not just ideas, but are real. Therefore, the number of them must be finite.

Whatever Begins to Exist Has a Cause

- # An intuitively plausible metaphysical principle.
- # *Ex nihilo, nihil fit.*
- # Anthony Kenny (philosopher): “A proponent of the big bang theory, at least if he is an atheist, must believe that the universe came from nothing and by nothing.”
- # Kai Nielson (atheist philosopher): “Suppose you suddenly hear a loud bang ... and you ask me, ‘What made that bang?’ and I reply, ‘Nothing, it just happened.’ You would not accept that. In fact, you would find my reply quite unintelligible.”
- # Arthur Eddington (scientist): “The beginning seems to present insuperable difficulties unless we agree to look on it as frankly supernatural.”

The Cause

- # Immediate conclusion from first two premises: the universe has a cause.
- # The cause must be uncaused, changeless, timeless, and immaterial.
- # But more can be said ...

Personal Cause

- # The cause cannot be “mechanical;” must be “personal.”
- # A mechanical cause cannot exist without its effect. (But the cause of the universe existed timelessly without the universe.)
- # A personal cause is associated with a free agent.
- # The only way for the cause to be timeless and the effect to begin in time is for the cause to be a personal agent who freely chooses to create an effect in time without any prior determining conditions.
- # Thus, we are brought, not merely to a transcendent cause of the universe, but to its *personal* creator.

Counter-Arguments: Premise 1

- # Whatever begins to exist has a cause?
- # Sub-atomic events are said to be uncaused.
- # Premise 1 is true only for things *in* the universe, but it is not true *of* the universe.

Answers (Premise 1)

- # *Sub-atomic events are said to be uncaused.*
- # Not all scientists agree with this “Copenhagen Interpretation” of subatomic physics (e.g., [David Bohm]).
- # Even with the above interpretation, particles do not come into being out of *nothing*, but out of the energy fluctuations in the sub-atomic vacuum. The same can be said about theories of the origin of the universe out of a primordial vacuum.
- # Robert Deltete (philosopher of science): “There is no basis in ordinary quantum theory for the claim that the universe itself is uncaused, much less for the claim that it sprang into being uncaused from literally nothing.”

Answers (Premise 1) [cont'd]

- # *Premise 1 is true only for things in the universe, but it is not true of the universe.*
- # This objection misconstrues the nature of the premise: it is a *metaphysical* principle (a principle about the very nature of reality).
- # J. L. Mackie (atheist): “I myself find it hard to accept the notion of self-creation *from nothing*, even given unrestricted chance. And how *can* this be given, if there really is nothing?”
- # On the atheistic view, there wasn't even the *potentiality* of the universe's existence prior to the Big Bang, since *nothing* is prior to the Big Bang.

Counter-Arguments: Premise 2

- # The universe began to exist?
- # There are alternative theories to the Big Bang that do not involve a beginning.
- # Actually infinite number of things can exist.

Answers (Premise 2)

- # *There are alternative theories to the Big Bang that do not involve a beginning.*
- # The overwhelming verdict of the scientific community is that none of them are more probable than the Big Bang theory.
- # Theories like the Oscillating Universe (which expands and re-contracts forever) and Chaotic Inflationary Universe (which continually spawns new universes) do have potentially infinite future but turn out to have only a finite past.
- # Vacuum Fluctuation Universe theories (which postulate an eternal vacuum out of which our universe is born) cannot explain why, if the vacuum was eternal, we do not observe an infinitely old universe.
- # Quantum Gravity Universe theory [Stephen Hawking], if interpreted realistically, still involves an absolute origin of the universe.
- # Hawking: "Almost everyone now believes that the universe, and *time itself*, had a beginning at the Big Bang."

Answers (Premise 2) [cont'd]

- # *Actually infinite number of things can exist.*
- # For example: the number of members in the set of natural numbers $\{0, 1, 2, 3, \dots\}$ is infinite.
- # Not all mathematicians and philosophers agree.
- # Potential infinities vs. actual infinities.
- # Existence in the mathematical realm does not imply existence in the real world.

Other Counter-Arguments

- # *Just because we can't explain it doesn't mean God did it.*
- # Misconstrues the argument: this argument is deductive. If the premises are granted, the conclusion follows; it doesn't matter if it's explanatory or not.
- # The argument does not postulate God to plug up a gap in our scientific knowledge. The scientific evidence is used only to support the plausibility of the truth of premise 2 (which is a religiously neutral statement and can be found in any textbook on astronomy).
- # The hypothesis of God is, in fact, genuinely explanatory (though not scientific, but personal). It explains some effect in terms of an agent and his intentions.
- # Personal explanations are valid and used all the time. Example: "Why is the kettle boiling? Because I put it on to make a cup of tea."
- # Richard Swinburne (philosopher): there *cannot* be a scientific explanation of the first state of the universe. So, without a personal explanation, there is no explanation at all—which is metaphysically absurd.

Other Counter-Arguments [cont'd]

- # *A cause must come before its effect, and there is no moment before the Big Bang.*
- # Many causes and effects are simultaneous.
- # The moment of God's causing the Big Bang just is the moment of the occurrence of the Big Bang.
- # God's existing alone without the universe is either before the Big Bang, not in physical time, but in metaphysical time, or else is strictly timeless but enters into time at the moment of creation.

Other Counter-Arguments [cont'd]

- # *If the universe must have a cause, then what is God's cause?*
- # Reveals an inattentiveness to the formulation of the argument.
- # Not “Whatever *exists* has a cause” but “Whatever *begins to exist* has a cause.”
- # God never began to exist, and hence would not require a cause.
- # This is not a special pleading for God, since the atheist who believes in an eternal and uncaused universe relies on this too.

Other Counter-Arguments [cont'd]

- # *Isn't God infinite? So how can God exist?*
- # The argument was that an actually infinite *number of things* cannot exist. God is not a collection of an actually infinite number of things!
- # In theology, "God is infinite" in a qualitative, not quantitative, sense. (God is absolutely holy, all-powerful, all-knowing, etc.)

Further Reading

- # William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument*, Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2000.
- # Wes Morriston, "A Critique of the Kalam Cosmological Argument," in *God Matters*, Ray Martin and Christopher Bernard, eds., Longman, 2002, pp. 95–108.
<http://spot.colorado.edu/~morr isto/kalam-not.html>

Theistic Arguments: Teleological Argument

Faith EFC, Fall'07

Teleological Argument

- # God makes sense of the *complex order in the universe*.
- # Many forms:
 - Fine-tuning argument
 - Intelligent design in living organisms

Faith EFC, Fall'07

106

The Argument

- # The fine-tuning of the universe is due to either law, chance, or design.
- # It is not due to law or chance.
- # Therefore, it is due to design.
- # (A *deductive* argument.)

Fine-Tuning of the Universe

- # Existence of intelligent life depends upon a complex and delicate balance of initial conditions given in the Big Bang itself.
- # Old belief: Whatever the initial conditions of the universe, eventually intelligent life might evolve.
- # Current belief: Our existence is balanced on a knife's edge. A *life-prohibiting* universe is much more likely than a *life-permitting* universe like ours.

Specific Examples

- # Stephen Hawking: if the rate of the universe's expansion one second after the Big Bang had been smaller by even one part in 10^{15} , the universe would have re-collapsed.
- # P.C.W. Davies: The odds against the initial conditions being suitable for star formation is at least $10^{10^{21}}$.
- # P.C.W. Davies: A change in the strength of gravity or the weak force by one part in 10^{100} would have prevented a life-permitting universe.
- # Roger Penrose: Odds of the Big Bang's low entropy condition existing by chance are on the order of one out of 10^{1230} .
- # There are around 50 such quantities and constants present in the Big Bang that must be fine-tuned in this way if the universe is to permit life.
- # Not just must *each* quantity be fine-tuned, their *ratios* must also be fine-tuned.

Law, Chance, or Design

- # **Law:** the fine-tuning of the universe is physically necessary. It had to be that way, and there was no (or little) chance of its not being life-permitting.
- # **Chance:** the fine-tuning of the universe is due entirely to chance.
- # **Design:** an intelligent Mind behind the cosmos.
- # Which is the most plausible?
- # Check: false dilemma?

Law

- # Requires that a life-prohibiting universe be virtually impossible.
- # Extraordinarily implausible. Requires strong proof or evidence.
- # John Leslie: "The claim that blind necessity is involved—that universes whose laws or constants are slightly different 'aren't real physical possibilities' ... is eroded by the various physical theories, particularly theories of random symmetry breaking, which *show* how a varied ensemble of universes might be generated." If subatomic indeterminacy (or uncausedness) is real, then it must be possible for the universe to be different.
- # Even if the laws of nature were necessary, we still have to supply initial conditions. Hence, the physical universe is not necessarily unique [P.C.W. Davies].
- # If there is a single physically possible universe, this would itself be strong evidence for a designer.
- # *Strong Anthropic Principle*: often taken as indicative of God's existence [Barrow and Tipler].

Chance

- # It could have happened by chance, but the odds against it are incomprehensibly great. We would never embrace such a hypothesis in any other area of our lives. But it's not just probability that's at stake here; see next point.
- # *Specified probability*: demonstration that the event in question is not only improbable but also conforms to an independently discovered pattern. Example: chimpanzee typing "To be or not to be; that is the question."

Many-Worlds Hypothesis

- # Theorists who defend the chance alternative have adopted the Many-Worlds Hypothesis (that there are many parallel universes).
- # This is a sort of backhanded complement to the design hypothesis in that the fine-tuning cries out for explanation.
- # The Many-Worlds Hypothesis is no more scientific, and no less metaphysical, than the hypothesis of a Cosmic Designer [John Polkinghorne].
- # The designer hypothesis is arguably superior because it is simpler (Ockham's razor).
- # No good explanation for generating a World Ensemble. (The only consistent inflationary model is Linde's Chaotic Inflationary Theory, but it requires fine-tuning to start the inflation.) [Robert Brandenburger]
- # The Many-Worlds Hypothesis faces a challenge from biological evolutionary theory.

Counter-Arguments: Fine-Tuning

- # *We really don't know how much certain constants and quantities could have varied from their actual values.*
- # This admitted uncertainty becomes less important when the number of variables to be fine-tuned is high.
- # Example: The chances of all 50 variables being fine-tuned, even if each has a 50% chance of being its actual value, is less than 3 out of 10^{17} .

Counter-Arguments: Fine-Tuning

- # *The existence of any universe is equally improbable, and therefore there is nothing to be explained.*
- # In light of specified probability, can immediately see the fallacy.
- # It's not the probability of some universe or other's existence, but the specified probability of a life-permitting universe's existing.

Counter-Arguments: Fine-Tuning

- # *We shouldn't be surprised at the finely tuned conditions of the universe, for if the universe were not fine-tuned, then we wouldn't be here to be surprised about it.*
- # True statement: "We shouldn't be surprised that we do not observe conditions of the universe incompatible with our existence."
- # It does not follow that: "We shouldn't be surprised that we do observe conditions of the universe that are compatible with our existence."
- # John Leslie's analogy.

Counter-Arguments: Designer

- # *The Designer Himself remains unexplained; an intelligent designer also exhibits complex order, so that if the universe needs an explanation, so does its designer.*
- # Based on a misconception of "explanation." If the best explanation of a disease is a previously unknown virus, we cannot dismiss the explanation just because we can't explain the virus.
- # The complexity in a Mind is not analogous to the complexity of the universe. A mind's ideas may be complex, but a mind itself is a remarkably simple thing. In order to be a mind, it must have certain properties like intelligence, consciousness, and volition. These are not contingent properties that it might lack.

Counter-Arguments: Designer

- # *What about alleged designs that are evil or hurtful?*
- # Irrelevant to the design hypothesis, which says nothing about the moral qualities of the Designer.
(But see next reason.)

Craig-Flew Debate

- # In 1998, Craig debated well-known atheist philosopher Anthony Flew. See: *Does God Exist: The Craig-Flew Debate* (Ashgate Publishing, 2003).
- # It was reported that the debate had some impact on Flew. The Winter 2004 issue of the journal *Philosophia Christi* published an exclusive interview with Flew, "My Pilgrimage from Atheism to Theism," in which Flew now declares himself a theist.
- # Flew: "I think that the most impressive arguments for God's existence are those that are supported by recent scientific discoveries. I've never been much impressed by the kalam cosmological argument, and I don't think it has gotten any stronger recently. However, I think the argument to Intelligent Design is enormously stronger than it was when I first met it."

Theistic Arguments: Moral Argument

Moral Argument

- # God makes sense of the *objective moral values in the world.*

The Argument

- # If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist.
- # Objective moral values do exist.
- # Therefore, God exists.
- # (*A deductive argument.*)

Objective Moral Values

- # Morals that are binding whether or not anybody believes them.
- # Example: the Holocaust was objectively wrong even though the Nazis who carried it out thought that it was right.
- # Many theists and atheists concur on premise 1 (e.g., [Bertrand Russell, Michael Ruse, Friedrich Nietzsche]).
- # If there's no God, what's so special about human beings and their morality?
- # On the atheistic view, there's nothing really wrong with rape. But somehow we all recognize that rape *is objectively wrong*, not just socially unacceptable (perhaps for preservation of our species).

What We're Not Saying

We're not saying:

- # "We must believe in God to live moral lives."
- # "We must believe in God to recognize objective moral values."
- # "We must believe in God to formulate an adequate system of ethics."

Counter-Argument: Premise 1

- # *If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist?*
- # Objective moral values can exist in the absence of God.
- # "Atheistic Moral Realism."

Answer (Premise 1)

- # *Objective moral values can exist in the absence of God.*
- # Incomprehensible.
Example: what does it mean for justice to exist?
- # Moral values exist as properties of persons, not as abstractions.
- # Moral duty or obligation is incompatible with Atheistic Moral Realism [Richard Taylor].
- # It is highly improbable that just that sort of creatures would emerge from blind evolution who correspond to the abstractly existing realm of moral values.

Counter-Arguments: Premise 2

- # *Objective moral values do exist?*
- # But objective moral values don't exist (because there is no God).
- # The only reason you believe objective moral values exist is that you believe in God!
- # If objective moral values exist, why is it that we change our view of morals over time?
- # If objective moral values exist, why can't we all agree universally about what is moral?

Answers (Premise 2)

- # *But objective moral values don't exist (because there is no God).*
- # Agreed. This follows from premise 1 if we assume there is no God.
- # But what other reason is there to think that this is true?

Answers (Premise 2) [cont'd]

- # *The only reason you believe objective moral values exist is that you believe in God!*
- # *Genetic fallacy*: invalidating an argument by showing how it originated (e.g., the only reason you believe in democracy is that you were raised in a democratic society).
- # The truth of a statement is independent of how the statement originated, or the motives of the person asserting it.

Answers (Premise 2) [cont'd]

- # *If objective moral values exist, why is it that we change our view of morals over time?*
- # Our gradual and fallible apprehension of the moral realm no more undermines the objective reality of that realm than our gradual and fallible apprehension of the physical world undermines the objective reality of the physical realm.

Answers (Premise 2) [cont'd]

- # *If objective moral values exist, why can't we all agree universally about what is moral?*
- # Some moral questions have clear answers, others do not.
- # If we fail to see the objective moral truth about a matter, then we are simply morally handicapped, like a color-blind person that cannot tell red from green. This impairment should not make us question what we do see clearly.

Other Counter-Arguments

- # *If we say "God is good," we must have some independent meaning of the word "good."*
- # Plato's Euthyphro Argument.
- # Basic dilemma: either something is good because God commands it or else God commands it because it is good.
- # Former: right and wrong are arbitrary; latter: goodness is independent of God.
- # Plato's solution: God himself is the Good. God's commandments are not arbitrary, but necessarily flow from his own nature.

Other Counter-Arguments [cont'd]

- # *Some things are evil, but God is good and he created everything.*
- # *Problem of evil: classical atheistic defense.*
- # But how do we know that something is evil? It must be that we have a moral yardstick by which to judge evil.
- # Gives rise to an argument for God's existence:
 - If God does not exist, objective moral values do not exist.
 - Evil exists.
 - Therefore, objective moral values exist (some things are truly evil).
 - Therefore, God exists.
- # But we still haven't answered *why* God permits evil. That's a wholly separate question.

Further Reading

- # Wes Morriston, "Must There Be a Standard of Moral Goodness Apart from God?" *Philosophia Christi*, Series 2, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 127–138, 2001.
spot.colorado.edu/~morr isto/goodness.html

Theistic Arguments: Resurrection of Christ

Faith EFC, Fall'07

Resurrection Argument

- ✦ God makes sense of the *life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.*

Faith EFC, Fall'07

136

The Argument

1. There are four established facts concerning the fate of Jesus of Nazareth: his honorable burial by Joseph of Arimathea, the discovery of his empty tomb, his post-mortem appearances, and the origin of his disciples' belief in the resurrection.
 2. The hypothesis "God raised Jesus from the dead" is the best explanation of these facts.
 3. The hypothesis "God raised Jesus from the dead" entails that God exists.
 4. Therefore God exists.
- # (A *deductive* argument.)
 - # Steps 3 and 4 are obvious. It remains only to examine steps 1 and 2.

Jesus' Death: Four Facts

- # In defending this premise of Jesus' death, Craig does not treat the New Testament as inspired and therefore inerrant, but simply as a collection of Greek documents coming down to us out of the first century.

Fact 1

- ✦ Fact 1: After his crucifixion, Jesus was buried by Joseph of Arimathea in a tomb.
- ✦ Highly significant because it means that the location of Jesus's tomb was known to Jew and Christian alike in Jerusalem.
- ✦ Evidence supporting this fact:
 1. Jesus' burial is attested in the very old information handed on by Paul in his first letter to the church in Corinth, Greece.
 2. The burial account is part of very old source material used by Mark in his gospel.
 3. As a member of the Jewish high court that condemned Jesus, Joseph of Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian invention.
 4. The burial story lacks any signs of legendary development.
 5. No other competing burial story exists.

Fact 2

- ✦ Fact 2: On the Sunday after the crucifixion, Jesus' tomb was found empty by a group of his women followers.
- ✦ Evidence supporting this fact:
 1. The old information transmitted by Paul implies the empty tomb (e.g., "he was buried ... he was raised").
 2. The empty tomb story is also part of Mark's very old source material.
 3. The story is simple and lacks signs of legendary embellishment.
 4. The tomb was probably discovered empty by women. This is significant because in Jewish society, the testimony of women were regarded as unreliable.
 5. The earliest known Jewish response to the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection presupposes the empty tomb.
- ✦ Jacob Kremer: "By far most exegetes hold firmly to the reliability of the biblical statements concerning the empty tomb."

Fact 3

- ✦ Fact 3: On multiple occasions and under various circumstances, different individuals and groups of people experienced appearances of Jesus alive from the dead.
- ✦ Evidence supporting this fact:
 1. The list of eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection appearances that is quoted by Paul imply that such appearances occurred. (Cephas, the Twelve, more than 500 brethren, James, all the apostles, Paul. [1 Cor. 15:5--8])
 2. The appearance narratives in the gospels provide multiple, independent attestation of the appearances. Gerd Ludemann: "It may be taken as historically certain that Peter and the disciples had experiences after Jesus' death in which Jesus appeared to them as the risen Christ."

Fact 4

- ✦ Fact 4: The original disciples suddenly and sincerely came to believe that Jesus was risen from the dead despite their having every predisposition to the contrary.
- ✦ Imagine the situation the disciples faced following Jesus' crucifixion:
 1. Their leader was dead.
 2. Jesus' execution exposed him as a heretic.
 3. Jewish belief about the afterlife precluded anyone's rising from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of the world.
- ✦ Nevertheless, the disciples suddenly came to believe so strongly that God had raised Jesus from the dead that they were willing to die for the truth of that belief.
- ✦ Luke Johnson: "Some sort of powerful, transformative experience is required to generate the sort of movement earliest Christianity was."
- ✦ N.T. Wright: "That is why, as an historian, I cannot explain the rise of early Christianity unless Jesus rose again, leaving an empty tomb behind him."

Best Explanation

- ✦ C. B. McCullagh, in *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, lists six tests historians use in determining the best explanation for a given body of historical facts:
 1. It has great explanatory scope.
 2. It has great explanatory power.
 3. It is plausible.
 4. It is not ad hoc or contrived.
 5. It is in accord with accepted beliefs.
 6. It far outstrips any of its rival theories in meeting conditions 1–5.
- ✦ The hypothesis "God raised Jesus from the dead" passes all these tests.

Counter-Argument 1

- ✦ *What about alternative hypotheses, like "the disciples stole the body" or "Jesus wasn't really dead?"*
- ✦ These are "old theories."
- ✦ Universally rejected by contemporary scholarship (more info in Craig's debate with Brian Edwards).

Counter-Argument 2

- # "*God raised Jesus from the dead*" lies beyond the reach of a strict historian.
- # Probably most scholars would agree.
- # The fact is that there just is no plausible *naturalistic* explanation of the facts.
- # A historian may simply choose to remain agnostic about this. But surely insofar as we are not merely historians, but human beings searching for the meaning of our existence, we cannot be debarred from drawing such a conclusion. (See next point.)

Counter-Argument 3

- # *Most historians have reservations about the resurrection hypothesis.*
- # Why? Because the resurrection is a miracle.
- # Gerd Ludemann: "Historical criticism ... does not reckon with an intervention of God in history."
- # Thus, the resurrection cannot be historically established; it is excluded *a priori*.
- # Ludemann's only justification for this crucial presupposition of the impossibility of miracles is vague references to Hume and Kant.
- # Philosophers consider Ludemann's procedure here of merely dropping names of famous philosophers unsound [Thomas Moris]. (Ludemann was not a philosopher, but a New Testament theologian.)

Counter-Argument 4

- # *But miracles don't exist!*
- # How do we know?
- # The only way we can reject the notion of miracles if we can show that God does not exist (i.e., that atheism is true).

Craig-Edwards Debate 2001

- # Listen to the debate between William Lane Craig and Brian Edwards, Easter 2001:
<http://media.gospelcom.net/rzim/Nzdebate.mp3>