

LifeGroup Study
2024-04-14
SKEPTICS WELCOME
Isn't Religion Just a Result of Social Evolution?
Leader Notes

OVERVIEW: Welcome to week 2 of our series Skeptics Welcome. During this series we are looking at six common objections to the Christian faith and how the Bible speaks to these objections. This week we're looking at the issue of whether or not God exists in the first place. For today's LifeGroup study, we will explore five compelling arguments for the existence of God that have been proposed by theologians, philosophers, and apologists throughout history. Each argument offers unique insights into the existence of God, drawing from different aspects of human experience and rational inquiry.

ICEBREAKER:

Have you always believed there is a God? Have you ever had intellectual objections to God? If so, what helped you overcome your objections? Or, are you still in process? **Share your story with the group!**

STUDY:

LEADER NOTE: There are a number of ways your LifeGroup can tackle this week's study. One option is you can decide to walk together through each of the 5 arguments for the existence of God. Note: This will likely take longer than an average study. Another option is to subgroup and have each subgroup prepare to present an argument or two to the rest of the group. This may give your subgroups time to look at some of the extra resource links in the study for further explanation. A third option is you could choose to spend your time as a whole group looking at two or three of the most compelling arguments for your group. These arguments are important for us to know. They are also somewhat heady and philosophical. Allow time for your group to ask questions about each argument and don't be afraid to say, "I don't know!"

5 ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

I. Argument from Fine-Tuning:

Definition: The fine-tuning argument posits that the remarkable precision of the physical constants and conditions in our universe, which allow for life, suggests intentional design by an intelligent Creator.

Best Defenses:

- The universe's parameters are so finely tuned that even slight alterations would render life impossible, implying intentional design.

- Fine-tuning points towards a transcendent creator who carefully crafted the universe to support life.

Bible References:

- Psalm 19:1: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands."

- Romans 1:20: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

Counterarguments:

Multiverse Hypothesis: Many atheists and secular thinkers argue that the apparent fine-tuning of the universe can be explained by the multiverse hypothesis, suggesting that our universe is just one of countless others, each with different physical constants. According to this view, the existence of a life-supporting universe is not improbable, but rather inevitable given the vast number of universes.

For more information on the fine tuning argument, check out <https://www.gotquestions.org/fine-tuning-argument.html>

For more information on the multiverse hypothesis, check out <https://www.gotquestions.org/multiverse-theory.html>

Questions for Discussion:

1. How does the concept of fine-tuning impact your understanding of God's creative power?

LEADER NOTE: Our God has created our universe and our world with the exact conditions needed to sustain life. Every detail down right down to the atoms that build life show us God's creative power. God is the Master Engineer who has fine-tuned our world in a way that should make us stand back and say, "Wow, God!"

2. Can the fine-tuning argument coexist with scientific theories about the universe's formation?

LEADER NOTE: The fine-tuning argument can coexist as a plausible and intellectually defensible option along with scientific theories about the universe's formation. Some may posit the fine-tuning argument cannot coexist because it presupposes the existence of an Intelligent Designer. They would rule out any theories that presuppose God and only look at theories outside of God as an explanation. For example, the theory of naturalism presupposes that only natural causes are behind the universe and that any valid scientific theories must support this.

An eclipse is a cosmic reminder that the universe is not a random collection of matter and events that happened by chance. The cosmos is so finely tuned that we can know precisely where every heavenly body will be 200 years from now, down to the minute. These events remind us that the universe is not an accident, and neither are we.

R. L. Solberg

II. Argument from Moral Realism:

Definition: The argument from moral realism suggests that the existence of objective moral values points to the existence of a moral lawgiver, namely God.

Best Defenses:

- Objective moral values imply a transcendent standard beyond human convention, which is best explained by the existence of God.
- The universality and authority of moral principles across cultures and civilizations suggest their divine origin.

Bible References:

- Romans 2:14-15: "Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts sometimes accusing them and at other times even defending them."
- Matthew 22:37-40: Jesus summarizes the moral law as loving God and neighbor.

Counterarguments:

Evolutionary Morality: Some atheists and secular thinkers propose that moral values and principles can be explained by evolutionary biology and social constructs rather than a divine source. They argue that morality is a product of natural selection, developed to promote cooperation and social cohesion among human beings, rather than being dictated by a transcendent moral lawgiver.

Cultural Relativism: Critics claim that moral values vary across cultures, suggesting that there is no universal moral standard.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How do objective moral values influence our understanding of right and wrong?

LEADER NOTE: Objective moral values influence our understanding of right and wrong by giving us a universal standard to live by. This standard is validated by our conscience, confirming whether the action we are considering would be right or wrong.

<https://www.gotquestions.org/moral-argument.html>

2. Can moral values exist without a divine source? Why or why not?

LEADER NOTE: Moral realism would argue that a divine source is necessary for moral values to exist.

III. Argument from Consciousness:

Definition: The argument from consciousness posits that the existence of subjective conscious experiences cannot be adequately explained by purely materialistic or naturalistic explanations, suggesting the existence of a transcendent mind or consciousness, namely God.

Best Defenses:

- Consciousness points towards a reality beyond the physical world, indicating the existence of a higher spiritual realm. In short, materialism cannot fully explain consciousness.
- The emergence of self-awareness and subjective experiences cannot be accounted for solely by evolutionary processes, necessitating a non-material explanation.

Bible References:

- Genesis 1:27: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."
- 1 Corinthians 2:11: "For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God."

Counterarguments:

Emergent Materialism: Critics of the argument from consciousness often advocate for a materialistic or naturalistic explanation of consciousness, suggesting that subjective experiences and self-awareness can emerge from complex neural processes in the brain without the need for a transcendent consciousness. They point to ongoing advancements in neuroscience to support their view that consciousness is a product of physical processes.

Illusion of Self: Secular thinkers argue that consciousness is an illusion, and our sense of self is a by-product of brain activity.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How does the concept of consciousness point to a deeper reality beyond the physical?

LEADER NOTE: Mental life is a nonphysical feature of reality, and that the phenomenon of consciousness is grounded in the existence of a conscious being, like God. The nature of people is that we are of two substances - we have a body, but essentially, we are a soul, and the nature of the soul is that consciousness is located in the human soul. Source: https://thedailyapologist.com/blog/the-nature-of-consciousness-points-towards-god#_ftn2

2. In what ways does the existence of consciousness shape our understanding of the human experience?

LEADER NOTE: One support for this argument comes from **immaterial awareness**. There is a *what it is like* nature to consciousness. As conscious subjects of experience, when we introspect (look within ourselves), we are aware of a number of mental states -- states like beliefs, thoughts, emotions, past life experiences. Interestingly, these states cannot be reduced to physical processes of the brain. These contents of consciousness are immediate (they can be recalled instantly), intrinsic, and qualitatively raw. Also, these states can only be known by our conscious selves as persons of sentience. Because these states are not physical, it is reasonable also to believe that consciousness is not physical. Source: <https://thedailyapologist.com/blog/the-nature-of-consciousness-points-towards-god>

IV. Argument from Reason:

Definition: The argument from reason asserts that the existence of rationality, logic, and objective truths in the universe points towards a rational and intelligent creator, namely God.

Best Defenses:

- The laws of logic and rationality provide a coherent framework for understanding reality, suggesting an intelligent source.
- Human capacity for reasoning and understanding reflects the image of God, who is the ultimate source of all truth and wisdom.

Bible References:

- Colossians 2:2-3: "My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."
- Isaiah 1:18: "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool."

Counterarguments:

Fallibility of Reason: Atheists and secular thinkers may challenge the argument from reason by pointing out the limitations and fallibilities of human reasoning. They argue that cognitive biases, cultural influences, and subjective experiences can often lead to erroneous beliefs and conclusions, casting doubt on the reliability of human reason as a pathway to truth.

Naturalistic Epistemology: Critics contend that reason and rationality can be explained purely through naturalistic processes, without invoking God.

Circularity: Skeptics claim that using reason to argue for God's existence assumes what needs to be proven.

Questions for Discussion:**1. How does reason enhance our understanding of God's communication with us?**

LEADER NOTE: Reason helps us to see the truth and logic of God's communication with us in the Bible. Reason also helps us communicate God's message to others. For example, the Apostle Paul uses reason to share God's message with the high council in Athens (see Acts 17:16-34)

2. Can reason alone lead us to a knowledge of God, or is faith necessary?

LEADER NOTE: The Apostle Paul wrote, "We walk by faith and not by sight." 2 Corinthians 5:7. Our knowledge of God is tremendously helped by our reason. But faith is also necessary. God wants us to trust that what He has revealed to us about himself is true and reasonable. (see Hebrews 11:6)

3. How can we use reason to engage with skeptics?

LEADER NOTE: There are many practical ways we can use reason to engage with skeptics. Check out some of those ways here <https://christianeducatorsacademy.com/how-to-be-a-logical-and-rational-christian-a-guide-for-spiritual-thinkers/>

V. Argument from Beauty:

Definition: The argument from beauty proposes that the existence of beauty, harmony, and aesthetic experience in the universe suggests a transcendent source of beauty, namely God.

Best Defenses:

- Beauty points towards a higher reality beyond the physical realm, reflecting the divine creativity and order.
- Aesthetic experiences evoke a sense of wonder and transcendence, pointing towards the existence of a higher, spiritual reality.

Bible References:

- Psalm 27:4: "One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple."
- Ecclesiastes 3:11: "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end."

Counterarguments:

Subjective Experience: Critics of the argument from beauty may contend that aesthetic experiences are subjective and culturally contingent, rather than pointing towards a transcendent source of beauty.

They argue that what one person finds beautiful may not resonate with another, and therefore beauty cannot serve as reliable evidence for the existence of God.

Evolutionary Aesthetics: Evolutionary psychology would explain our appreciation for beauty as an adaptive trait rather than a reflection of divine creativity.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How does beauty inspire awe and draw us closer to God?

LEADER NOTE: God is both engineer and artist. We see God's artistic handiwork all around us in creation. Beauty inspires awe by pointing us to something beyond what is only necessary for our world to function. Think, for example, of the beauty of a flower. The flower, it could be argued, could be a flower without some of its attractive qualities. There is something artistic and wonderful about the symmetry, colour and fragrance of the flower to inspire awe in us and draws us to the Creator of the flower, to God.

2. What role does beauty play in worship and spiritual growth?

LEADER NOTE: Beauty inspires awe of our Creator which in turn inspires worship. As we worship God, we grow in our knowledge of Him.

3. Can beauty exist without a transcendent source? Why or why not?

LEADER NOTE: The Scriptures would argue that all beauty finds its source in God. Both the beauty within ourselves and the beauty we see around us comes from our beautiful God.

<https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/what-does-the-bible-say-about-beauty.html>

For more insights as to how beauty points us to God, check out

<https://reasons.org/explore/blogs/reflections/god-as-the-best-explanation-of-beauty>

PRAYER:

Spend some time today thanking God for how He has revealed himself to us through the 5 arguments we've looked at today. Ask him to grow your faith as you continue to learn the compelling reasons to believe!