**Arguments for God**

# **Defining Terms: Atheism and God**

* **Explicit atheism**=explicit rejection of belief, with or without a denial that any deities exist
* **Weak/soft atheism**=absence of belief in the existence of any deities
* **Strong/hard atheism**=explicit belief that no gods exist

\*atheists.org states that atheism is NOT a disbelief or denial of gods

* **Antitheism**=the categorical opposition to the belief in any and all deities
* **Agnosticism**=the view that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God or of anything beyond material phenomena. **Agnostic**=a person who claims neither faith nor disbelief in God

It can be difficult to define the line between these groups. It may seem like splitting hairs, but it is important to establish what an atheist believes or disbelieves in. Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates were considered atheists because they disbelieved in the Greek pantheon. Some modern atheists also tend to avoid wanting the label of atheist attached to them or want to change the definition of atheism to that of agnosticism.

“I see no God out here.” – Yuri Gagarin, Soviet cosmonaut and the first human in space (quote apocryphal)

* Comparable to Frodo reaching the top of Mt. Doom and saying, “I see no J.R.R. Tolkien up here.”
* When atheists say “God,” they usually mean something very different from what we mean.
  + Something inside time and space: Flying Spaghetti Monster, grandfather in the sky, etc.

# **The 5 Classic Proofs of the Existence of God from St. Thomas Aquinas**

1. The need for a **Prime Mover**
2. The need for a **First Cause**
3. The need for a **Necessary Being**
4. The need for a **Supremely Perfect Being**
5. The need for an **Intelligent Designer**

Proofs 1, 3, and 4 are philosophical and theological, so they don’t help much in dialogue with modern atheists, who tend to be attached to the scientific method and materialism. They are more likely to listen to proofs 2 and 5.

## **2. The Need for a First Cause**

Nothing comes into existence without a cause. This is true of all matter.

* Why does matter exist? Where does matter come from?
* Matter must have an explanation, since nothing can cause itself to exist.
* If matter had always existed, there would simply have to be a coeternal infinite power that wasn’t prior in time but would be a prior *cause*, since it gave matter its eternal existence.

**“But if nothing can make itself, then who made God?”**

No one made God. He has always existed. He is the First Cause, the uncaused cause, on which all other causes depend. The First Cause doesn’t depend on anything, it simply *is* an always *was*.

“God said to Moses: I AM WHO AM. He said: Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: HE WHO IS, hath sent me to you.” – Exodus 3:14 (Douay-Rheims)

“Jesus said to them: Amen, amen I say to you, before Abraham was made, I am.” – John 8:58 (Douay-Rheims)

**Key question: Do you believe the universe is intelligible?**

* If so, you believe in an underlying principle—a first cause. Whether you believe that first cause is personal is another matter.
* If not, life has no meaning, morally or ontologically. The logical conclusion of this position is despair.

“Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.” – William Shakespeare, Macbeth

## **5. The Need for an Intelligent Designer**

When we discover a complicated system constructed for an obvious purpose, common sense tells us an intelligent being is responsible for that objects creation.

Imagine you find a watch in the middle of the woods. The watch is a complicated mechanical device made for the purpose of telling time. Common sense tells us the watch had a creator that assembled all of the pieces for that specific purpose; the watch didn’t simply form itself from nothing. Now look at the human eye: a collection of cells assembled and working together for the purpose of allowing us to see. It was built from instructions in our DNA (yet another complex collection of chemicals).

Assembling a watch is relatively easy in comparison, but atheists don’t argue that watches are made by chance. Many of them do, however, argue that the human eye and our DNA are merely the result of a random chaotic process. The marvel of these great biological mysteries should lead us to the idea of Intelligent Design. One could go even further to say the awesomeness of the order and majesty of the universe reflect the awesomeness and majesty of God, the intelligent designer.

## **The Spirituality of the Human Soul**

1. Human thinking reveals the ability to form purely immaterial concepts called ideas. (e.g., Love and Justice)
2. These immaterial concepts require an immaterial faculty: the intellect.
3. This immaterial faculty requires a spiritual reality: the soul.

Example: Justice

* How much does justice weigh?
* How long is justice?
* What color is justice?
* How much space does justice take up?

We can’t use these attributes to describe justice because it has no material attributes. Something with no material attributes is immaterial, or spiritual.

Since something material can’t create something immaterial, the faculty to create immaterial things must itself be immaterial. We call this faculty the soul.

# **The Problem of Evil or Suffering**

Many atheists will point to the existence of evil as proof that God doesn’t exist, since God is all powerful and good. But evil and suffering don’t change the proofs for God’s existence. Man has free will, and our abuse of that free will has brought much suffering and evil into the world. Without free will, we would be puppets. It’s not God’s fault we misuse the gifts he gives us. Suffering can be beneficial. Scripture says, “See how much he loved him” after Jesus wept. It is in knowing sadness that we truly know how much we love.

We assume there is good in the world if we call something evil. If we account for evil by denying God, then how do we account for the obvious good in the universe?

Atheists experience the same suffering as Christians, but we have the promise of knowing we will get answers to our questions at our judgement. Atheists have no answers and no hope of finding any.

# **Pascal’s Wager**

I have nothing to lose by believing in God, so I should live as though He exists and seek to believe in Him. If He does exist, I will go to Heaven—infinite gain, finite loss. If He exists and I have not been living accordingly, I will not—infinite loss. If He doesn’t exist, it doesn’t matter because nothing matters—finite gain, finite loss.

# **Modern Atheistic Systems (21st Century)**

These likely have their origins in the Enlightenment (1637-1800).

* **Materialism**=the claim that only material things exist. The only reality is the material universe.
* **Rationalism** denies anything supernatural, misusing the truth-finding power of reason to deny the ultimate truth, God.
* **Scientism** claims the only certain truths are those obtained through the scientific method. Note: its adherents are not called scientists or scientologists.
* **Evolutionism** claims there is no need for intelligent design to explain human life.

Subscribers to these systems seldom identify as such; sometimes they are unaware that they believe in them.

## **Refuting Materialism**

If everything in the universe can be explained in terms of matter and its products, then human thinking is a product of matter. Matter acts out of necessity. Water doesn’t choose to flow downhill; it simply must. If materialism is true, then human thought is simply the result of necessary physical causes and chemical reactions. Our thoughts are then not true or false but just *are*.

If this is true, we are not free to choose one theory over another. It is therefore futile to attempt to convince someone that your idea is “true.” Truth and choice are illusions of necessary physical causes in the world of materialism.

But if materialism is true, then thoughts aren’t true, they simply are. The claim that all thought is the result of physical conditions destroys the possibility of thought. G.K. Chesterton called it the “thought that stops all thought.”

## **Refuting Scientism, Rationalism, and Evolutionism**

“Faith is believing in things when common sense tells you not to.” – “Miracle on 34th Street”

Incorrect.

“Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know himself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.”  
– Pope St. John Paul II, Fides et Ratio

Aristotle classifies mathematics, physics, and metaphysics under the same branch of knowledge: theoretical.

The scientific method has never claimed the ability to prove anything; it can only get asymptotically close to proof. This is why scientific concepts such as gravity and natural selection are called theories. Any scientist worth their salt knows this.

Science measures observable phenomena. How would one apply the following steps to the question of the existence of God?

1. Do background research: make sure you don’t repeat mistakes from the past.
2. Construct a testable (i.e., falsifiable) hypothesis, e.g. “if I do this, that will happen.”
3. Test your hypothesis: conduct an experiment, repeating it at least 3 times and changing only 1 variable at a time.
4. Analyze your data and draw a conclusion, which may or may not agree with your hypothesis.

Even scientists accept things on authority, i.e., on faith. Richard Dawkins, renowned evolutionary scientist and atheist, claims to believe in nothing but verifiable fact despite no scientist having been present to witness the evolution he believes brought about all life on Earth. He relies on things like the fossil record, carbon dating, and the conclusions of previous scientists to reach his conclusion. If scientists accepted nothing on faith, they would never make any progress because every one of them would have to start from scratch.

**Key question: Why did the Scientific Revolution take place in Christian Europe?**

The idea that the universe is governed by fixed laws is a Judeo-Christian innovation.

* When a Viking hears thunder, he attributes it to Thor throwing his hammer.
* Many creation myths are complex dramas of personification, often involving a cosmic struggle to defeat chaos. By contrast, in Genesis God is alone in the beginning and speaks everything into being.
* Among non-Jewish ancient theologies, that of Aristotle comes closest to our conception of God. And even the Greek philosophers who gave us our intellectual heritage did not invent the scientific method.
* Even Islam regards the laws of nature as habits of Allah, which he can change if he so chooses.

A Few Christian Scientists from History:

* Francis Bacon (1561-1626): the scientific method
* Galileo Galilei (1564-1642): heliocentrism
* Johannes Kepler (1571-1630): laws of planetary motion
* Robert Hooke (1635-1703): cells, named after rooms in which monks lived
* Sir Isaac Newton (1643-1727): gravity, the laws of motion
* Charles Darwin (1809-1882): natural selection
* Gregor Mendel (1822-1884): genetics
* Louis Pasteur (1822-1895): pasteurization
* Fr. George Lemaïtre (1894-1966): the Big Bang

# **Further Reading**

*The Experience of God: Being, Consciousness, Bliss*, by David Bentley Hart

*Fides et Ratio*, by Pope St. John Paul II

*How the Catholic Church Built Western Civilization*, by Thomas E. Woods, Jr.

*The Language of God*, by Francis S. Collins

*The Last Superstition: a Refutation of the New Atheism*, by Edward Feser

*Mere Christianity*, by C.S. Lewis