

Arguments for the Existence of God
and
Images and Concepts of God

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Arguments for the existence of God have taken various forms as have been discussed in the ontological, cosmological, teleological, and moral arguments. The ontological argument concerns the meaning of the term God and the nature of being or existence. The cosmological argument concerns the origin, structure, and space-time relationships of the universe. The teleological argument concerns the existence of design, purpose, and order in nature and the resulting necessity of a designer. The moral argument argues that God is the source of moral awareness. All are various approaches for attempting to prove the existence of an omniscient God or creator.

The images and concepts of what God is and represents have varied from culture to culture throughout history though most concern mankind's need for spiritual and religious understanding. The more primitive concepts concern the struggle for human and ecological survival rather than pure intellectual enlightenment. The concept of God can contain all (the universe) or nothing for some nonbelievers or something in between for agnostics and those adhering to more moderate philosophies. God can take the form of Plato's Form of all forms making him the Ultimate Good, the highest in the hierarchy or the Supreme Being and greatest reality like Anslem's definition of God as being greater than anything the human mind can conceive (that "being than which nothing greater can be conceived"¹). Anslem proved God's existence (to himself at least) based on the idea that the existence of God is contained within the definition so that God exists solely on the idea of God itself.

The concept of God has been described in a multitude of ways from being all wise, omniscient, all powerful, and all good. God has also been described mathematically by mathematicians such as Descartes, poetically by poets such as Dante and Milton, and anthropomorphically by the general population as a loving, feared, or, at times, even vengeful father. Logicians use the principle of sufficient reason to prove his existence and metaphysicists support evidence of God's existence based on faith because of God's unknowability and the fact that an incredibly complex world exists and must therefore have a designer or creator despite its at times apparent chaos.

Human beings have a tendency to explain phenomena in humanly understandable terms. Our experiences make us believe that every living or non-living object has a beginning and end. It is

difficult for human beings to imagine something eternal or infinite although if there is a God he must be a self-created creator, therefore, based on the principle of sufficient reason, a being with no beginning and no end; a circular (perhaps recyclable and self-replicating) form made of humanly incomprehensible essences. So it may be argued by some that it is futile to attempt to understand a not-understandable concept based on human reason, so one must accept the premise that something like God exists but will never be understood or directly perceived.

Human beings also have a tendency to anthropomorphize their conceptions of God or to call God a person rather than a thing. If there is a God then that being must be beyond human characteristics, human beings being only pale imitations or slight approximations of his perfection. As human beings are only able to see visible light, a fraction of the light and electromagnetic wave spectrum, perhaps humans can only perceive a fraction of the observable results in the universe of the efforts of a creator which, to the untrained eye, appears to be mostly random chance although it is probably chance interacting and colliding with design.

Even if pure chance caused the world to be created like a pinball falling into the nearest and best-fitting hole, the random creation itself, based on human reason, had to have a beginning. The beginning-and-end oriented scientific minds of physicists and astronomers have conjured up the Big Bang theory based on Hubble's evidence of an expanding universe. Even if the universe with its billions of galaxies each containing billions of stars and solar systems (some besides ours possibly supporting life) began with an explosion of a microscopic particle containing all of the potential matter of the universe, the question naturally arises: where did that particle come from? To satisfy astronomers God can be called the first cause prior to the Big Bang and to the scientifically religious he only initiated the process and left the universe unattended. According to the religious, God intervenes whenever miracles or designing are necessary to maintain his creation. Even Darwin's theory of evolution can support the argument of a cosmic designer and scientific biblical supporters can claim the biblical account of creation can be considered as metaphorical.

Like Einstein's attempt to unify all the physical laws of the universe and his own theory of relativity into one all-encompassing unified field theory, societal religion has moved from polytheism

to monotheism. The Aztecs, Japanese, Greeks and Romans all had many gods. In fact, Montaigne estimated that the Greeks and Romans had as many as 36,000² gods. All of those now are incorporated into the capital G God. Like the difference between psychology and sociology, the polytheistic gods could represent the working towards individual goals such as materialistic accumulation, sensual pleasure, the attainment of knowledge, power, and intellectual and spiritual enlightenment among others while the monotheistic God could represent societal goals of truth, beauty, and perfection towards Thomas More's Utopia.

Of course, there is also Huxley's agnosticism based on not being able to know whether or not a God exists and atheism or denial of God's existence. There is also pantheism which states that God is nature or God is life and with that definition everyone would agree that God exists since nature and life exist. Those who define God as love and goodness would have more difficulty convincing others of God's existence since evil and suffering exist in the world.

To some like Sigmund Freud the concept of God is a human invention and therefore exists only in the mind or the collective unconscious of human society representing what human beings are not yet able to explain scientifically. Like Hegel's Absolute Idea and ultimate truth towards which all nature and activity gravitates, the attainment of which all human activity would cease, God could be considered a cosmic magnet of perfection, the final rather the first cause towards which all things move. If God is a human invention then perhaps, as the child protagonist in Steven Spielberg's motion picture *Empire of the Sun* poetically asserts with childlike sincerity to his mother, God is our dream and we are his.

To Spinoza God is "the infinite and eternal substance of all finite existences". Maimonides thought God could only be described via negativa by saying what he is not. Plotinus thought of God as the power of the One or the Primal Source. Aristotle argues in his *Physics* based on his concept motion and change for the existence of an unmoved mover or first cause which he calls God:

At the same time it is impossible that the first cause, being eternal, should be destroyed; for since the process of becoming is not

infinite in the upward direction, that which is the first thing by whose destruction something came to be must be non-eternal.³

Nothing infinite can exist; and if it could, the notion of infinity is not infinite.⁴

Actuality is prior to potency and to every principle of change.⁵ Movement is continuous in the sense in which time is; for time is either the same thing as movement or an attribute of movement. Nothing is moved at random, there must always be something present to move it.⁶ The unmovable first mover is one both in definition and in number.

Locke believed "there is an eternal, most powerful, and most knowing being"⁷. Augustine said in his confessions that "the heavens were not created by themselves therefore there must be a God"⁸:

The knowledge of God is naturally implanted in all, therefore the existence of God is self-evident. As soon as the word "God" is understood it is at once seen that God exists. For by this word is signified that thing than which nothing greater can be conceived. But that which exists actually and in the intellect is greater than that which exists only in the intellect. Therefore as soon as the word "God" is understood it exists in the intellect, it also follows that it exists actually. Therefore, the proposition "God exists" is self-evident.

Further, the existence of truth is self-evident. God is truth itself, therefore "God exists" is self-evident.⁹

Descartes considers God as an absolutely perfect being and human beings as imperfect approximations:

That substance which we understand to be supremely perfect and in which we conceive absolutely nothing involving defect or limitation of its perfection is called God.

The knowledge of the existence of God proceeds from the mere consideration of his nature.

The existence of God is proved by the fact that we possess this idea, ourselves exist¹⁰.

Berkeley believed that because there is a universe there is a mind of some Eternal Spirit that exists but is not necessarily capable of being perceived "being perfectly unintelligible and involving all the absurdity of abstraction"¹¹:

To be convinced of which, the reader need only reflect, and try to separate in his own thoughts the *being* of a sensible thing from its *being perceived*.

We may even assert that the existence of God is far more evidently perceived than the existence of men; because the effects of nature are infinitely more numerous and considerable than those ascribed to human agents.¹²

Newton used the mechanistic argument and A posteriori proof by using the teleological argument with some spiritualism describing God as the designer or architect of the universe:

This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being. This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all.

God is the same God, always and everywhere. He is omnipresent. In

him are all things contained and moved; yet neither affects the other: God suffers nothing from the motion of bodies; bodies find no resistance from the omnipresence of God. It is allowed by all that the Supreme God exists necessarily; and by the same necessity he exists *always* and *everywhere*.¹³

He is a uniform Being, void of organs, members or parts, and they are his creatures subordinate to him, and subservient to His will. The organs of sense are not for enabling the soul to perceive the species of things in its sensorium, but only for conveying them thither; and God has no need of such organs, He being everywhere present to the things themselves. And since space is divisible *in infinitum*, and matter is not necessarily in all places, it may also be allowed that God is able to create particles of matter of several sizes and figures, and in several proportions to space, and perhaps of different densities and forces, and thereby to vary the laws of Nature, and make worlds of several sorts in several parts of the Universe.¹⁴

Immanuel Kant thought God was "the postulate of pure practical reason as the necessary condition of the possibility of the *summum bonum*"¹⁵ or ultimate happiness and used subjective and objective criteria to prove his moral argument:

A Supreme Being is, therefore, for the speculative reason, a mere ideal, though a faultless one – a conception which perfects and crowns the system of human cognition, but the objective reality of which can neither be proved nor disproved by pure reason.¹⁶

There exists either in, or in connection with the world – either as a part of it, or as the cause of it – an absolutely necessary being.¹⁷

Consequently we must assume a moral world-cause, that is, an Author of the world, if we are to set before ourselves a final end in conformity with

the requirements of the moral law. And as far as it is necessary to set such an end before us, so far, that is in the same degree and upon the same ground, it is necessary to assume an Author of the world, or, in other words, that there is a God.¹⁸

One interesting psychoanalytical alternative to the concept of God is offered by Sigmund Freud. Freud says mankind's need to create a God or gods in his own image is his need for finding a surrogate father. "In western religion God is openly called Father. Psychoanalysis concludes that he really is the father clothed in the grandeur in which he once appeared to the small child. Though the adult realizes that his father is a being with strictly limited powers and abilities, he nevertheless looks back to the admired father of his childhood and exalts him into a deity or divinity and brings it into the present and into reality."¹⁹

Explanations for the existence of God range from the astronomical to the psychological. Perhaps the best argument for the existence of God is that the concept, based on various definitions, satisfies a basic human need and finds its expression in a multitude of forms.

Images and Concepts of God

Images and concepts of God have varied throughout history and representations have taken the form of verbal abstractions as well as visual symbols. Visual symbols are not to be mistaken for idols or icons to be worshiped. They instead represent a quality or essence that is admired much the same way as the flag is symbolic of the revered country. Also, those who oppose the admiration of religious symbols and view them as literal rather than symbolic images might also consider Christianity idolatrous and anthropomorphic.

The following images are roughly chronological beginning with one of the oldest artifacts ever uncovered and ending with more recent works. Also most of the works are anthropomorphic.

1. The *Venus of Willendorf* is one of the oldest non-utilitarian objects ever found dating back to more than 27,000 years ago (some tools date back 2,000,000 years ago). The Venus has religious significance as a fertility goddess. It is interesting to note that one of the first deities was female.²⁰



2. The *God Abu* from the Abu Temple at Tell Amar dates back to 2700 B.C. The enlarged, exaggerated eyes suggest Aristotle's observation that mankind is distinguished from the animals by rationality and that sight is the most rational and important of the senses. The god is represented as omniscient and all knowing.²¹





3. The seated statue of *Khafre* made in 2500 B.C. shows the god-like king sitting on his throne. To the Egyptians the king was a god or a link with the gods as the hawk on the statue's shoulder symbolizes his divine status as son of Re, the Sun God.²²



4. The *Sphinx* - The lion figure with a human head is possibly a portrait of Khafre.²³



5. *Ramses II*, 1257 B.C. in Abu Simbel.²⁴



6. *Mycenaean Earth Mother*, 12th century B.C., shows the need for a bountiful harvest and female fertility.



7. *Aztec Goddess of Sustenance*



8. *Water God*



9. *Aztec Goddess of Childbirth*



10. *Aztec God of Games and Flower Prince*



_____ 11. *Mexican Goddess of Earth and Death*



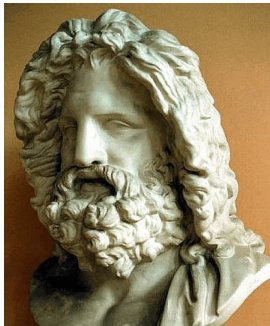
12. *Jesus by Rev. Howard Finster - contemporary folk artist*



13. Seated Bodhisattva



14. Vishnu and Krishna



15. Greek Zeus of Otricoli in the Vatican- 4th century B.C.

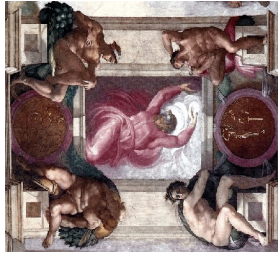
16.-21. Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel 1508-1512, God as father



16. *Creation of Planets and Stars*



17. *Separation of Earth from Waters*



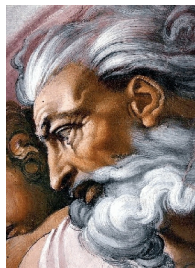
18. *Creation of Light*



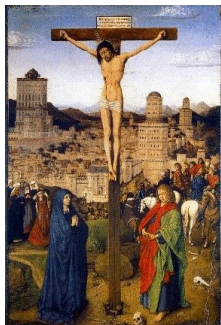
19. *God and Eve*



20. *Creation of Adam*



21. detail of above, head of God.



22. Hubert Van Eyck – *The Crucifixion* – the triumph of
good over evil.



23. Van Eyck – *The Ghent Altarpiece* depicts God the father in kingly robes.²⁵



24. William Blake – *Satan Arousing the Rebel Angels* Blake, the British poet/illustrator/artist depicts a non-evil looking Satan (the devil may take a pleasing form?) leading the forces of evil.



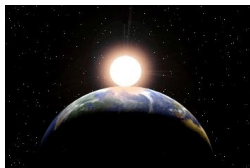
25. Blake – *The Ascension*



26. Gustav Moreau – *Jupiter and Semele* – In a similar mood as Van Eyck's *Crucifixion* except using the Roman god as a subject.²⁶



27. Paul Klee – *Death and Fire* – I asked several children what God is or what form he takes. Several described him as a bearded father figure and one described him as "fire".



28. Space as depicted in *2001, a Space Odyssey* – an essentially religious motion picture, containing the riddle of the mysterious monolith, about the quest for truth, the unknown, knowledge... God as infinite space.

God could also be represented as pure light and energy; and matter, or observable reality, merely a conversion, like Einstein's energy and matter conversion equation, of pure energy into recognizable matter.

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