

THEISM

I. INTRODUCTION: NEED TO KNOW GOD

This is the end for which we are made. This is the summation of the meaning of life. This is what everything else is pointing to: that we be a people who know God.

Jer 9:23 Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; Jer 9:24 but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord.

Boasting is the NASB translation of it; some of you may have a different word, it is the word "halal" meaning "to be boastful," or, "to praise." What would it mean to not let the wise man boast or glory in his wisdom, the rich man boast, or glory in his riches? Find your purpose in this. Don't look at riches as my purpose in living or that which gives me meaning and significance in life. Don't look to riches for that which fills me and satisfies me. Don't look to wisdom for that; don't look to power for that.

Can you see how contemporary these three items are that the prophet Jeremiah picked out thousands of years ago? Here we are in 2017; let not a wise man, rich man, powerful man (wisdom, riches, power) boast. It is human. Whether you are ancient human or contemporary human. So instead of finding in those things what matters most to you in life, find in this what matters most to your life, namely that you know God. Boast in this: that you understand and know me. Think about it; this is the number one, the top, the supreme purpose for your life and mine. This is what we ought to find our greatest significance in, that we know the Lord. So with everything else in our lives we have to ask the question. What role does this play in what matters most? You have to think this way. How will this fit; how does this accord with what matters most, namely knowing the Lord.

He says, "**Boast in this, that you understand and know me.**" "Understand" and "know" are two different Hebrew words. "Understand" emphasizes more factual knowledge; you get understanding of me factually correct. "Know" ("yada") is intimate relational knowledge. He uses both of those terms and in that order; this is especially interesting because obviously we can't have intimate relational knowledge with someone of whom we either have no knowledge or incorrect knowledge.

Jeremiah 31:31 is another indicator of the fact that knowing God is the sum and substance of life. He says to Israel,

Jer 31:31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, Jer 31:32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. Jer 31:33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the Lord, "I will put my law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Jer 31:34 They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the Lord, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

If you ask God, "Summarize for us, what does it look like when you are done with your restoration project you call salvation; what does the goal line look like? How do we know when you have finished?" Answer: My people will know the LORD. Doesn't it make sense that if that is God's end goal for us, then that needs to be our end goal?

In Philippians 3 Paul talks about his own experiences in life before he was saved.

Php 3:5-9 ... as to the Law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

When compared with the surpassing value of knowing him, everything else pales; everything else is paltry in comparison to this one thing.

II. THEISM: WHETHER THERE IS A GOD

A. COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

This argument has been far more widely used, and, in my judgment, has legitimacy to a point at least, though not as a proof. (Sometimes these are called proofs. It depends on what you mean by that. If you mean that you can prove God exists in the way you can prove mathematical equation's answers to be correct, then no it is not like that. If, by proof, you mean that it provides strong evidence, strong support for believing God exists then, yes, I believe that they do.)

In this other approach, the one person it is most often associated with is Thomas Aquinas who lived from 1224 to 1274. Aquinas proposed that we can work from sense experience in this world and go from that to prove that God exists. His type of argumentation is "a posteriori". Here again, you can remember this by thinking of "post," "a posteriori" is post sense experience, post observation, post gathering of evidence. He argued that based on evidence we gather, we can show that God exists. He developed his "five ways" which appeared in his "Summa Theologica" in maybe four pages; it is not all that long. It is a very brief little part of the "Summa", and yet again huge amounts have been written on it. Aquinas didn't think this up originally; it goes back to the early church. Augustine has embedded in his "City of God" and some of the other writings provided an argument for God's existence based on an appeal to nature. This wasn't something that Aquinas invented, but it is something that he really brought to bear in theology.

Of his "five ways," they can be really reduced. Three of them are versions of the same thing, so three of Aquinas' "five ways" can be reduced to one basic way. It is called the cosmological argument.

'COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT'

Cosmological comes from "cosmos" meaning universe. Basically, this argument works very much in the same way, evoking the same methodology that the other two will use as well. What is that methodology? It appeals to some

feature of the universe, something that is observable, and given that, the best way to account for it is that God made it. God exists to account for this. What is the feature of the universe that the cosmological argument points to? There is a world. The advantage of the cosmological argument is that it appeals to an indisputable fact. Who is going to deny that there is a world, that there is a cosmos? To put in the most basic way possible, that something exists rather than nothing. Who is going to dispute that? The minute someone objects to it, you say, and who are you that is objecting to this? Do I sense existence here? Something exists rather than nothing. The Cosmos exists; how do we account for this?

Aquinas argued that it makes no sense at all to say that we can account for the present universe merely by appeal to a series of previously existing universes in a kind of succession. For example, here we are now; here is the universe at this moment; take a snapshot of it, freeze it, there we have it. How do we account for this? Because the universe the moment before brought it into being; that is how it happened. How did the universe the moment before come into being? The universe a moment before it brought it into being. The problem with this is that it ends up an infinite regress reasoning. Catch the point. His point is not the problem; he doesn't complain in the way that another form of this argument does, that an infinite regress is logically impossible. That is not what Aquinas said. Aquinas said that if you have an infinite regress then you never have an answer to the question, why is there a universe rather than none? All you do, if go on in this form, is explain the universe at this moment by appealing to the one before. But you never answer the question of why there is a universe at all. Why is there something rather than nothing. The whole series must be grounded, otherwise all you are left with is the universe just is; you can't explain why there is a universe. All I can tell you is why this one is here, or this one is here, or this one is here. I can't tell you why there is a universe; it must be a brut fact.

Aquinas says that if we are going to explain why there is a universe at all, then there must be a divine creator, even if the universe has internal recurrence or existence. Even if that is true, it still doesn't explain why there is one. God has to ground it. There must be something that is uncaused to explain what is caused. Something that is necessary to explain what is contingent in Aquinas' way of thinking.

'THE KALAM ARGUMENT'

There is another version of this from William Lane Craig, who teaches at Talbot Seminary (which is connected with Biola University). He had been with Campus Crusade for years and has been involved in campus debates all over the country. He has written a number of things on the Cosmological Argument, and he advocated what is called the Kalam version of the Cosmological Argument, which evidently comes from some Muslim sources in terms of defending their view, also, that there is one God who created the heavens and earth.

According to the Kalam Argument, an infinite regress is logically impossible. It is logically impossible to have an infinite number of cause and effect relationships. It is impossible to transverse, or pass through, an infinite number of points. Think of time that has passed in the history of the universe as a series of points and here we are right here at this point, this present moment. In order to get here we had to pass through that point, and to get to that one we had to pass through that one, so we go back all of these seconds, as it were. Ask yourself the question, how did we get here if to get here we had to pass through if we had to pass through an infinite number of moments to get to this moment. How could we do this? How could we pass through infinite number of moments? How about if I said to you I will give you a million dollars the moment you finish counting to the highest possible integer? As soon as you are done, a million dollars. You can't do it. You could never finish, there is no highest possible number; you can't have accomplished that so how can you ever have gotten to this point?

That is the Kalam Argument. It is one of the reasons theologians who argue for the temporality of God are misguided. If God is a temporal being, he exists this moment having passed through an infinite number of previous

moments, and that is impossible. The Kalam argument argues against a sort of eternal temporality for God just as it argues against the eternal temporality of the world. This argument says there has to be not only a God needed to ground that there is a universe (that is Aquinas), but also God is needed to start the universe. There must be a first moment of the universe, so God is needed to be the creator, the one who brings that into being.

The development over the 20th century in physics seems to confirm this sort of notion that, in fact, there is a first moment for the universe. This was a conclusion that scientists tried to avoid. They tried to say the universe can be accounted for in one of two ways. The first is a steady state theory of the universe. It is just kind of always the same, all the way through. What blew that apart was the observation that the universe was expanding. When they saw, this they realized that it isn't a steady state. It sure looks as though it all had a definite beginning. It is more like we are here, and who knows where everything is going to go from here? At least we know it is here, and it had a definite beginning. So if the universe is expanding, we can't say that it is a steady state.

The other proposal was an oscillating universe. Here is the big bang and then a big crunch; this happened in the past, and then we had another big bang, and big crunch, and now here is our universe. Here we are, and presumably we are going to have another big crunch, and it just going to keep going. So, yes, there was a beginning to this particular expression of the universe, but the universe has always existed. To my understanding this theory is completely debunked now for a number of reasons. One of which I have read several places is that the mass of the universe is far too insufficient to provide the gravitational pull necessary for the big crunch, or the so-called big crunch. Like a black hole sucks everything back together, well the universe does not have anywhere close to enough mass to do this. So rather than a big crunch, it going to be a big fizzle, according to physicists, as I read it. Here we are now and we are just going to keep expanding until everything burns up and it is over. The point is, the two leading hopeful theories of explaining the universe, the steady state and this oscillating model, have both been debunked.

Right now we have a model of the universe that says it had a definite beginning. That is an enormously amazing conclusion. Hugh Ross has written a lot on these things. He is a physicist who became a believer in his discipline after he was an adult. He has written quite a few things that help show the biblical understanding of what is happening in physics.

In summary, when you look at Aquinas' argument, namely there has got to be a God to found the fact that there is a universe, that there is something rather than nothing, and the Kalam argument that says you got to have God to begin the universe because you can't transverse an infinite number of moments. It seems that these two arguments are confirmed by what appears to be a contemporary scientific understanding of the universe.

One more comment on this. Let's learn from the fact that scientific theories change, maybe not as fast as we change our underwear, but just wait for another 30 years. Don't ever pin the truthfulness of the Bible on a leading scientific theory. It's a huge mistake. Let science do its things, and we will stay with Scripture regardless of what they do. At this time it appears that this is the case: contemporary physics is actually affirming something that is in accord with something that we hold as Christian people. There is a definite beginning to the universe; God spoke and there it is.

B. TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

"Teleos" in Greek means, "end, goal," so the teleological argument is an argument for the existence of God from the fact that things work toward an end or a goal. Think about simple things like planting seeds; you put a corn seed in the ground, and how does it know what to do? Look at the seed; does it have inherent intelligence? Is it

able to chart out its own destiny to be self-actualized? It doesn't have a mind. It can't will anything. It can't do anything, except it has something built into it that when the right conditions are there it grows and produces a corn stock with more corn seeds to grow more corn stocks. How does it know how to do that? Obviously, it can't know that from itself because it doesn't have a mind; it doesn't have any capacity for having that in itself, so it must be from outside. That is the point.

The person who made this argument famous is William Paley who used the analogy of a watch and a watchmaker to make his point. He says if you are walking along and you pick up a stone, you might not think much about it in terms of where it came from or why it looks the way it does or whatever. But you are walking along, and your foot kicks up a watch and you look at it (think of a Swiss watch, the old fashion kind with cogs and wheels and springs). You take the back off it and you look at how intricately placed these little wheels and cogs and springs are. Everything is in the right tension and all of that for the purpose of keeping correct time, and it works. You realize that this watch cannot have done this by itself. You can't account for it by appeal to the watch you have to appeal to a watchmaker. That is the only thing that makes sense. The *Teleological Argument* looks at evidence of design, at the fact that things work toward an end, toward a goal and yet those things in themselves cannot be accounting of it. You cannot appeal to those things in themselves to account for why they work toward an end, why they work toward this goal, but they do.

As you probably know, this argument, more than either of the other two, has come into something of a renaissance today. There is a huge movement afoot out there and I am sure you know about it. It is called the Intelligent Design Movement, with people like Steven Myer at The Discovery Institute, and William Dembski down a Baylor. Phillip E. Johnson is kind of the leading guru behind this. He was at a very tough point in his life, going through a divorce from his wife, and he took one of his children to a children's Bible club during the summer. He went to pick her up and sat in the back of the church (here is Phillip Johnson who is the head of the Law Department at the University of California at Berkley, has degrees from Harvard and the University of Chicago), and he hears this pastor give a Gospel presentation and is riveted as he hears it. He goes home; his life is a wreck; he is looking for hope, looking for answers and starts reading his Bible, and about two weeks later he became a Christian. As a Christian he started reading a whole lot of things, and now he has a whole different worldview. On a sabbatical one year (this goes back about 30 years ago) he was reading some evolutionist literature, and he said, as I was reading it I was constantly laughing because I thought, this great material for my legal students to show them faulty argumentation. There are so many examples here of logical fallacies. All of a sudden he realized, this really isn't very humorous because they mean it, they are really trying to convince people of this. So he started reading more intently and noticed all of these faulty arguments that were being given by evolutionists to support their case and realized it is systemic; it's the whole field; they are all deceiving people. It must be a conspiracy, or else they just can't think or something. That led him ultimately to write the first book that he became famous for, "Darwin on Trial", which is a very fine first book to read if you are interested in problems with Darwinian Evolution. That began this movement of a bunch of young bright, gifted energetic conservative Christian (for the most part) scholars who are working in this Intelligent Design Movement. An enormous amount of profitable work is being done to give evidence to show that there is a hand-print of design stamped on the universe.

J. P. Moreland has written this book called "The Creation Hypothesis". Bill Dembski has a book called "Intelligent Design", and he had written another called, "Mere Creation".

Teleological is an argument for the existence of God from the fact that things work toward an end or for a purpose or toward a goal. There is evident design in what they do. There are two kinds of spheres of design that the Teleological Argument focuses on. One of them is **temporal succession**, like the seasons of the year. Why is it that we have a planet that works the way it does? We have fall, when things kind of go into dormancy through winter

and then spring, new life, summer growth, productivity, and harvest in fall again. Why is it that we have this temporal succession? How did that happen? That has to be answered somehow. Is it just chance; it is just that the universe happened to develop that way? The other one is the **spatial arrangement**. Paley's rational works better for the spatial rather than the temporal, with cogs that line up just the right way. An appeal to the human body is really a structural form rather than temporal of the Teleological Argument. Look at the design of the way the different organs in the body work together. Look at a cell, it is incredibly complex. That's just a cell. How do you have these things working together this way? So whether it is temporal succession, whether it is location, things are working toward an end for beneficial results. How is this? How do we account for this? What is the best explanation?

C. MORAL ARGUMENT

Remember, what all three of these have in common is that they point to some feature of the universe, and because of that we argue that God must exist. This one is an argument for the existence of God from the fact of **moral sensibility**. We human beings *have moral consciences, and we act in morally significant ways*, and we judge right and wrong on moral grounds. It asks the question, *how did we come up with this that we think in these terms of moral right and wrong*. I'm not referring to the pragmatic; of course we think in pragmatic right and wrong; which is the best way to get somewhere. But we also think in moral right and wrong; am I not going this way because I am avoiding seeing somebody? Am I going this way because I want to pass those shops that allure me? We make moral decisions all the time about things, so where does this come from. **One of the champions of this line of argumentation is C. S. Lewis in his little book "Mere Christianity" and even more so in "The Abolition of Man"**. In "Mere Christianity", the beginning of it starts out with this theme on a bus, where two people are arguing about who should have the seat, who got there first. Lewis talks about this argument that is going on and says, the one thing that is interesting about this is that both agree that whoever got there first deserves to have the seat. Where did this come from? How is it that we have this sense of right and wrong, and if we can just settle the question of who got there first, they both know that person deserved to have the seat? He goes on from there and starts this discussion of failed ways to account for it. **Behaviorism** says this happened just because they were trained this way; their parents trained them to think this way; that is all it is, just a matter of behavior modification. That is what moral sensibility is. Lewis talked about that and showed how deficient that is because the fact of the matter is that we constantly evaluate our training and what we grew up with as to whether it is right or wrong. So how does this happen? Where does that come from then? On what basis do we say, even though I was trained this way, this is what we should do instead?

Then he talks about another explanation, this sort of **genetic** model; it is really survival of the fittest; that's all it is. So we have a group of human beings that evolved, and they just grew up with notion that to survive you've got to have certain rules if you are going to make it. How does that account for the guy who dives on a grenade? Survival of the fittest? Yet here is this guy said it is my duty to save these sixteen comrades of mine, my life for theirs.

Then he uses this analogy in "Mere Christianity" of how there is this composition that accounts for why we play the notes we do on a piano. Think of a piano; there is no right or wrong note; it is not that playing a "C" is right but playing a "C" sharp is an evil note. No, there are no right or wrong notes, but according to the composition notes are right and wrong. The composition is what informs us whether to play the "C" or the "C" sharp, what note to play at a particular time. Where does this come from? This is where he goes into his argument of the universality of this, the kind of "Tao" he calls it in the "Abolition of Man". We all have this sense of right and wrong; it is wrong to murder, wrong to commit adultery. That we realize this must be from a common moral law giver. The only way to account for it is that there is a common moral law that is, in fact, pervasive in humanity; it is not genetic or behavioral; it is, by virtue of creation, the Creator inventing it.

The value in all three of them, especially all three of them together, gives good reason for thinking the best explanation for the fact that we have a world and there is design and this moral sense we have is a God. Do they prove it? No, I don't think these arguments can prove to anybody. What they can do is be used by the Spirit to overcome obstacles that people might have, to say that there really is good reason for belief in God. It isn't unreasonable to do so. I think that is a good first step; it certainly doesn't make a Christian necessarily, but it is a good first step in helping people to see the reasonableness of the Christian faith and looking to more beyond that.