

## The Question of God's Existence

The most foundational question a person can ask and answer for themselves is, “Does God exist?” The majority of the world’s population believes in the existence of some type of higher power; and because there is considerable disagreement as to who or what this higher power is, the question of God’s existence must be answered in light of one’s understanding of the term *God*. In this course, we will use the term to refer to a being who exists outside space-time, is eternal in nature, absolute in power, and who created from nothing the universe and all that is in it—while being distinct from the universe.

The reason the question of God’s existence is so important is due to the implications of its two possible answers. If the answer is “no, God does not exist,” then humanity is merely the result of a random series of chance mutations and, therefore, has no obligation to live according to any objective moral parameters. In addition, without the existence of a Creator, the concepts of purpose, meaning, and intrinsic human value also cease to exist. If there is no God, then life has no higher purpose or meaning than to exist for a short time before disappearing.

If, however, the answer is “yes, God does exist,” then humanity is beholden to this Creator for their existence and is responsible to adhere to any moral laws that are given. This, however, is one of the reasons so many reject God’s existence. In general, people do not want to change how they live but instead desire to live as they want. In October 2008, a city-wide campaign in London, England, displayed on the sides of city buses the message, “There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life.” A sentiment of this nature carries grave consequences and brings to mind the words of Psalm 14:1, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

Some say belief in the existence of God is irrational because we cannot interact with Him through the physical senses. On the contrary, belief in God is a very rational perspective to take in understanding and interpreting the world around us. In fact, the rationality used to believe in God’s existence is the same rationality commonly used in everyday life, as we will see later.

And while the existence of God may not be able to be proven

as a tangible fact that we can touch with our hands or see with our eyes, there is much evidence for God's existence in creation through what is called "general revelation," which refers to God's revealing of Himself through what has been created. In Psalm 19:1–4, the psalmist writes,

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; whose voice is not heard. Their voice has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

According to the psalmist, even though the world around us does not verbally speak to us, it nonetheless communicates volumes about its Creator. The apostle Paul picks up this idea in the opening chapter of his letter to the Romans when he says of God,

For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. (Romans 1:20–23)

Paul here informs his readers that God's invisible attributes, His eternal power, and His divine nature are clearly displayed in the world, though many still refuse to acknowledge this information and honor God, choosing instead to worship aspects of the creation to the exclusion of its Creator. To this, Paul says these individuals are "without excuse" and have become fools, living in the futility of their own thoughts.

The universe declares God's existence; and as we examine it closely, we come to see through rational inference that it reflects the reality of a Creator. When combined, these inferences (conclusions reached on the basis of evidence and reason) assert a truth claim. The greater the number of inferences used to support a truth claim, the more likely a truth claim is to be true. In addition to inferences, faith is also a necessary element that underlies our thinking and understanding not only about God's

existence but also of the world around us.

According to the author of Hebrews, faith is defined as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:1). Every time we take a drink from a fountain, a faucet, or a bottle of water, we are exercising a measure of faith because we have no idea where the water ultimately came from or the process it took to reach us. But by faith, experience, and rational inference, we believe the water is safe to consume, and from that conclusion we take a drink.

But what kind of faith are we talking about? Obviously, not a blind faith but an informed faith; a faith that takes into account the full understanding of an issue, any historical experience, and one’s reasoning abilities. As a result, when we drink water, we take into consideration our knowledge of where we are, whether we have consumed water from this location before, and the testimony, if available, of others who have consumed the water and are alive to talk about it. Using this collective information, we rationally infer that drinking the water is a safe activity. Even so, we still exercise some faith in our ultimate decision to drink or not.

Or consider a student who goes to school and is introduced to the periodic table, a listing of all known elements that make up the world around us. How does the student know that all of the elements listed on the table actually exist? It’s unlikely that any given student will have seen or tested all known elements in the world to validate their existence prior to attending a science class. However, the student accepts that the information on the periodic table is correct by exercising trust in the testimony of the history of science and the trustworthiness of their teachers. This “trust” is what we mean by “faith.”

In the examples above, evidence combined with faith are both part of the believing process. The student ultimately has to exercise some degree of trust, or faith, in believing that the information recorded on the periodic table is accurate since s/he cannot independently verify its information. Likewise, when we travel to new places, we exercise faith in drinking the water based on our understanding of the location.

How, though, does this apply to belief in God? Well, as we view the world around us, from the *micro* to the *macro* levels, we see that the existence of God best explains what we observe in nature. According to William Lane Craig, God’s existence best

explains not only the origin and existence of the universe but the apparent fine-tuning of the universe, the presence of an objective moral law, and the reality of a transformed life with purpose and meaning. Let's examine each of these separately.

First, God's existence best explains the origin and existence of the universe. To demonstrate this point, we need only examine the three possible options for the existence of the universe: 1) the universe came into existence out of nothing; 2) the universe has always existed; or 3) the universe was created by a being who exists outside the confines of space and time that make up the universe.

The first option—that the universe came into existence out of nothing—stands in opposition to the basic scientific principle of cause and effect. Put another way, “You simply cannot get something from nothing.” The universe didn't just pop into being from nothing. Even the theory of the Big Bang must acknowledge that the single object of immense mass containing all known matter, which exploded and produced our universe, came into being from somewhere.

The second option—that the universe has always existed—is refuted by the fact that no object, whether a cell, a person, a planet, a galaxy, or the universe as a whole can be eternal in nature. The universe had to have a beginning, because if it were infinitely old then we could never arrive at this point in time to talk about it. To arrive at any point in time there must be a point of beginning and not an infinite regression. Consequently, the universe cannot be infinitely old; it had to have a beginning, a point at which it came into existence.

Given that the first two options fail scientifically and logically, the only option for the existence of our universe is that there must be a being who exists outside the universe and who created all things—a being whose existence is not dependent on anything else. This is the best explanation as to where the universe and all it contains came from.

Second, God's existence best explains the fine-tuning of the universe. Though we will examine this claim in greater depth in a later lesson, for now it is important to note that many physicists speak of the universe being fine-tuned, thereby enabling life to exist as it does. From the micro world of particle physics to the macro world that encompasses planets, stars, and galaxies, life in

the universe exists within precise parameters that if changed even slightly would cause life to cease. According to Lewis and Barnes in *A Fortunate Universe*, even the extremely precise electrical charges of the protons and electrons that make up atoms, the building blocks of all matter, are essential for sustaining life. And if these electrical values changed even slightly, life would not continue.

The immensity of the universe, the complexity of DNA, the unique properties of cells, and the wondrous quantum world of subatomic particles, which physicists are still seeking to understand, all speak to the presence of an intelligent Designer who brought all things into existence. According to Paul in Colossians 1:16–17, God, through Jesus, not only created all things but holds all things together. Science and faith are not at odds with one another, but complement each other. Science seeks to understand what God has created, whereas faith seeks to understand who God is. The fine-tuning of the universe gives credence to the existence of an intelligent Designer who created and formed the universe in a very specific way.

Third, God's existence best explains the presence of an objective moral law. When speaking of a moral law, we are referring to a foundational set of moral values that apply to all people, not truth claims that relate to personal preferences. You might have heard the statement, "What's true for you is not true for me." While this is correct when speaking about the type of food a person likes to eat, the style of clothes one wants to wear, or how someone wishes to spend their vacation, it doesn't apply to questions such as "Is it wrong to murder or torture an innocent person? Is it wrong to abuse a child? Is it wrong to rape another person?" Everyone can agree on the obvious injustice and depravity of these types of actions. But why can we agree that these actions are in fact wrong?

In the face of this, there are those who do not believe in a universal moral law that applies to every person in every culture, but instead believe moral ideals are subjective and derived either by personal choice as influenced by the culture in which a person lives or through some means of biological evolution. Those who hold this worldview, called moral relativism, must acknowledge that moral values and ethical concerns based on personal preferences and cultural contexts have no real, objective authority or significance, but are simply individual opinions of how life should operate.

Moreover, those who embrace moral relativism must also recognize that the moral values of all cultures are equally valid, even if those moral values are in opposition to one another, because, as they assert, moral values are culturally derived. In essence, the view of moral relativism stipulates that moral truths are relative, not absolute by nature.

The futility of holding to moral relativism is best illustrated in the Holocaust. During World War II, the German leadership believed that the systematic killing of over six million Jews was good. Most every person today, unless guided by a particular ideology, would say the attempted extermination of the Jewish people was wrong. But a worldview that holds to moral relativism cannot say the Holocaust was actually wrong because, in their perspective, right and wrong are culturally based, personal opinions that are not absolute in nature.

Only the existence of a God who created all things provides the basis for a set of foundational moral values that indwell and apply to all people in all situations; a set of moral values that allow humanity to truly distinguish between what is right and what is wrong. If there is no God, then humanity is simply the result of chance mutations, and concepts such as good and evil are mere arbitrarily constructed ideals that have no objective foundation upon which to rest.

Fourth, God's existence best explains the reality of a transformed life with purpose and meaning. This argument for God's existence is different from the first three in that it doesn't rely on objective argumentation but on experience. It is the most personal and subjective of the four, yet the most powerful as it addresses the question of whether God can be individually known and experienced. Testimonies of transformed lives can be found throughout history. One of the greatest examples is the apostle Paul who, before encountering Jesus while on the road to Damascus, was a persecutor of Christians. But after encountering and embracing Jesus as the promised Messiah, Paul became Christianity's most outspoken proponent, eventually writing thirteen of the twenty-seven books that make up the New Testament.

The New Testament speaks of the spiritual transformation that occurs when an individual encounters and turns to God for salvation in a variety of ways. In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he writes that those who have given their lives to Christ have been



“delivered... from the domain of darkness and transferred... to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13). To the Romans he writes,

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:29–30)

Several other verses could be mentioned, but the general idea presented in the New Testament is that God desires to have a personal relationship with people, a relationship in which they are transformed more and more into the image of Jesus.

It should be noted that the spiritual transformation referenced in the Bible is different than a mere passion for an ideology, involvement in a cultural movement, or dedication to a specific cause. The transformation God offers changes the very nature, being, and purpose of an individual. Devotion to a cause can be found in most religions, even among those who embrace atheism as their worldview. But that devotion is not the same as what the Bible describes. What God offers is a renewed soul with hope, purpose, and meaning.

In fact, without the existence of God, life has no real purpose or meaning. Humans are the only creatures who look beyond their own existence to something greater and higher than themselves. Craig writes of humanity,

Man among all living creatures anticipates his death. This results in an odd paradox: man hopes for the future, yet at the same time he knows that the future brings death one step closer. This paradox suggests that just as it belongs to man's nature to know of his own coming death, so it belongs to his nature to hope for life beyond death. (William Lane Craig, *The Son Rises: The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus*)

Without the existence of God, humanity is a cosmic orphan, an accident of nature, the result of mindless evolutionary mutations with no real significance. But with the existence of God, humanity is given the hope of life beyond this life, of a being who purposely and intricately created all things, and who, according to the Bible,

wants to have a personal relationship with them.

Based on the four arguments above, we can say that belief in the existence of God, though ultimately held by an informed faith, is a reasonable view to take of the world around us. For God's existence best explains the origin, immensity, complexity, and fine-tuning of our universe; the reason there exists an innate moral law that resides in all humanity—whether people choose to acknowledge that law or not; and the reality of lives that have been transformed by the power and presence of their Creator.

God's existence cannot be proven 100 percent, nor has anyone been able to disprove His existence. That said, the very construction of the natural world speaks of a God who is involved in His creation. In addition, the Bible is also a source that tells us that God not only exists, but who He is.