

# Existence of god

[Religion](#), [God](#)



Since the beginning of time, mankind as a whole has always had an innate belief in a higher being, whether it be karma, fate or in the case of this essay, God. From the Ancient Greeks' mythological Gods to the current Creationist movement in America, the idea and belief in God has not faltered over time, but why?

Why do so many people believe in something of which they have no concrete proof? In reality, I believe that faith in God has nothing to do with having proof of his existence; it is about intimate, deep and spiritual feelings that someone is either born with or gains through life experiences.

Nevertheless, for thousands of years philosophers have been captivated by the prospect of answering the infamous question, 'does God exist?' Plato and Aristotle started off the quest for the answer to this question, followed by nearly every philosopher that came after them, including Descartes, St Anselm, St Thomas Aquinas and Ibn Rushd to name but a few. Every philosopher has presented new ideas and theories but fundamentally they all fall under three main headings; the ontological, teleological and cosmological arguments.

Each of these puts forward its own argument for the existence of God, and in this essay I will be evaluating their strengths and weakness in order to discover which one is the strongest and which is the weakest.

The ontological argument for the existence of God was introduced by St Anselm who was the Archbishop of Canterbury. He wanted to find a proof for the existence of God that was solely based on logic and that could inspire non-believers without the need for scriptures or the Bible.

He believed that from the very definition of God, he could prove his existence. In the book entitled 'Proslogion', he begins his proof by defining God as 'something which nothing greater can be conceived,' in other words, the greatest being imaginable. It follows that everyone, even those who do not believe in God, can understand this statement and can imagine that such a being exists, 'when the fool hears the words he understands what he hears and what he understands exists in his understanding, even if he doesn't think it exists.'

So now in our mind we have this idea of God as being the greatest being imaginable, however Anselm believes that a being which exists in reality is greater than one which only exists in our mind, 'therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived.'

Obviously this is a contradiction, and so Anselm concludes by saying 'that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.' Going back to the original definition, if something which nothing greater can be conceived exists, God exists.

Anselm succeeds in creating a proof for the existence of God that does not need any knowledge of religion, just logic. However I believe that some of his logic is in effect, incorrect, making his whole proof void. When Anselm first defines God as 'something which nothing greater can be conceived' he does not explain clearly from where he derived this, it is simply stated as his opinion and he assumes that it is the opinion shared by everyone.

However this is not the case, not everyone who believes in God will necessarily think of him as the greatest being imaginable, indeed there are some people who believe that God is not perfect and that he has his limits. For the non believers who Anselm is trying to target with this proof, it is even less likely that they will think of God as being the greatest being imaginable, as they do not believe in him, so how can they think that? It therefore appears that the fundamental definition which Anselm's proof is based in is not entirely true and so there is a flaw in his whole argument.

There are some people who would be able to believe Anselm's first definition and so we move on to next step of the proof. He claims that if something exists in reality, it is greater than that same thing imagined in our mind.

To a certain extent I do agree with this statement as surely having one thousand pounds in my hands is better than just imagining it. However the same is not necessarily true for all things; Santa Claus does not exist in reality but that doesn't make him any less great in terms of how people feel towards his character.

This objection was initially put forward by Kant and I do agree with him and also think that it is down to personal opinion; once again Anselm has assumed that everyone will think the same as him. The first objection to Anselm's proof was presented by Gaunilo, a monk, and he claimed that Anselm's proof can be used to define things into existence, even if we know they do not exist, which does not make any sense.

For example we can use his logic to prove that 'the greatest ever island' exists and even the devil exists, by simply defining them, imagining them and

then concluding that they must exist. However, we do not know that there is no such thing as the 'greatest ever island' or that there is a devil, they could both very well be in existence and we just haven't found them. In fact, I believe that Anselm's writings can prove that in some place or another around the galaxy, everything is possible.

The ontological argument presented by St Anselm requires one to 'understand' the concept of God, but many people, including myself believe that the notion of God cannot be grasped by anyone even the Archbishop of Canterbury, as St Anselm was. Hence, although it does not need a deep understanding of the bible, it does require you to think about God as a being, which is very hard to do.

The teleological argument for the existence of God is often referred to as the design argument as it calls on evidence of design and purpose to prove the existence of God.

It has been presented by many philosophers including Ibn Rushd, also known as Averroes, who was an Islamic philosopher who believed that the answers to all the questions we are seeking lie in the Qu'ran and the world around us: 'we maintain that philosophy is nothing other than to look into creation and to ponder over it in order to be guided to the Creator.'

In his book, 'religion and philosophy' he starts his argument by explaining that when we look at a chair, we see evidence of design and purpose; the chair has been designed specially for the purpose of us sitting on it and it is 'not possible that those qualities be collected by chance alone.'

Therefore we know that it has been 'made by a maker' or a designer. If we then apply the same thinking to the Universe, we can also see evidence of design and purpose all around us; when a man sees the sun the moon the existence of man and the water fit for animals living in it he would come to know that it is not possible for it all to be found by chance only.' Thus we come to the conclusion that the Universe also has a designer, and Rushd believes it to be God. He will know that there is one who made it by intention, and that is God.'

Ibn Rushd was not the only Philosopher to put forward a teleological argument, there were many more, including William Paley who used the analogy of a watch as an object showing design and purpose. Of all the arguments for the existence of God, this one is, in my opinion, the one that most believers in God agree with, including myself.

For me, when I look at the world around me I find it very hard to believe it all happened simply by chance. There are too many things that are just too perfect; flowers blooming, autumn sunsets and birds chirping are but a few. The objection to this that is also widely believed is that many people find it hard to see the beautiful things left in this world, amongst all the war, disasters and crime that we are faced with today.

They cannot see how there could be a God who created such an awful place with so much evil, but I think that it was man who created the evil, not God. However, some would argue that God should put a stop to it but I do not believe that is what God is there for; he put us here and gave us choices, if some people made the wrong choices then they do not get 'fixed' or 'cured', not in this lifetime anyway. I do think that there are awful things

happening in the world today, but can also see all the good things and I think that is just the way life is; a mixture of good and bad, just like the world we live in.

Of course, I could be wrong, and this whole Universe could have been created by pure chance and we are here today because of evolution, not because God made us. Darwin's theory of evolution erases the design argument completely as he states that everything is the way it is because of millions of years of evolution, and has nothing to do with God. If Darwin is ever proved to be completely right, then the design argument is invalidated and vice versa.

There is one other point in the teleological argument that can be debated; even if everyone agreed that the world showed evidence of design and purpose and therefore has a creator, why is the creator God, it could equally be one of us; a member of mankind who has extra-special abilities to design his own world.

In this argument, there is no logical progression from the statement 'the Universe has a designer' to the statement 'the designer is God.' In between those two statements there is a big jump which can only be made if you already believe in God or equally, if that is the only explanation you can think of without reverting back to the initial Universe that was without a designer.

The teleological argument is in some ways an intuitive way of proving that God exists and is either readily adopted by people or completely thrown to the floor. With this argument there is no middle ground in my opinion, you

either believe it or you don't and that highly depends on an individual's own perspective; their life experiences and their level of skepticism when they look at the world around them.

The cosmological argument for the existence of God examines the Universe as it is today and uses its very existence to conclude that God exists. It holds its roots in Plato and Aristotle but became well known in the 13th century when Thomas Aquinas published his 'Summa Theologica' in which he described his version of the argument.

He begins by stating that there are things in the world which are changing and 'whatever undergoes change must have been changed by something else which undergoes change and so on.' However this cannot go back to infinity because otherwise there would be 'no first cause of change, and consequently, no other causes of change.' Therefore there must be a first cause of change, which is not changed by anything, and this is God.

Aquinas also believed that all things are brought into existence by something else and that this also cannot go back to infinity, as there would be no first cause. In order for there to be a first cause there must be a being 'that does not owe its existence to anything else' and this can only be God.

Aquinas' argument was revolutionary for its time as it implies that there was a time when there was nothing, when the Universe did not exist, only God existed, and then he created the Universe. Although this is a commonplace belief now, at his time it was not.

Scientists in fact believed that the Universe had always existed, as they could not find any evidence of creation. However, now, the Big Bang theory



corresponds very well with Aquinas' argument, as that was the point of creation, and Aquinas would argue that God created the Big Bang, whereas scientists today have other theories for example they think that particles may have caused the Big Bang.

Personally, I agree with Aquinas in that all effects have a cause and that this cannot go all the way back to negative infinity as there would be no first cause which created all the other causes, and I believe that you cannot create something out of nothing.

Nevertheless, this could be disputed; just because we have never witnessed something being created from nothing does not necessarily mean that it cannot happen; scientists have come such a long way since the days of Aquinas, who is to say that in future they will not achieve this task which seems impossible now. If, however, they did achieve it, then the cosmological argument would be invalid, as the Universe today could not be traced back to God as a series of cause and effects, instead, it would most likely have been formed by the random creation of matter from nothing.

Another objection to this argument, which was mentioned briefly before, is to say that the Universe has always existed and that no cause created it; eliminating the need for God. However, I believe that this line of thinking goes against human nature and common sense itself. In the world today everything is created by something; from reproduction and planting seeds to making bread from flour.

The concept of something always existing seems somewhat alien to the world around us, and furthermore, scientists have even witnessed galaxies

being born from matter, which strengthens the idea that the Universe must have been created at some stage.