**Finding our way to God: Part 1**

What can you prove? Can you prove anything if someone is unwilling to believe?

In a sense apologetics and discussing belief in God is person-relative or relationship-relative. Some are easy to convince, some take time and others simply refuse.

Alvin Plantinga observed, “you can reduce someone from knowledge to ignorance by presenting him with a valid argument containing premises he knows to be true for a conclusion which he simply refuses to accept, so that he has to deny one of the premises he knew to be true.”

The reason I mention this is that it is very important to keep the reason for why we engage in these discussions—our care for others, thus a relationship. We might want to focus on the argument rather than the person. So then, when we engage in apologetics or faith-sharing of ANY kind its important to remember the person and your relationship with them. If you don’t have one, develop one first.

Find common ground. At the basic level your common ground can be the laws of logic and the facts of experience. Start there and build your case.

So our goal initially is to provide reasonable evidence that suggests belief in God is plausible and actually makes a lot of sense.

CS Lewis once said that God is not the sort of thing one can be moderately interested in. After all, if God does NOT exist, there is no reason to be interested in him at all. On the other hand, if God DOES exist, then this is of paramount interest, and our ultimate concern ought to be how to be properly related to this being upon whom we depend moment by moment for our existence.

Some might shrug and say, “What difference does it make?” This only shows that they haven’t thought very hard about the problem. Satre and Camus, atheistic philosophers, said that the existence or lack thereof make a tremendous difference for mankind.

Tonight we’ll start finding our way to God by looking at the first two arguments for his existence. Absurdity of Life (put positively The Necessity of God for Meaning) and the Cosmological Argument

**Absurdity of Life without God – God is necessary for meaning**

* **If God does not exist, life is meaningless**. As our Ecc writer points out, death renders every action under the sun meaningless.
  + We’re talking about the threat of Non-Being
    - How many remember what it was like the first time you contemplated death as a child?
    - I was terrified and depressed. What did anything matter if I simply ceased to be?
    - What meaning can our lives possibly have if we die and pass into nothingness? We take none of our possessions, accomplishments or friends with us.
  + Relative vs. Ultimate Meaning
    - Without God we face a life without significance. If we pass out of existence when we die, what ultimate meaning can be given to the time you’ve spent studying or working or laughing or anything? Does it really matter if you’ve lived or not?
    - Some will argue that you can pass on a legacy to others. Or cause some sort of change here, but that is what is called relative meaning. So what? You cause change in a temporary world that is headed for the same end as you.
    - Scientists tell us that the universe one day will cease to be, unable to sustain life. It is ever expanding, so whatever we do is all headed for the same end.
    - So is there any ULTIMATE meaning? There cannot be for nothing lasts.
  + What is the point of doing anything? Of becoming?
  + The horror of the modern man who doesn’t believe in god is that because he ends in nothing, he is nothing.
  + “Waiting for Godot” by Samuel Beckett
    - he wrote another play that lasts 30 secs as an audience stares at a blank stage.
    - Both meant to show the absurdity of life with no purpose.
* **If God does not exist, morals are meaningless.**
  + If there is no point to life, shouldn’t we just live as we please?
  + “If there is no God or immortality then all things are permitted.” Dostoyevsky
  + Kai Nielsen, an atheist philosopher, has worked to defend the viability of ethics without God, but in the end admits:
    - We have not been able to show that reason requires the moral point of view, or that all really rational persons, unhoodwinked by myth or ideology, need not be individual egoists or classical amoralists. Reason doesn’t decide here. The picture I have painted for you is not a pleasant one. Reflection on it depresses me…pure practical reason, even with a good knowledge of the facts, will not take you to morality.
  + Without a transcendent moral God there is no objective standard for right and wrong.
    - One humanist philosopher wrote, “The moral principles that govern our behavior are rooted in habit and custom, feeling and fashion.”
    - Can that be right? Do morals simple come from what we decide is correct?
    - So who is to say what is right and wrong? Who can judge the morals behind what Hitler did? Who can say he didn’t have the right of it?
    - Can we believe that it is just majority rule? Might makes Right. Those who wield the most power or loudest voice determine our values and morals.
  + Social Justice is a major concern for our society right now. What are some of those concerns? Where do they come from?
    - There are Hindu practices that believe it is acceptable to burn widows alive on the funeral pyres of their husbands.
    - There are whole villages in Africa that rule by rape.
    - What about the slave trade? A whole economy and world system was built on it. How can these things be wrong if large amounts of people believe in it?
* Without God to provide a trans-cultural basis for moral values, we’re left with socio-cultural relativism, so that horrific practices we see in varying cultures are morally unobjectionable—which scarcely anyone can accept.
* The problem with atheism is that it becomes very difficult to live consistently with a view that all things are permissible. Sarte and Betrand Russell both struggle to elude the contradiction between denial of divinely pre-established values and their urgent desire to affirm value and morals in humanity.

The argument then goes like this:

1. True moral absolute cannot exist without God.
2. Moral absolutes do exist.
3. Therefore God exists

It is true that while this isn’t the most persuasive argument, it is really meant more to be a reason for belief in God. As we mentioned it is difficult to live life with purpose or belief that life has meaning and be consistent without belief in a transcendent being.

**Finding our way to God: Part 2**

***The Cosmological Argument: The Universe and its existence***

* Contingent Argument: An argument no can avoid. Why is there something rather than nothing?
  + Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature or in an external cause.
    - Ball in the forest must have an explanation of its being there. You would see it and thing that it exists there without explanation.
    - Things that exist necessarily (abstract ideas or thoughts) Numbers
    - External Causes
  + The Universe exists therefore it needs an explanation.
  + If the universe exists it has an explanation and that explanation is external, transcendent, personal cause.
    - Why? The explanation must be great than the universe. Think of the universe it is all space and time. Therefore the cause must be beyond, it cannot be physical or material.
    - Two things fit that description
      * Abstract though
      * An intelligent, un-embodied, transcendent consciousness
  + Explanation of the existence of the universe is an external transcendent, personal cause.
* **Put another way: Out of nothing comes nothing.**
* The universe cannot be infinite with an infinite past. Past events are real and not just ideas and so those events must be finite. Therefore the past cannot go back forever, it must have begun to exist.
* **The Un-Caused Cause**: Fancy way of saying everything MUST have a cause. Therefore the universe must have had a cause that brought it into being.
  + Scientists argue for the Big Bang Theory as an explanation for the universe. There have been remarkable discoveries in astronomy and astrophysics that provide strong evidence that the universe began about 13 billion years ago in a cataclysmic event. What makes this claim startling is that it represents the origin of the universe from literally nothing. Everything came into being at the Big Bang.
  + Physicist Davies explains “the coming into being of the universe, as discussed in modern science…is not just a mater of imposing some sort of organization… Upon a previous incoherent state, but literally the coming into being of all physical things from nothing.”
  + The fact that it has been shown that our universe is in a state of cosmic expansion suggests that at some point it started somewhere.
  + What is actually great about this is that it shows our universe began somewhere and since out of nothing comes nothing…SOMETHING must have started it.
  + There MUST have been a cause, someone lighting the fuse that caused the bang.
* Summary
  + Whatever begins to exist has a cause
  + The universe began to exist
  + Therefore, the universe has a cause.
* Therefore, this cause must be an uncaused, changeless, timeless and immaterial being which created the universe. It must be because there cannot be an infinite regress of causes. It must be timeless and outside of the natural world order of things. It must transcend space and all things physical.

***The Law of Sufficient Reason***

* This argument follows a similar logic to the one we just discussed.
* German Mathematician and philosopher, G.W. Leibniz argues for a Sufficient Reason of the universe.
* Nothing happens without sufficient reason – there must be a reason or rational explanation for the existence of one state affairs rather than another.
* Why does the universe exist?
  + This argument differs in that it looks for a reason, not an explanation.
  + The reason cannot be found in any single thing within the universe.
    - Why?
    - Because any reason found within the universe would be contingent themselves.
    - They do not NEED to exist.
    - Infinite regress is out of the question.
    - One could always ask, where did X come from?
  + Therefore, the reason for the universe must be found OUTSIDE it, in a being whose sufficient reason is self-contained.
    - It is its own sufficient reason for existing.
    - This Sufficient Reason of all things is God.
    - His existence is explained only by reference to himself.
    - That is to say, God is a metaphysically Necessary being.

The Teleological Argument: Intelligent Design

* Argument from design
* We infer an intelligent designer for any product in which we discern evidence of purposeful adaptation of means to some end.
* Greek Philosophers were impressed by the order of the cosmos and argued from its order the existence of God.
  + Plato’s Academy – made a study of the movement of the stars and it led Plato to declare that the stars “awaken men to divine destiny.”
  + Plato said 2 things lead to God.
    - Argument on the soul
    - Arguments based on the order and motion of the stars.
  + Aristotle (Metaphysics) argued for a first unmoved mover, one who set all in motion.
* Thomas Aquinas
  + All things in nature operate towards some end.
  + In nature, operation doesn’t vary and almost always turns out well. This shows that the natural order tends toward a goal and isn’t accidental.
  + Nothing that lacks consciousness tends toward a goal…unless under direction or design of someone with consciousness and intelligence.
  + The Arrow doesn’t fly to a target unless aimed.
  + Famous Watch Argument, Pg 87.