

PROOFS OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

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OUTLINE AND SUMMARY:

(A presentation in outline form; not a formal paper.)

ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Three levels or types of proof:

Proof by Instance, or by direct sensory experience:

Cannot be used to show that things do not exist. Ultimately the most limited type of proof because, on the one hand, the senses can sometimes be misleading and contradictory (ie, we can see a mirage, but cannot feel it), and on the other hand so many things (forces, electromagnetic fields, electrons and protons, quarks, love, truth, beauty, etc) cannot be perceived by the senses

Proof by Deduction

Used in mathematics and logic. Deductive proofs can be valid or invalid, depending on whether the logic is correct or not. Things proved by deduction can be true or false, depending on whether the premises are true or false. A valid deductive proof whose premises are correct is called sound.

Proof by Induction

The basis of scientific discovery. This is the least certain, but ultimately the most powerful, method of proof. Things proved by induction can be disproved if a counterexample is found, and truths discovered through an inductive process can be superseded by what a later age may see to be greater or more comprehensive truths, themselves discovered through an inductive process based on new evidence or new lines of thought. Consequently, inductive truths are 'relative'.

Note: Induction, in the greater sense of the term, has been further subdivided into induction in a strict sense – reasoning from the specific to the general – and abduction – reasoning to the most likely explanation. Scientific conclusions are derived by both induction and abduction.

Traditional proofs of the existence of God

a posteriori: “based on premises that can be known only by means of experience of the world”

Cosmological proof

Cosmology: a branch of philosophy that deals with the universe as an orderly system. Four of the five ‘classical proofs’ of St. Thomas Aquinas are cosmological proofs

Teleological proof

Teleology: the study of evidences of design in nature. One of the five proofs of St. Thomas Aquinas is a teleological proof

a priori: “resting on premises that can be known to be true independent of the experience of the world”

Ontological proof

Ontology: a branch of philosophy relating to the nature and relations of being

SOME PROOFS OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Cosmological - ‘First Cause’ (St. Thomas Aquinas)

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| 1. There exist things that are caused | (Observation) |
| 2. Nothing can be the cause of itself | (Premise) |
| 3. There cannot be an infinite regress of causes | (Premise) |
| 4. Therefore, there exists an uncaused first cause | (Conclusion) |
| 5. <i>God</i> means uncaused first cause | (Identification) |

Cosmological – the ‘*Kalam*’ Cosmological Argument (al-Kindi, al-Ghazali; Craig)

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|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Whatever begins to exist has a cause | (Premise) |
| 2. The universe began to exist | (Observation - Big Bang) |
| 3. Therefore, the universe has a cause | (Conclusion) |
| 4. This cause we call <i>God</i> | (Identification) |

Cosmological – Proof of the *nonexistence* of God (St. Thomas Aquinas)

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|---|---------------|
| 1. The name God means that He is infinite goodness | (Premise) |
| 2. If therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable | (Premise) |
| 3. There is evil in the world | (Observation) |
| 4. Therefore God does not exist | (Conclusion) |

Rebuttal (St. Thomas Aquinas): It is part of the infinite goodness of God that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good. (i.e., premise 2 above is false).

Rebuttal ('Abdu'l-Bahá): There is no evil in the world of creation. What we call 'evil' is the consequence of man exercising free will to obey the promptings of his lower nature (which is not evil in itself) rather than the promptings of his higher nature (which is illumined by the Holy Spirit through the Manifestation of God). (i.e., observation 3 above is false).

The above 'proof' by St. Aquinas, is probably the most common reason people turn away from God. One may compare St. Thomas' rebuttal – which allows for the existence of Satan – with that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Teleological – governance of the world (St. Thomas Aquinas)

1. Things which lack knowledge, such as natural bodies, act for an end
(Observation)
2. It is evident that they achieve their end not fortuitously, but designedly
(Premise)
3. Whatever lacks knowledge cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence
(Premise)
4. Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end
(Conclusion)
5. This being we call God
(Identification)

Teleological – Paley

If you were to find a watch in a forest, you would conclude the watch, clearly designed by an intelligent hand and made for a purpose, had a maker. In the same way, we conclude Nature has a Maker or Designer, called God.

Teleological – Paul Davies (from *The Mind of God*)

“Through my scientific work I have come to believe more and more strongly that the physical universe is put together with an ingenuity so astonishing that I cannot accept it merely as a brute fact. There must, it seems to me, be a deeper level of explanation. Whether one wishes to call that deeper level 'God' is a matter of taste and definition.”

Teleological – Euler:

$$e^{i\pi} = -1,$$

therefore God must exist!

Teleological – Rebuttal (Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker*)

The Darwinian Theory of Evolution shows that, contrary to what Paley might think, blind forces with no intelligence have, through the random processes of chance mutation and natural selection, produced life. The 'intelligence' evident in the design of life is only an illusion.

Rebuttal to Dawkins (Michael Behe, *Darwin's Black Box*): Forty + years of biochemical research have shown conclusively that life, at the most fundamental level, is far too complex to have been produced through a 'Darwinian' process. That is, the neo-Darwinian evolutionary scenario cannot produce systems which are 'irreducibly complex'. Life, however, is irreducibly complex; therefore it is inescapable that life was designed by an intelligence.

Ontological - reductio ad absurdum (St. Anselm)

1. God ('a being than which nothing greater can be conceived') exists in the understanding but not in reality (Premise; to be disproved)
2. Existence in reality is greater than existence in the understanding alone (Premise)
3. God's existence in reality is conceivable (Observation)
4. If God did exist in reality, then He would be greater than He is (Premise)
5. Therefore it is conceivable that there is a being greater than God (Conclusion)

This violates premise 1, so therefore

6. It is false that God exists in the understanding but not in reality; therefore God exists in reality (Conclusion)

Ontological – another version

1. God ('a being than which nothing greater can be conceived') exists in the understanding (Observation)
2. This concept must either have arisen within the human mind or have been placed in the human mind by God (Premise)
3. If it arises within the human mind then man is God, in actuality or potentiality (Premise)
4. Man is not God ('man did not create himself' – 'Abdu'l-Bahá') (Observation)
5. Therefore there exists a supreme being, God (Conclusion)

Innate knowledge: There is, it appears, a fourth level of proof, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá calls 'the indwelling spirit'. Through it we can come to know, with absolute certainty, that God exists. Indeed, we have been created with the capacity to *know God*. 'Abdu'l-Bahá cautions us not to be misled by 'the promptings of the human heart'; there is perhaps nothing else which we *can* know with absolute certainty, except that God exists and that the Manifestation of God is His Manifestation. "...when man feels the indwelling spirit, he is in no need of arguments for its existence; but for those who are deprived of the bounty of the spirit, it is necessary to establish external arguments." ('Abdu'l-Bahá, SAQ)

The Ontological proof:

As a deductive proof it is valid. There has been a protracted debate, over centuries, as to whether it is sound. Like all deductive proofs it is subject to rejection on the basis that one or more of its premises may be false. One could argue, for instance, that in reality no one conceives, or can conceive, of a being ‘than which no greater can be imagined’. However, following this logic, if one person could conceive of such a Being – such as, for instance, the Manifestation of God – then surely, such a Being would exist.

As an abductive proof, however, the ontological proof becomes very powerful and compelling.

Let us assume that God does not exist. Then this human comprehension of the existence of a ‘superior being’ is an illusion, an illusion which has played a dominant role in virtually every human society in every age in history. It remains for the skeptic to explain the source of this persistent and pervasive illusion, in terms of the laws of physics and biology. The ontological proof makes this possibility (that God does not exist) very implausible.

Let us, however, assume that there *is* a Supreme Being, Creator and Sustainer. By His nature, He could not be observed by the senses, nor could He be embraced by human understanding. It is logical, though, that within at least one of the elements of His creation, He would have placed the potential for the certain knowledge of His existence. Hence, the persistence and pervasiveness of belief in God, on an historical social level and on a personal level for millions of people throughout history, is explained. Humans believe in God because He has deposited in the human reality the capacity for belief, just as humanity has created sciences and social systems of evolving complexity because the human reality has the capacity to create such evolving systems. Thus, the most plausible explanation for our ages-long apprehension of the existence of a Creator, is that there is a Creator.

We are scientific beings. ‘*Science is the first emanation from God toward man*’. That is, the process by which we come to know and understand, and to function on a level beyond that of the mineral, vegetable or animal creations, is a generalization of that process which we have come to call ‘the scientific method’. The scientific process is one which leads to continual discovery and growth, not to certain knowledge. Put another way, the Creator, and His Manifestation, Know. We do not; we engage in a continual process of developing towards knowledge. Aside from the knowledge of our own existence, we can never know anything with absolute certainty – except for one thing. The Creator has deposited in us the capacity to know, with absolute certainty, of His existence. We can never know if, for instance, forces, fields and quarks really do exist. We can never know just what the Gospels mean when they say that ‘Christ died for our sins’, or what Bahá’u’lláh meant when He said, ‘The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that all mankind may be freed from its bondage’, although we can gain meaning and derive illumination from these scriptural passages. And we can never know whether another man’s belief is false. However, we can know, with certainty, that God exists.

These obvious arguments are adduced for weak souls; but if the inner perception be open, a hundred thousand clear proofs become visible. Thus, when man feels the

indwelling spirit, he is in no need of arguments for its existence; but for those who are deprived of the bounty of the spirit, it is necessary to establish external arguments.

(Abdu'l-Baha: Some Answered Questions, Page 6)

If we look at the ontological proof in this light, as a 'scientific' or abductive proof, its validity becomes evident and it becomes very powerful indeed.

For an introduction to this subject, one may read:

Pojman, Louis. Part I, Philosophy of Religion, 3rd Edition (1998). Wadsworth Publishing Company.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Nature is Governed by One Universal Law", and "Proofs and Evidences of the Existence of God", in Some Answered Questions, pp 3-6.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, "Tablet to Dr. Auguste Henri Forel", The Bahá'í World Vol. XV , 1968- 1970, pp 37-43.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD FROM 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

NATURE IS GOVERNED BY ONE UNIVERSAL LAW

Nature is that condition, that reality, which in appearance consists in life and death, or, in other words, in the composition and decomposition of all things.

This Nature is subjected to an absolute organization, to determined laws, to a complete order and a finished design, from which it will never depart - to such a degree, indeed, that if you look carefully and with keen sight, from the smallest invisible atom up to such large bodies of the world of existence as the globe of the sun or the other great stars and luminous spheres, whether you regard their arrangement, their composition, their form or their movement, you will find that all are in the highest degree of organization and are under one law from which they will never depart.

But when you look at Nature itself, you see that it has no intelligence, no will. For instance, the nature of fire is to burn; it burns without will or intelligence. The nature of water is fluidity; it flows without will or intelligence. The nature of the sun is radiance; it shines without will or intelligence. The nature of vapor is to ascend; it ascends without will or intelligence. Thus it is clear that the natural movements of all things are compelled; there are no voluntary movements except those of animals and, above all, those of man. Man is able to resist and to oppose Nature because he discovers the constitution of things, and through this he commands the forces of Nature; all the inventions he has made are due to his discovery of the constitution of things. For example, he invented the telegraph, which is the means of communication between the East and the West. It is evident, then, that man rules over Nature.

Now, when you behold in existence such organizations, arrangements and laws, can you say that all these are the effect of Nature, though Nature has neither intelligence nor perception? If not, it becomes evident that this Nature, which has neither perception nor intelligence, is in the grasp of Almighty God, Who is the Ruler of the world of Nature; whatever He wishes, He causes Nature to manifest.

One of the things which has appeared in the world of existence, and which is one of the requirements of Nature, is human life. Considered from this point of view man is the branch; nature is the root. Then can the will and the intelligence, and the perfections which exist in the branch, be absent in the root?

It is said that Nature in its own essence is in the grasp of the power of God, Who is the Eternal Almighty One: He holds Nature within accurate regulations and laws, and rules over it.(1)

PROOFS AND EVIDENCES OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

One of the proofs and demonstrations of the existence of God is the fact that man did not create himself: nay, his creator and designer is another than himself.

It is certain and indisputable that the creator of man is not like man because a powerless creature cannot create another being. The maker, the creator, has to possess all perfections in order that he may create.

Can the creation be perfect and the creator imperfect? Can a picture be a masterpiece and the painter imperfect in his art? For it is his art and his creation. Moreover, the picture cannot be like the painter; otherwise, the painting would have created itself. However perfect the picture may be, in comparison with the painter it is in the utmost degree of imperfection.

The contingent world is the source of imperfections: God is the origin of perfections. The imperfections of the contingent world are in themselves a proof of the perfections of God.

For example, when you look at man, you see that he is weak. This very weakness of the creature is a proof of the power of the Eternal Almighty One, because, if there were no power, weakness could not be imagined. Then the weakness of the creature is a proof of the power of God; for if there were no power, there could be no weakness; so from this weakness it becomes evident that there is power in the world. Again, in the contingent world there is poverty; then necessarily wealth exists, since poverty is apparent in the world. In the contingent world there is ignorance; necessarily knowledge exists, because ignorance is found; for if there were no knowledge, neither would there be ignorance. Ignorance is the nonexistence of knowledge, and if there were no existence, nonexistence could not be realized.

It is certain that the whole contingent world is subjected to a law and rule which it can never disobey; even man is forced to submit to death, to sleep and to other conditions - that is to say, man in certain particulars is governed, and necessarily this state of being governed implies the existence of a governor. Because a characteristic of contingent beings is dependency, and this dependency is an essential necessity, therefore, there must be an independent being whose independence is essential.

In the same way it is understood from the man who is sick that there must be one who is in health; for if there were no health, his sickness could not be proved.

Therefore, it becomes evident that there is an Eternal Almighty One, Who is the possessor of all perfections, because unless He possessed all perfections He would be like His creation.

Throughout the world of existence it is the same; the smallest created thing proves that there is a creator. For instance, this piece of bread proves that it has a maker.

Praise be to God! the least change produced in the form of the smallest thing proves the existence of a creator: then can this great universe, which is endless, be self-created and come into existence from the action of matter and the elements? How self-evidently wrong is such a supposition!

These obvious arguments are adduced for weak souls; but if the inner perception be open, a hundred thousand clear proofs become visible. Thus, when man feels the indwelling spirit, he is in no need of arguments for its existence; but for those who are deprived of the bounty of the spirit, it is necessary to establish external arguments.

(Abdu'l-Bahá: Some Answered Questions, Pages: 3-6)

What is the reality of Divinity, or what do we understand by God? When we consider the world of existence, we find that the essential reality underlying any given phenomenon is unknown. Phenomenal, or created, things are known to us only by their attributes. Man discerns only manifestations, or attributes, of objects, while the identity, or reality, of them remains hidden. For example, we call this object a flower. What do we understand by this name and title? We understand that the qualities appertaining to this organism are perceptible to us, but the intrinsic elemental reality, or identity, of it remains unknown. Its external appearance and manifest attributes are knowable; but the inner being, the underlying reality or intrinsic identity, is still beyond the ken and perception of our human powers. Inasmuch as the realities of material phenomena are impenetrable and unknowable and are only apprehended through their properties or qualities, how much more this is true concerning the reality of Divinity, that holy essential reality which transcends the plane and grasp of mind and man? That which comes within human grasp is finite, and in relation to it we are infinite because we can grasp it. Assuredly, the finite is lesser than the infinite; the infinite is ever greater. If the reality of Divinity could be contained within the grasp of human mind, it would after all be possessed of an intellectual existence only - a mere intellectual concept without extraneous existence, an image or likeness which had come within the comprehension of finite intellect. The mind

of man would be transcendental thereto. How could it be possible that an image which has only intellectual existence is the reality of Divinity, which is infinite? Therefore, the reality of Divinity in its identity is beyond the range of human intellection because the human mind, the human intellect, the human thought are limited, whereas the reality of Divinity is unlimited. How can the limited grasp the unlimited and transcend it? Impossible. The unlimited always comprehends the limited. The limited can never comprehend, surround nor take in the unlimited. Therefore, every concept of Divinity which has come within the intellection of a human being is finite, or limited, and is a pure product of imagination, whereas the reality of Divinity is holy and sacred above and beyond all such concepts.

But the question may be asked: How shall we know God? We know Him by His attributes. We know Him by His signs. We know Him by His names. We know not what the reality of the sun is, but we know the sun by the ray, by the heat, by its efficacy and penetration. We recognize the sun by its bounty and effulgence, but as to what constitutes the reality of the solar energy, that is unknowable to us. The attributes characterizing the sun, however, are knowable. If we wish to come in touch with the reality of Divinity, we do so by recognizing its phenomena, its attributes and traces, which are widespread in the universe. All things in the world of phenomena are expressive of that one reality. Its lights are shining, its heat is manifest, its power is expressive, and its education, or training, resplendent everywhere. What proof could there be greater than that of its functioning or its attributes which are manifest? This plant or this flower - we ask: Does it exist or not? Can this plant - this flower - comprehend the reality of man? Can it put itself in touch with the human existence or reality? Evidently not. It is entirely out of tune with the human kingdom; it is not possessed of the capacity, although both man and the flower have been created. But the difference in the degrees between the vegetable and the human is ever a hindrance, an obstacle. Inasmuch as the degree of capacity appertaining to this plant is inferior to our human kingdom, it is entirely impossible for the plant, which is inferior, to comprehend man, who is superior, although both are accidental, or created. We are created; likewise, this plant is existent, this mineral exists, this wood exists. But can this flooring here comprehend those who are standing upon it? It cannot, because sight and hearing are properties or faculties belonging to a higher kingdom than the mineral. The difference between these two kingdoms, the vast difference between the mineral kingdom and the human kingdom, is a hindrance to comprehension.

How, then, can the reality of man, which is accidental, ever comprehend the Reality of God, which is eternal? It is self-evidently an impossibility. Hence we can observe the traces and attributes of God, which are resplendent in all phenomena and shining as the sun at midday, and know surely that these emanate from an infinite source. We know that they come from a source which is infinite indeed.

Furthermore, it is a philosophical principle that the existence of phenomena implies composition and that mortality, or nonexistence, is equivalent to decomposition. For example, certain elements have come together, and as a result of that composition man is here. Certain elements have entered into the structure of this flower. Certain organic or

cellular elements have been utilized in the composition of every animal organism. Therefore, we can state that existence necessitates composition, and death is another expression for decomposition. When there is disintegration amongst these composing elements, that is death; that is mortality. The elements which have gone into the body of this flower and which have given existence to this form and shape will finally disintegrate; this beautiful organism will decompose; and this we call mortality, death. Consequently, the conclusion is that life means composition, and death is equivalent to decomposition. On this account the materialists are of the opinion that life is the mere conjoining of elemental substances into myriad forms and shapes. The materialist comes to the conclusion that life, in other words, means composition; that wherever we find single elements combined in aggregate form, there we behold the phenomena of organic life; that every organic composition is organic life. Now if life means composition of elements, then the materialist may come to the conclusion of the non-necessity of a composer, the non-necessity of a creator; for composition is all there is to it, and that is accomplished by adhesion or cohesion. In response to this we say that composition must needs be of three kinds: One form of composition is termed philosophically the accidental, another the involuntary, and a third the voluntary. As to the first, or accidental, composition: This would signify that certain elements through inherent qualities and powers of attraction or affinity have been gathered together, have blended, and so composed a certain form, being or organism. This can be proven to be false; for composition is an effect, and philosophically no effect is conceivable without causation. No effect can be conceived of without some primal cause. For example, this heat is an effect; but that energy which gives forth this phenomenon of heat is the cause. This light is an effect, but back of it is the energy which is the cause. Is it possible for this light to be separated from the energy whereof it is a property? That is impossible and inconceivable. It is self-evidently false. Accidental composition is, therefore, a false theory and may be excluded.

As to the second form of composition - involuntary: This means that each element has within itself as an inherent property the power of composition. For example, the inherent quality of fire is burning, or heat; heat is a property of fire. Humidity is the inherent nature or property of water. You cannot conceive H₂O, which is the chemical form of water, without having humidity associated; for that is an inherent quality of water. The power of attraction has as its function attractive, or magnetic, qualities. We cannot separate attraction from that power. The power of repulsion has as its function repelling - sending off. You cannot separate the effect from the cause. If these premises be true - and they are self-evident - then it would be impossible for a composite being, for the elements which have gone into the makeup of a composite organism, ever to be decomposed because the inherent nature of each element would be to hold fast together. As fire cannot be separated from heat, likewise the elemental being could not be subjected to decomposition, and this does not hold true because we see decomposition everywhere. Hence this theory is untrue, inasmuch as we observe that after each composition there is a process of decomposition which forever ends it. By this we learn that composition as regards phenomena is neither accidental nor involuntary.

Then what have we left as a form of composition? It is the voluntary form of composition, which means that composition is effected through a superior will, that there is will expressed in this motive or action. It is thus proved that the existence of phenomena is effected through the eternal Will, the Will of the Living, Eternal and Self-subsistent, and this is a rational proof concerning composition whereof there is no doubt or uncertainty. Furthermore, it is quite evident that our kind of life, our form of existence, is limited and that the reality of all accidental phenomena is, likewise, limited. The very fact that the reality of phenomena is limited well indicates that there must needs be an unlimited reality, for were there no unlimited, or infinite, reality in life, the finite being of objects would be inconceivable. To make it plainer for you, if there were no wealth in the world, you would not have poverty. If there were no light in the world, you could not conceive of darkness, for we know things philosophically by their antitheses. We know, for example, that poverty is the lack of wealth. Where there is no knowledge, there is no ignorance. What is ignorance? It is the absence of knowledge. Therefore, our limited existence is a conclusive proof that there is an unlimited reality, and this is a shining proof and evident argument. Many are the proofs concerning this matter, but there is not time to go into the subject further. ('Abdu'l-Bahá: Promulgation of Universal Peace*, Pages: 421-425)