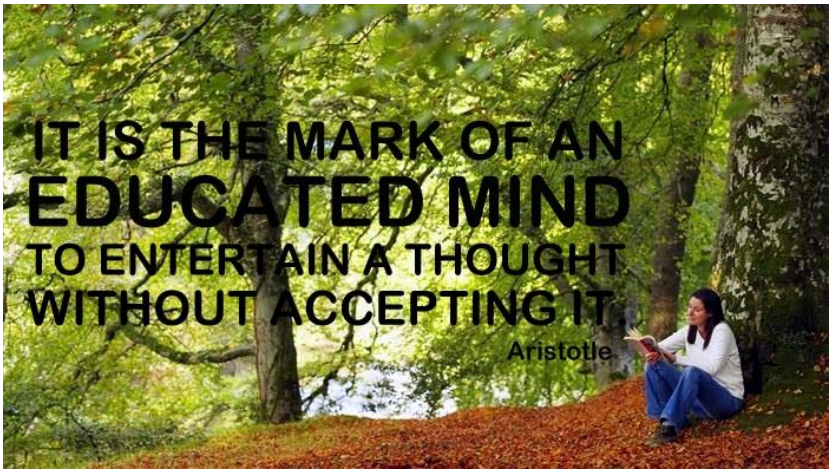
PART TWO

THE NATURE OF REALITY & KNOWLEDGE

PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

TRUTH SPRINGS FROM
ARGUMENT AMONGST FRIENDS.

(DAVID HUME)



Philosophy, like mathematics, engineering, sociology, literary criticism, physics, or anthropology, is a discipline. We've discussed the methodology of doing philosophy, the guiding principles of doing it well, and the five rules of discourse in Part One. We've also begun to understand something of the four general areas of philosophical inquiry, by getting familiar with logic.*

Epistemology

Epistemologists (say *that* five times fast!) study *knowledge* and *belief*.

Here's an interesting question to get the gist: it seems plausible that, given enough background, you could usefully explain what precisely happens when you are *digesting*. Say, certain fluids and acids are excreted, breaking down proteins and carbs into molecules that can be absorbed and so on. We could, given enough background, usefully explain what happens when we are *seeing* or *walking* or *sleeping*. But epistemologists ask—what are we doing when we're *knowing* something? Not even just when we're actively thinking about something, but when we are *knowing* something even that we've perhaps temporally lost full access to (like maybe something like your first phone number).

Epistemologists ask us what knowledge *is*, how we can know, and how belief adequately hooks up to reality such that we can be certain a belief we have is *true*, how it can be knowledge and not just a lucky guess (like we saw in the Gettier problem discussed in the endnote to chapter 6). Other things they consider include how language hooks up with reality so that we can communicate knowledge and beliefs to each other, and how minds (not brains) work.

They look at the *way* we can justify knowledge claims by analyzing the criteria for knowing. For example, *how do we know that the scientific method is the best way to get at certain kinds of knowledge?* And *where is it inappropriate/appropriate to use scientific method*? What other knowledge-gaining or knowledge-measuring approaches are there? How reliable might they be? How can we know when we know?

Epistemology breaks down into smaller sub-disciplines: *philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, cognitive science,* among others. (Some disciplines straddle both metaphysics and epistemology.)

Value Theory

There are a lot of different kinds of value. Value theorists try to determine what are the standards of evaluation. In discussing value theory, it might be the clearest way for us to see how these areas all eventually overlap in philosophy. How? Well, consider this list of value kinds: truth, beauty, goodness, meaning. If something *means* something, then it has a *meaning* value. Thus, ***philosophy of***

METAPHYSICS

Like physics tries to understand the nature of the *physical* universe, metaphysics attempts to understand the nature of *all* reality—physical and nonphysical alike.

Not all reality is physical, of course. For example, God isn't physical, if God exists. And things like freedom, justice, and existence itself aren't physical either. Nor are things like thirty-seven or possibility.

Metaphysicians attempt to understand *these* things, along with physical things. In fact, Einstein was a metaphysician, and much of the discipline of theoretical physics is done by metaphysicians.

Other questions that direct the work of metaphysics include: What is causation? How did the Universe come into being?

Can we prove/disprove the existence of God? How do minds and bodies relate to each other? Do we have a free will? What *is* a will?

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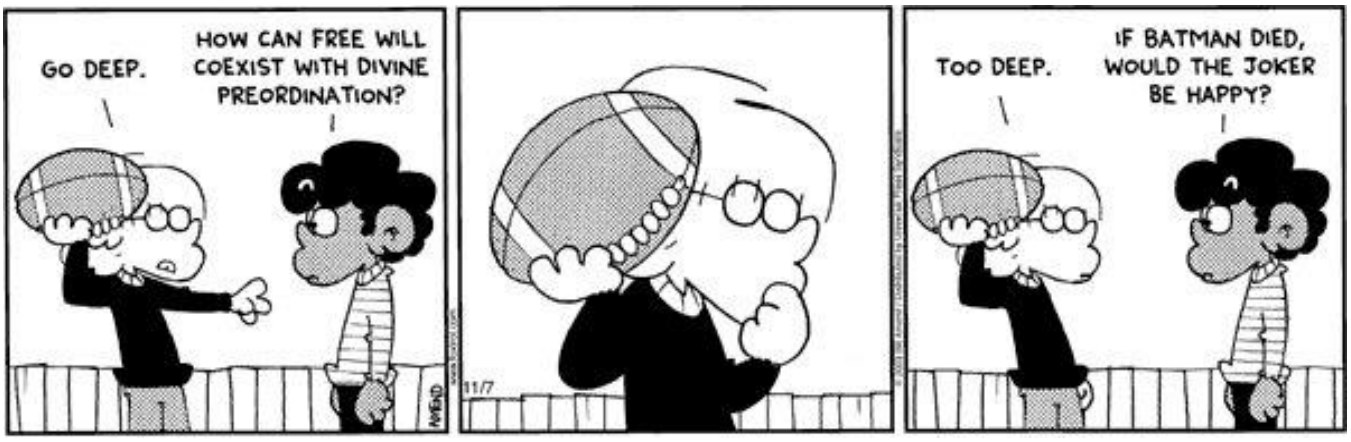
* It's very important to realize that these are *very rough* generalizations. Each of these areas are vast, and they have overlapping and oft-disputed boundaries.



LOGIC

The first area of philosophical investigation we discussed in part one: is logic and critical reasoning. This is what I call the philosopher's toolbox. Logicians study the rules of discourse, the reasons behind claims that are made, the assumptions and beliefs that are unstated but required to accept the truth of something. There are patterns of justification (kind of like the theorems of mathematics or science) that guarantee or probabilify the truth of certain claims, and logicians study these patterns and the abuses to them (called fallacies). And if you have been working along with me through this text, you already are quite adept at this.

language (a kind of epistemology) dips into value theory. And if something is true or false (both a question of metaphysics and of logic, which we'll hit in a second) is a matter of value, too.

Theory of Truth

In the first part of this text, we scratched the surface of ***logic*** and its relation to *truth value*. But logic goes far deeper than merely using truth value. It explores the very nature of truth itself, in the same way other areas of Value Theory study the nature of their respective values. In the Gospel of John, Pilate is famously reported to have asked Jesus "What is truth?"* The gospel writer, of course, intended the question to be seen either as inappropriate or as a moment for the Christ to be revealed, but philosophers have been trying to determine the nature of truth for millennia. Is it a relation of correspondence between statements about reality and states of affairs? Or is it some sort of coherence? How does language hook up to reality so that certain utterances can be accurately labeled as *true*? How

METAPHYSICS,

continued.

Can we prove/disprove the existence of God? How do minds and bodies relate to each other? Do we have a free will? What *is* a will?

What makes a person a person? What is the essence of a thing—heck, for that matter, what is *essence*? What is the difference between an individual and a group? Between an individual and a property of an individual?

Are there minds? What *is* a mind? What makes an object a *conscious* object? How does consciousness work? Can a machine be a person? Can personhood be lost?

continued…

* Jn. 18:38.

can one know that one's theory of truth is itself… *true*? Doesn't this invoke a problem with self-reference? You can see that our small exploration has within it a lot of suppositions that philosophers of logic don't allow to rest untested.

The vast region of Value Theory breaks down into smaller disciplines that study the criteria of evaluation for many kinds of value—and some of these areas might seem more clear as value studies than a study of truth, at first glance, might seem.

Ethics

Thus, ***ethics*** studies the criteria of good or evil regarding human actions and human character. The value ethicists study is *goodness*. If morality is a personal value system somebody tries to live by, ethics is a system of valuing actions as good or bad that applies to all humans because they are humans. Ethics looks at the morality of individuals and attempts to determine what makes something good for anyone. What is the standard of goodness for human beings? But then again, what is it to be a human? Are we essentially good, essentially evil, or something else? What is our responsibility to each other? Thus, to study ethics requires one to spend some time in metaphysics, too.

Political Science

A third area in Value Theory is ***political science***. The value here is *justice*. What makes a law just? How does justice work? In fact, legal theory and politics are philosophical disciplines attempting to determine how to make the best society. So how do we define "best society"? (Notice how political science and ethics work closely together!) Certainly the best society will hang on what sorts of things its members are and how they communicate to each other, so political science will include metaphysics and epistemology.

Theology

A fourth area in Value Theory is ***theology***. The value here is *piety*, or whatever it is that pleases the divine or is considered religiously proper or mandatory. Religious studies might use holy texts as the standard of value, or they might attempt to find some transcendent value that is consistent for any religiously significant ideal. How can we know what piety itself is? Thus theology will dip into both metaphysics and epistemology—the former regarding the nature of piety, and the latter regarding how (and whether) we can know something is pious.

Another area of Value Theory is aesthetics. It considers the value we call beauty. What makes something art and something else less than art? What are the criteria for a beautiful piece of music, a beautiful painting, a beautiful dance, a beautiful work of literature, or a beautiful movie? What makes something timeless and aesthetically pleasing, even if it is disturbing (like, say, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, or Picasso's *Guernica*)? What are the criteria for distinguishing between art and pornography? What makes for harmony, and what counts as creativity? Where does our capacity for artistic expression come from? Such is the matter of aesthetic philosophy.

As you can see—there's a ***lot*** of philosophy out there.

And of course, I bet you can also see that we won't be able to cover all of this. Hardly any of it.

This second part of our journey will explore the second two general areas of philosophical inquiry: metaphysics and epistemology. (We'll leave value theory—specifically ethics—for the final part of our quest).

METAPHYSICS, *continued.*

We work with numbers and quantities all the time in math. But what *is* a number? Are they real or just useful constructs?

Any question that looks at the nature of reality itself, at what sorts of things can be accurately described as "real" and what the criteria for "realness" might be, is a question of metaphysics. It's a pretty big area of study, even for those who are stingy at granting the status "real" to things. (I'm looking at you, Quine.)

Metaphysics breaks down into smaller (but still huge) disciplines: *philosophy of religion*, *ontology*, *number theory*, *philosophy of mind*, *philosophy of psychology*, and others.

Of course, even when focusing on metaphysics and epistemology, we'll find ourselves taking necessary side-trips into value theory, and we'll always be guided by careful logic.

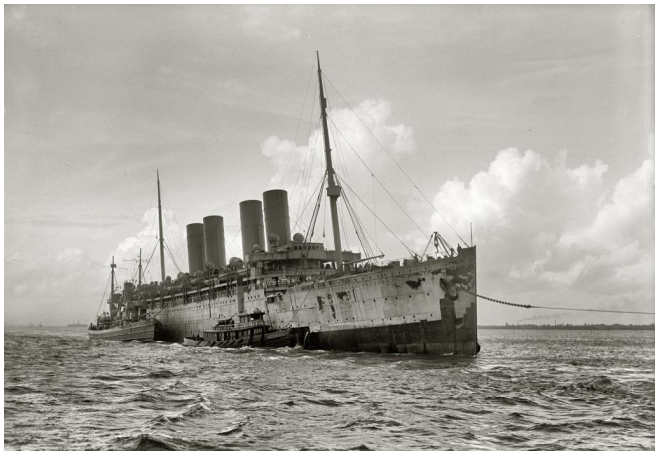
Hang on, keep your arms inside the cart at all times—and away we go!

STUDYING REALITY & KNOWLEDGE

English philosopher Bertrand Russell gave us a useful way of thinking about how we can productively philosophize about those things we find perplexing.

If you are truth-seeking, and find out what you once *thought* was the truth isn't, then know that it's a great new insight worth treasuring. But then, what about everything else that hangs on what you thought you knew but found out you don't? Is it all trash, too?

Here's where Russell's insight helps. He reminds us to think like a cartographer. You start by using what you are pretty certain about. Say, that's what you know about reality (hence, metaphysics). Then you begin to ask epistemology questions about this reality. When you have some useful findings, you then step back and check them by testing whether reality is what you can know. You might find out that your metaphysics isn't quite right. So you bookmark your epistemology, and set in on getting a more accurate metaphysics. And when you have this done, you test your epistemology—which might now be found a bit lacking. And you go at it again. In short, doing philosophy is a lot like doing science. It doesn't end once you make a discovery. Every theory needs testing, refining, checking, evaluating. And every discovery will refine, improve, or even undermine other discoveries.



You can see why intellectual honesty is so very important. We often have to take a couple steps back in order to make advances. The steps back are as useful as the advances, especially if we were going the wrong way.

Maybe you don't like Russell's way of thinking about it. Otto Neurath, an Austrian philosopher from the early 20th Century gives us another useful view of it. He writes,

> *We are like sailors who on the open sea must reconstruct their ship but are never able to start afresh from the bottom. Where a beam is taken away a new one must at once be put there, and for this the rest of the ship is used as support. In this way, by using the old beams and driftwood the ship can be shaped entirely anew, but only by gradual reconstruction.*

So, as we dive into our own metaphysics & epistemology work, remember to remain contritely fallible and open to new discoveries and concept repair, even while we must ever sail on through the open seas of learning, knowledge, and reality.

That God does not exist I cannot deny. That my whole being cries out for God, I cannot forget. (Jean-Paul Sartre)

CHAPTER TEN

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD & THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

ARGUMENTS AND SOUNDNESS

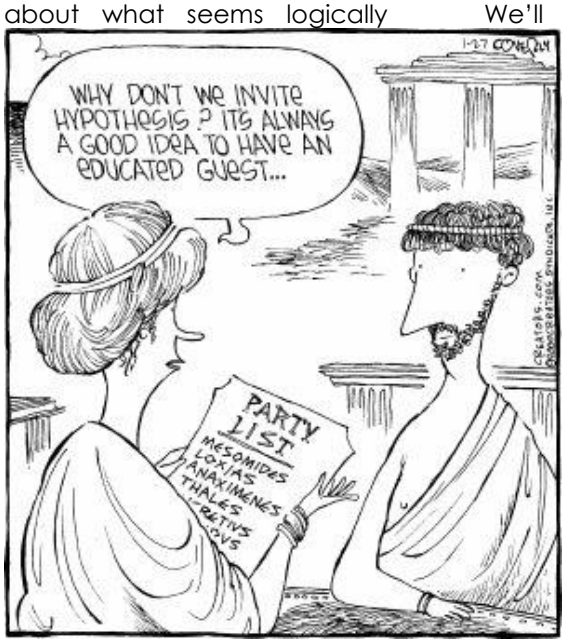
The process of philosophical investigation

How do we set up an argument? We've looked at what arguments are, how to assess them, and how to avoid bad reasoning; but how do we make arguments to support our own beliefs or intuitions?

It's time to put the rubber to the road. This chapter will not only look at the debate on God's existence, but it will also approach the issue by way of a step-by-step discussion of how to build a reasonable argument.

We'll begin by building an argument from our intuitions (our unreflective "gut feelings" about what seems plausible, about what seems logically correct). Then we'll build a valid argument on these intuitions, learning how to hone and revise until this argument is solid. We'll see how seemingly good arguments can fail—dismally. But we'll also see how we can use these failures to reach better and more defensible positions.

Once we have a good argument, we'll test it for soundness. Whereas in the first part of this text, we only looked for validity—now we'll start looking beyond, into the actual truth of the premises. And we'll test those premises. And test them again.



We'll do this with several arguments — two quite respectable and long-lived arguments that claim God *does* exist, and one that claims either that we have reason to believe God *does not* exist, or (more stridently) that God *cannot* exist. These arguments are all powerful, and each one will receive our careful philosophical treatment.

It's going to get bumpy.

READING QUESTIONS

As you study this chapter, keep these questions in mind for critical thinking and analysis.

- Consider the following sketch of a causal argument for the existence of God:

  We live in a physical universe, that had to come from something because whatever exists had some sort of cause. And whatever that cause was, it can't be itself, so it had to be something else. Furthermore, there can't be an infinite series of past causes. So there had to have been a first uncaused cause: God.

  This sketch contains a *logical* defect. State explicitly and explain this defect.

- Explain the importance of defining terms before arguing, and the role of a definition in an argument.

- Explain the proper method of developing and analyzing an argument from building an argument that is valid to testing the premises for truth.

continued…

FOUNDATIONS

For this unit, we need ever to keep in mind some key concepts.

- There are different kinds of possibility. To say something x is ***physically possible*** is to say that, given the past and the laws of nature as they currently exist, the world is such that x can exist. To say that something is ***logically possible*** is to say that the existence of x is not incoherent (that its existence doesn't defy bivalence).
- To say that something is *possible* is not to say that it in fact does exist, and to say that something does not exist is not to say that it is impossible.
- To determine whether 'x exists' can be evaluated as true, we *must* have a clear definition of what x is.
- A 'proof' of something cannot *ever* involve a logical leap (i.e., claiming more in the conclusion than the evidence in the premises allows).*
- We must take great care to distinguish between *what is real* (or not real) and *what is believed* (or not believed) to be real.

We also need to remember these principles and definitions.

The Principle of Non-Contradiction (PNC): *It is a logical law that for any claim p, it is false that both p and not-p.*

PNC: *~(p&~p)*

The Law of Excluded Middle (LEM): *It is a logical law that for claim p, either p is true or p is not true.*

LEM: *p ∨~p*

Bivalence: *Every claim or theory has exactly one truth value, either true or false. (That is, both PNC and LEM apply.)*

It is important, at this moment, to note that although Bivalence (and its constitutive laws) apply to *claims*, it can be logically extended to states of affairs.

On the condition that claims accurately represent the world, it follows that it cannot both be the case that, for example, today is actually Friday and today is actually *not* Friday. It cannot both be the case that both God exists and God does not exist.

These laws were presented in chapter 2, along with a third and equally important law called ***Leibniz's Law:***

Leibniz's Law (LL): *It is a logical law that for anything x, anything y, and any property P, if x is* ***identical*** *with y, then x and y will both have P.*

LL:† *(x = y) → (Px & Py)*

READING QUESTIONS, *continued.*

- Explain the difference between *a priori* and *a posteriori* arguments.
- Explain the two kinds of premises any *a posteriori* cosmological argument must have for it to be valid.
- There are two different universal principles about causation. One is called the Causal Regress Principle (CRP), the other the Causal Adequacy Principle (CAP). Explain each. Then explain different ways people have attempted to defend the truth of the CRP. Finally, explain how the truth of the CAP is defended.
- Present and defend the argument called ***CAUSAL***. Is it valid? How does it work? How have people defended the truth of its premises? Does it conclude what its defenders want it to conclude?
- Present and explain Descartes' ***MED. 3*** argument for God's existence. How does it work? What objections have been brought against it?
- Explain the problem of evil.
- Explain the difference between a defense, a total refutation, and a theodicy, offering examples of each as a response to the problem of evil.

continued…

* Refer to the Rules of Discourse, chapter 1. Also, this is related to the principle of parsimony, discussed in chapters 3 and 9.

† This is symbolized per standard predicate (or quantificational) logical form (sometimes called QL), which is not otherwise used in this text. The predicate, or property, is capitalized and attached to the object that is presumed to have it. All other notation is the same as TL (see chapter 6). Strictly speaking, the formulation should be herein presented as

(x)(y)(P)((x=y)→(Px&Py))

Finally, we must remember the distinction between ***necessary*** and ***sufficient***. Recall that for x to be sufficient for y, x must guarantee by its very presence that y. Recall further that for y to be necessary for x, then it is impossible for x to be present without y.*

> *X is **necessary** for y iff y cannot possibly be (exist, obtain) without x.*
>
> *X is **sufficient** for y iff x guarantees the presence (existence, obtaining) of y.*

It follows that if x is both necessary and sufficient for y, then every time you have y, you must have x, and every time you don't have y you cannot have x: they are a packaged set—you get both or you get nothing. We use the notation ***iff*** (pronounced "if and only if") to indicate that something is both necessary and sufficient for something else.

TASKS & CRITICAL QUESTIONS

There are ***six tasks*** and ***two critical questions*** in this chapter. There is also ***one team project***.

READING QUESTIONS, *continued.*

- Explain the difference between a theodicy and a proof for God's existence.
- Present and explain the argument called ***EVIDENTIAL***. What are the defenses of each premise? How does the argument work? What does it conclude?
- Present and explain the argument called ***EVIL***. How does it work? How do theists object to it? Do the objections work?
- Suppose a defender of ***EVIL*** modifies it to ***EVIL*.*** How does this modification respond to theistic objections to ***EVIL***? Does ***EVIL**** prove that God cannot possibly exist?
- Explain the difference between theism, atheism, and agnosticism. In your explanation, carefully explain the difference between religious and metaphysical claims about God's existence.

POSSIBLE WORLDS

Before we can properly discuss whether something can possibly exist, we need to get a bit of a handle on what this "possibility" thing is. That is, let's start building this thing with careful foundation work.

When we say something is "possible," what in the heck do we mean?

To answer that, we need to look at the concept ***necessity.*** The term "necessary" is a *domain-bound* term—that is, it means different things in different domains, or areas of conceptual work.

The three domains in which necessity matters, for us, have to do with

1. statements, (the domain of ***conditions***),
2. arguments (the domain of ***inferences***), and
3. worlds (the domain of ***possibilities***).

We'll look at each of these briefly, and you'll find that necessity is really quite the same in each of them, though related to the concepts in that domain only.

The first domain we see relevant in definitions. Remember how our conceptual analysis (or analytic definition) of a term says that

> *X is an F iff x is a G*

That is, that something or other x is an instance of the concept (or member of the category) we're looking at (F) *if and only if* x has all the ***necessary and sufficient*** properties we note (in G).

In this domain, *necessary* simply means that you cannot possibly have something without meeting this condition. A simple conditional statement—which is like *half* of a definition (since only offering the 'if x then y') offers an *asymmetrical* relationship between what's on the "left side" and what's on the "right side" of the statement (actually, these things are called the

But this might be confusing to any who find such notation intimidating. I leave it here in the footnote for those who thrive on such exactness.

* Refer to Analytic Definitions, chapter 2.

antecedent and the *consequent*, but for our current purposes, I'll try to stay as untechnical as possible).*

So here's a conditional statement in standard form:

If you love me, you'll keep my commands.

This is a claim attributed to Jesus, so I thought it might be appropriate in this unit about God. Anyway, the conditional can be understood this way: *loving me* guarantees *command keeping*. That is, the statement 'you love me' is ***sufficient*** for 'you will keep my commands.'

We can look at how the latter statement relates to the former, too. We can understand it this way: *keeping my commands* is a precondition for *loving me*. That is, "you keep my commands" is ***necessary*** for "you love me." If something is necessary, you can't do without it. Thus, the necessary relation of a conditional looks at the logical relations between statements.

The first domain contrasts necessity with sufficiency—it contrasts "only" (necessity) with "all" (sufficiency). The second domain contrasts necessity with probability, as we remember from our discussion in chapter 4 on arguments.

Our third domain, that of *possibility* contrasts necessity with ***contingency***. In each domain, we can say something about the truth of x.

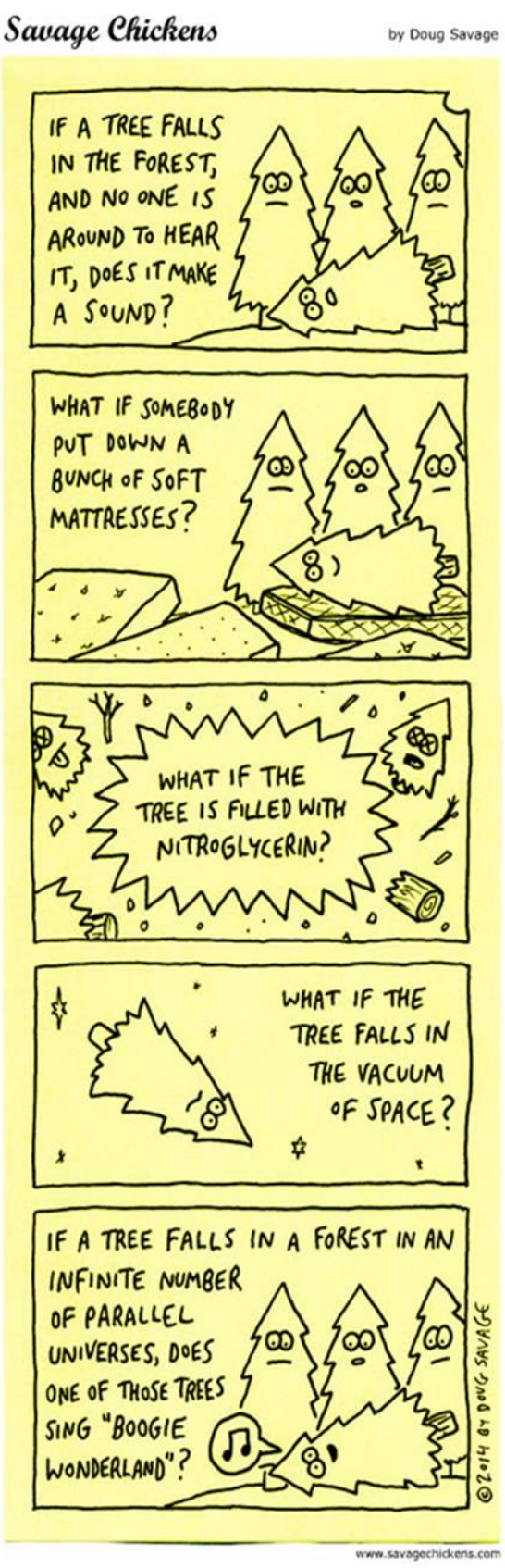
*If x is **necessary** in a given domain, then ~x is **impossible** in that domain.*

What that third domain means is the content of the rest of this preparatory section. It will be short and will focus primarily on defining terms and concepts we need to get into the meat of our discussion about God (and other issues later on).

Possible Worlds Semantics

Now that analysis gives us a good hint: *necessary* and *possibility* are related concepts. And this gives us a useful tool in philosophical discussion, what we call *possible worlds semantics*. This is just a way of talking about necessity and possibility that gives us helpful ways to wrap our minds around certain difficult notions. The following definitions are very important, since we'll use these terms for the rest of this text.

*X is a **state of affairs** (SOFA) iff x is a circumstance or way things can be related to each other.*



* More careful discussion of this logical relation is given in chapter 6, where we discuss truth-functional logic.

*X is a **maximal SOFA** iff every possible subset of SOFAs is included in x.*

*X is a **world** iff x is a maximal SOFA.*

*X is a **possible world** (PW) iff x is a world that contains no contradictions or impossibilities.*

*X is the **actual world** (called α) iff x is the PW that in fact obtains.*

Briefly, then, I can talk about a SOFA where, for example, I am hungry. That's simple enough.* Now consider a SOFA where I'm hungry; it's Monday; The sky is cloudy and grey; I'm wearing a golden-yellow shirt with French cuffs, and I'm listening to an iTunes playlist on my laptop. Certainly, this is a complicated SOFA, and it's the kind of thing we'll often mention in ***thought experiments***,† wherein we attempt to look at only a few key circumstances (like in a lab experiment) to see whether a certain conceptual hypothesis is accurate or misleading.

Assuming & Supposing

To ***assume*** something x is to make a claim about x that either you know is the case or you wish to prove *true*. And to ***suppose*** something x is to make a claim x that either you know is *not* the case or you wish to prove *false* (you *say* x is true only to prove ~x must be true).*

So when we make an argument where we don't *know* but suspect x is true, we will say "assume x is true", whereas when we make an argument were we don't know but suspect x is *false*, we will say "suppose x is true."

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* Of course, you remember that the curl ~ means "not."

But when we require every single SOFA to be taken into consideration—including all relevant laws of logic, laws of nature, the past, the present, all future events, and so on—we are considering a *maximal* SOFA or what we logically call a *world*. A world isn't a planet. It isn't the physical universe. It's everything. It includes all physical reality (if there is any), and it includes all metaphysical reality.

Of course, we can think about 'what ifs.' What if the world were different? What if I hadn't been born? What if I drove to work a different way? What if there wasn't this universe but a different one? What if all that existed were only in two dimensions? Each of these hypothetical scenarios are certainly different than the way things actually are. If I drove a different way to work, but the rest of all reality were the same up to this point, the difference would be pretty small from the reality I now live in. But if I didn't exist at all, well, that world would be a lot different than this one. And if the universe were not existing but an alternate one did, the world would be even more different than the actual one. And if all there were is two dimensions, whoa Nelly.

Each of these what ifs are possible worlds, or PWs. The way things *actually* are is called the actual world, and instead of having to use lots of words to indicate that we're talking about everything that actually happened in the past, is happening now, and will happen in the future, we just say Alpha (α). The name of the actual world is Alpha. So worlds like the one where I just took a different route to work (slightly different) we call *nearer* to Alpha (henceforth, I'll use

* Think about a SOFA as a single line on a truth table (chapter 6). Certainly you can have a line with only one variable—a very simple SOFA. But you can also, theoretically, have a line in which every possible variable is listed. Such a line would contain all variables, with truth values assigned to each. This line would be a maximal SOFA, or a world. And of course, there are infinitely many in-between kinds of SOFAs—some might be moderately complex, others relatively simple.

† Which we'll discuss in depth in chapter 12.

α) than those like the one where we've only got two dimensions.

Logical Possibility

Using this terminology and these definitions, we can enter PW semantics (that is, possible worlds talk). We use this way of talking to think about and test our intuitions about what might have been or could never be the case. So suppose you were never born. Now clearly you *were* born, which in PW semantics is stated in terms of α:

It is ***true in α*** that you were born.

But is it logically possible that you were not born? To ask this is to ask if your birth is *logically* necessary, to ask whether it is conceivable that there exist some world where you don't exist. We are asking if *this* statement is true:

In some possible world (call it ϕ)* you were not born.

To think of this, we need to make a distinction between logical and physical possibility:

*X is **physically impossible** iff, given the past series of events (P) and the laws of nature (L), x cannot obtain.*

*X is **logically impossible** iff x is does not obtain in any possible worlds.*

Now certainly it seems plausible to say that in α your existence is necessary, since your birth is in fact an event that is a part of the set of all SOFAs in the actual world. Your existence's necessity is similar to the truth of this statement:

(A) If you throw an apple up in the air, it will eventually fall back to the ground.

Now statement A is true in α, because of the past (P) & the laws of nature (L). But it is certainly possible that a *different* set of laws could be governing, or, in PW semantics, there is some other possible world where instead of L, there might be in place the set L'.† Say this set is exactly like L only there isn't gravity. Well, in *that* world, A isn't true. That's to say that there is some PW where ~A. Now this tells us something about the kind of truth A has. Here are some more terms defined:

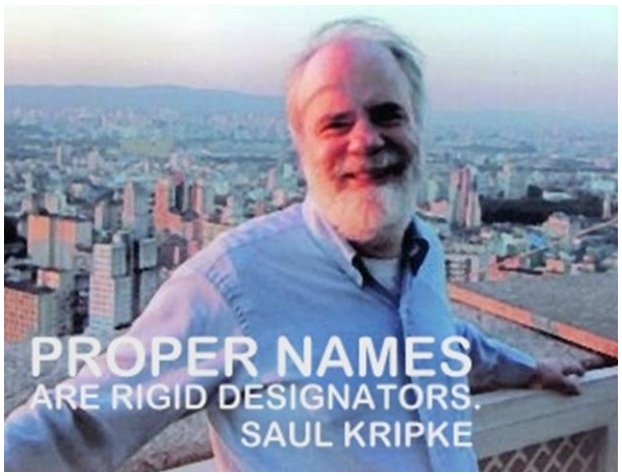
RIGID DESIGNATORS

We need to take care not to mess around with the meaning of words. So we set their references to how they are used in α in order to be able to think clearly. Thus, the term 'apple', since used in α to refer to a certain kind of fruit will be used as a ***rigid designator*** to refer to that kind of fruit (if it exists) in *every* possible world. We certainly realize that the noise 'apple' might, in a certain world, refer to some *other* thing (say, a rotary telephone) or not even be a word there at all. But when we use terms, we use them *from the point of view* of α.

With our terms set, and with the above definitions, we say that statement A is *contingently* true. And we can see that the statement "you were born" is *also* contingently true (or we also say your birth is contingent). Your existence isn't necessary. Neither is mine, for that matter. Contrast this with the following:

2+2=4.

Given the reference of '2' and of '4', we realize that no matter what world, no matter what twos and fours are *called* in that world, it *must be the case* (whether anyone in that world knows it or not) that 2+2=4. So we know that '2+2=4' is *necessarily true*. That is, 2+2=4 isn't contingent. It doesn't matter what the past events are; it doesn't matter what the laws of nature are, 2+2=4.



* ϕ is pronounced "Phi."

† L' is pronounced "L prime."

*Statement x is **necessarily true** iff x is true in all PWs.*

*Statement x is **necessarily false** (also called incoherent,[*] logically impossible, absurd) iff x is false in all PWs.[†]*

*Statement x is **contingently true** iff x is true in a but false in some other PW.*

*Statement x is **contingently false** iff x is false in a but true in some other PW.*

(Let's remember that statements are descriptions of SOFAs, so that if a statement is false, then the SOFA it describes does not obtain.)

Let's go back to our statement about your being born. It's certainly true in α that you were born (you're reading this, ain't ya?). And it's at least conceivable that in some faraway PW that we've conveniently called ϕ there is, say, only two dimensions, or maybe has no life-supporting planets, or some such, so that you would not be born. That is to say that there are some funky worlds where, alas, you don't exist. And *that* is to say that your existence is *contingent*. So, a statement about your existence like "I was born" is contingently true. On the other hand, consider this statement:

BJ's cat Marius had heart problems.

This logically entails that the statement

BJ's cat Marius had a perfect heart

is *false in* α. But it is conceivable that in some other PW, my fuzz-head had a perfect heart. If things were different in the past, say, things different in the genetic make-up of Marius's family tree. In *that* world, Mar would have had a great heart. Thus, although it's false in α that Mar had a perfect heart, this is only *contingently false*.[‡] Get it?

Near and Far Worlds

A final note about PW semantics: when two worlds have a lot of similarities to each other, we call those worlds 'near' to each other. The fewer the similarities, the farther away the worlds are from each other.

RIGID DESIGNATORS,

continued.

Consider a square circle. Now x is a square iff x is a two-dimensional enclosed equilateral figure with only 90 degree interior angles. Y is a circle iff y is a two-dimensional enclosed geometric figure with no interior angles, and, for any points P and Q on y, P and Q are equidistant from the center of y.[*] So for something to be a round square (for x = y) there must be something that *both* has interior angles *and* does not have interior angles. But this is impossible (by Leibniz's Law). So round squares are logically impossible—that is to say they cannot exist in *any* possible world. The notion of a round square is *incoherent*, even though our language seems to be able to include it with grammatical ease.[*]

[*] This latter condition is irrelevant to the point at hand, but it is important to distinguish circles from ovals.

It is customary, when discussing possible worlds, to follow the order of the Greek alphabet and to name worlds with Greek letter names (in lower case). Thus, the actual world is α (Alpha); very near worlds might be called β (Beta) or γ (Gamma); moderately distant worlds might be called ϕ (Phi) or μ (Mu), etc.; and the farthest conceivable worlds might be called ψ (Psi) or ω (Omega). In this text, you won't need to worry about the order of the Greek alphabet, though this knowledge might garner you brownie points among those who care about such things. For our purposes, just know that β is *really* near to the way things actually are, ω is as far away from actuality as one can conceive, and anything else is somewhere between these.

We will thus say things like,

Suppose there is some world φ where x is true.

[*] Aha! There's where we can conclude *incoherent*. Remember chapter 1.

[†] Remember the fourth kind of conclusion philosophers draw? Here's the difference between what we called *impossibility* and *incoherence*. The *impossible* conclusion is an *epistemic* claim, whereas the *incoherent* conclusion is a *metaphysical* claim.

[‡] Now we should all honor my deceased cat with a moment of reverential silence.

This translates as something like "suppose this very unexpected and highly improbable state of affairs is the case." Since the case is only improbable, not impossible, it *is* true in some possible world, just not any world we call 'near' to the actual world.

You will find that, although this seems a bit confusing right now, PW semantics will come to be quite helpful and will even crop up in your own discussion of some of the problems we face throughout this text, especially when we get into thought experiments.

You've made it! Here's a homework task, called Task 58 (even if you've just joined us in this exciting textbook). Write a 2-page, double spaced discussion on possible world semantics. Carefully explain what we mean by possibility in philosophy speak, then explain concepts like necessity, near and far worlds, SOFAs, and rigid designators. Write this paper according to proper college standards (if you don't know what these are, visit your college's writing center), but write it as if you're writing to an intelligent friend of yours who's never taken a philosophy class. This way you'll be sure to define everything *carefully* and explain everything *fully*. Label this assignment Task 58 and turn it in when this reading is to be discussed. Don't move on in the reading until you have finished this task.

THE CONCEPT OF GOD

When we talk about 'God,' what do we mean? What does that term refer to? One might worry that if we attempt to find a referent, we're thereby *assuming* that God exists. This isn't actually the case. For example, we have a *lot* of defined concepts for conceptual entities that do not exist outside our imagination. We can define *hippogriff*, *orc*, *Aslan*, *Gallifrey*, *Winterfell* and *Panem*, even though none of these exist outside of stories. Thus, *to define something is not to presume that something actually exists*—that is, to define something is not to presume that it exists in α.

Definition and existence

When we attempt to define something, we are not making any existential claims. We're doing something more like this:

> *On the assumption that x exists, what is x like?*

We're asking ourselves, in this case, *on the assumption that God exists, what is God like?* Or maybe, *if there were a God, what would that God-thing have to be?* Or *what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for something in order for that thing to be God?*

Thus, when we define the concept 'God' before we enter any attempt to see whether (or not) God exists, we are more precisely shaping the question as something more like this:

> *Given this concept, can something exist that meets all the criteria of this concept?*

> *Does such a thing as what this concept refers to exist in any possible world?*

A minimal concept

One thing that we don't want to do is make the concept so complicated that we cannot even manage it. We want a concept that we can use, that accurately reflects our understanding of God, and that also accurately represents the understanding of God shared by others with whom we want to have a productive discussion. We want concept simple enough that we can wrap our minds around it—a concept we can understand. A definition filled with complexity easily gets out of hand, and we lose our ability to determine whether it's our concept that is wrong or whether whatever it is we're trying to grasp is incoherent, hence impossible.* So instead of bogging ourselves down in descriptions of God as a *father* or *lover* or *savior* or *friend*, which are all tied up in

* Impossible in the sense that it cannot exist in **any** possible world.

certain theologies and experiences not shared by all within even Christianity, let alone all monotheistic traditions, we'll keep it simple. Why? Because 'father' is a complicated term that needs defining, too. So is 'lover.' and 'savior.' We really want to avoid having so many concepts that we're stuck defining and defining and defining. We also don't want to bring in concepts that not all people who agree on the initial concept (God) see as necessary to that concept. So we keep it logically as simple as we can.

Since our purposes are simply to determine whether God exists, all we need is the basic set of properties that all who believe God exists accept as necessary for something to *be* God. (It will, by the way, be the same set of properties that are necessary for those who say God doesn't exist. They'll say "anything like this doesn't exist" just like the others will say "something like this does exist.") The argument about all of God's characteristics comes logically *after* the argument about whether even a God as minimally defined can or does exist.

So, looking back across the long philosophical tradition shared by Christianity, Judaism, and Islam,* we will limit ourselves to this simple definition:

> *X is **God** iff x is an omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnibenevolent (morally perfect) being.*

If there is such a thing as God, that thing knows everything that can be known. We won't fall into crazy talk and assume God knows incoherencies. If something is incoherent—like a round square—then it is *unknowable* (and we don't want to confuse the crazy way we can twist language around with things that can actually be known). This tells us that

> *An omniscient being knows everything that can be known*.

Furthermore, if there is such a thing as God, then that thing can do anything that can be done. Again, we avoid crazy talk and assume God can do the logically impossible (like make a rock too heavy for God to lift). We are wanting to see what might actually be the case, so we avoid logical incoherencies. We want to see what might be or is the case in a possible world (in this case, in the actual world, α), and since incoherencies exist in *no* possible world, we omit the craziness that suggests a denial of the Principle of Non-Contradiction (something that is impossible in all possible worlds exists in the actual world, which is a possible world).†

So we know that

> *An omnipotent being can do anything that can be done*.

Finally, we think of this being's character, if it exists. In every religious tradition, God (or at least the highest god) is considered to be good, to be morally perfect and benevolent. That is to say that God is understood as a being that always has good will towards creation, that never wants anything bad to happen. In fact, a great deal of theology has to do with how God wants the best for us and how that relates to the less-than-perfect situations we face in life. So we see that

> *An omnibenevolent being wants always what is good.*

It is certainly the case that some religious groups deny this property of God. Or they redefine 'good' as it relates to God as something utterly different than what is 'good' for humans. They might say something like *whatever God wants to do is good, even if it seems evil to us, because God is bigger than us and God's ways are mysterious to us*.

* …and, it turns out, by Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, and any religions that hearken back to any of the aforementioned traditions for their own origin. Don't confuse the rejection of such a being's existence in a religion as a denial of this concept's accuracy. What they're saying is that *this sort of thing* doesn't exist. The concept has no referent.

† It is true that the arguments for God's existence tend towards wanting to prove that God is *necessary*, hence exists in *all* possible worlds. In our discussion, we will not attempt to demonstrate this stronger claim directly. To keep things simple in this introductory course, we'll limit our discussion to the actual world. For now.

These groups seem to embrace a view that holds that God put standards on us that don't apply to God. Remember the *Euthyphro* that we discussed in chapter three? These groups hold that God's will is paramount, not God's wisdom. There is a lot of philosophy and theology out there over this particular discussion as it's happened over the centuries. But the dominant view about God's goodness holds that God intends the good *as we understand good* for everyone. And since this view not only is the dominant view, and because this view is intuitively plausible even to little children (indicated by their sense of fairness and justice), we will here hold that omnibenevolence entails wanting always what is good, as *we* understand good.[*]

Finally, we realize here that whatever God is—if God exists—God is a being, not a force (like gravity or thrust) or an event. God might be a person, but need not be. (*Person* is a very complicated concept, and we don't need to get into that to determine whether God exists as a being.) We thus have a minimally satisfactory definition. It is one all ***theists*** will accept as something they believe exists, and it is one all ***atheists*** will say is a definition of something that cannot possibly exist.[†]

Atheism & Theism

This gives us our last two preliminary definitions:

> *Somebody S is a **theist** iff S holds that there exists some being that is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent (a being most call God).*
>
> *Somebody S is an **atheist** iff S denies that there exists some being that is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent (a being most call God).*[‡]

It's important that we don't make the mistake of inferring that atheism is some sort of religion. Although some atheists engage in religious behavior,[§] atheism itself is merely a denial of God's existence, akin to a denial of Voldemort's, Gandalf's, or Tyrion Lannister's existence. Atheists deny that there is adequate evidence to infer God exists.[**]

More careful atheists present arguments that God *cannot* exist. In the same way, it is important that we don't infer that theism mandates some sort of religion. Theists often engage in religious

behavior and adopt related beliefs and traditions, but it is this whole package that makes for religion, not simply the acceptance of God's existence as verified by evidence.

In short, neither theism nor atheism are religions; rather, they are metaphysical positions that may or may not lead to religious beliefs and affiliations.

[*] This is an application of a rigid designation for the term 'good.'

[†] Notice that theists argue, minimally, that God exists in α (hence, that the existence of God is possible). Atheists argue that God cannot exist in *any* possible world, including α (hence, that the concept 'God' is incoherent).

[‡] I will discuss agnosticism later in this chapter. This position is not an intellectually honest one until a person has adequately grappled with the question of God's existence, so we won't even allow it until we have.

[§] That is, there are people who might engage in religious (e.g., church) activities but who deny God's existence, and there are some atheist enterprises, like the atheist "megachurch" called the Sunday Assembly, engage in religious-like practices including ritual, communal chanting and reading, and shared tradition. Also, of course, Buddhists deny the existence of God, yet are often quite actively participating in religious behavior.

[**] Chris Tucker notes that some atheists who accept there is adequate evidence both for and against God's evidence can still "follow their passions" (as William James put it), and believe God can't exist. It's simply the case that people aren't always careful to base their beliefs on evidence.

Arguments for the Existence of God

FAITH SEEKS UNDERSTANDING.

I DO NOT SEEK TO UNDERSTAND THAT I MAY BELIEVE, BUT I BELIEVE IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND.

(ANSELM)

BUILDING AN ARGUMENT FROM INTUITION

The Kalam Argument (or ***CAUSAL***)*

There are several *kinds* of arguments about whether God exists—some people argue from the concept itself (the *ontological* arguments), some from the way the universe works (the design or *teleological* arguments), and some from our human nature and sense of justice (the moral arguments). We will look only at one kind of argument, which is a different kind of argument—called a ***cosmological argument***.†

> *X is a* ***cosmological argument*** *iff x is an argument that attempts to account for the existence of the 'cosmos' or universe.*

This means we're going to look at the world around us and try to argue that, given the fact that this world exists, there should be a God, too.

We need to remember that we're not talking about the physical universe only. The Greek notion of *cosmos* encompassed more than physical reality. It included the logical structure of everything. It included possibility. One might better understand *cosmos* to mean something more like *well-ordered reality*. So our exploration into cosmological arguments is a step into the wide organized everything of reality, thus is an exploration into possible worlds.

a posteriori vs. *a priori*

A cosmological argument has to do with the reality that we experience. If there's an actual world out there, then you're in it. Thus, a cosmological argument will begin with a reference to our experiences in α. And this tells us that there's another distinction we have to make. There are *two* general kinds of arguments: those that argue without any reference to experiences, and those that refer to experiences.

The former includes things like mathematical or logical equations, deductions in theoretical physics, and, as it turns out, the *ontological* arguments for God's existence. The kinds of arguments that come 'before' or without reference to experience are thus called ***a priori arguments***. These require some proficiency in logic, and had we more time to dig into this discussion, we'd see a couple interesting and fun *a priori* arguments. But, alas, we don't.‡ The other kind

---

* I owe the format of this discussion to Jan Cover, who teaches this argument in this way at Purdue. I am grateful to have been his teaching assistant and to have had access to his remarkable knack for making tough concepts approachable.

† The word 'ontological' comes from the Greek word *ontos* which means something like 'being,' as in something that has being or exists in some robust sense. Ontological arguments argue, using logic alone, that there is some being that must exist simply by virtue of what kind of being it is. The most famous argument of this sort was offered by Anselm, the most recent by Alvin Plantinga.

'Teleological' comes from the Greek word *telos*, which means something like 'purpose' or 'reason' or 'function.' This kind of argument attempts to demonstrate that there are certain naturally occurring complex things with clear purposes or designs that give us reason to infer there must be some designer, much like the presence of artifacts imply the existence of an artisan. The most famous arguments of this kind were offered by Thomas Aquinas and William Paley.

Arguing that all arguments that existed to date—teleological, cosmological, etc.—boil down to the ontological argument, Kant forcefully argued that the ontological argument failed, and with it, each of the others dissolved. In their place, Kant presented the *moral* argument for God's existence, attempting to demonstrate that if there is any objective standard of morality that applies to all humanity, then there must be some objective reality that logically supports this morality. And the kind of thing that would logically support such morality would have to be God.

In short, there are quite a few arguments for God's existence, and one could spend a lifetime studying just them.

‡ These are the ontological arguments I mentioned.

of argument begins with our experiences—that is, the argument comes 'after' experience, so it's called an ***a posteriori argument***. Since the cosmological arguments begin with our experiences of the world, they are all *a posteriori* arguments.

> *X is an **a priori** argument iff x is an argument that is based on logic alone, without any reference to experiences or sensory data.*
>
> *X is an **a posteriori** argument iff x is an argument that refers to experiences or sensory data.*

This means that any *a posteriori* argument ***must*** have a premise about experiences or sensory data (more commonly called *empirical* data). This premise is called the ***empirical premise***.

Making a Valid Argument

We want to argue, given our experience of the world, that there had to be a God. How might we find such an argument? We'll want to reference our own intuitions—that is, our own plausible gut instincts. What is it that tends to spring to mind as a reason to believe in the existence of God? People tend towards thinking about everything 'out there' and inferring that it had to come from something. So, we could come up with something like this:

With all this possible world talk, we can say there's not only a physical world out there, but that α exists. It must have come from something, and that's God. So God exists.

To ensure we maintain good habits, let's put that into standard form. Recall that means we put every premise (bit of evidence) on its own numbered line, and the conclusion on its own numbered line, then separate these with a line. Our simple argument looks like this:

1. The actual world α, including the physical universe, exists.
2. The physical universe must have a cause.
3. That cause is God.

---

4. So, God exists.

Notice that it's easier to analyze once it's in standard form. We can *see* what the argument is up to, and we can find strengths and weaknesses much more easily. And even though this argument seems intuitively plausible (it makes sense to our unreflective gut instincts), upon careful consideration, we can see that it's not quite up to snuff. In fact, it's a disaster.

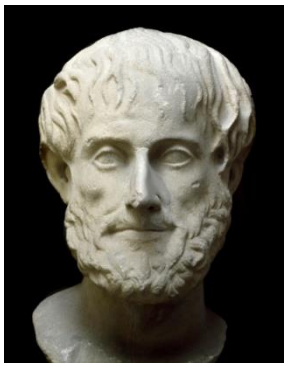
How do we go about analyzing this argument? Remember our discussion in chapter four. We just put it into standard form; now we need to see what kind of inference there is, then determine whether that inference is any good. So we see that this argument is attempting to *guarantee* that God exists, so the argument is deductive. Now we want to see whether the guarantee is good, or whether the argument makes logical errors.

So thinking carefully, we see that the argument is supposed to give evidence that guarantees God's existence. But premise 3 *already supposes God exists*. We can't smuggle our conclusion in the premises! We are trying to *prove* that there's a God. We can't just say there is and then conclude *told ya so*. In fact, when you assume the conclusion is true by smuggling it into the premises, this is a *fallacy*, that is, an argument that is *always* bad (invalid or weak):

> *X is a **fallacy** iff x is an argument that is invalid or weak because*
>
> 1. *it is deductive, and its structure allows a false conclusion from true premises, or*
> 2. *it is inductive, and its structure requires deductive certainty, or*
> 3. *it is inductive, and it fails to provide adequate evidence that the conclusion is more probable than any SOFA that would deny the conclusion, or*
> 4. *it violates the rules of discourse.*

In this case, the argument is smuggling the conclusion into the premises, violating the rules of discourse. How so? A claim cannot be evidence for itself. This fallacy is called *circular reasoning*, or more carefully, ***begging the question***. Inserting the conclusion into one's argument ensures the argument's failure. It *guarantees* one's argument to be bad, and that's certainly not what we wanted. So let's use our intuitive first attempt as a springboard and see what we can make of it.

First, because we want to avoid fallacies, we have to get rid of premise 3. No sneaking our conclusion into our premises. No fallacies! Now we can look at what's left. We have an interesting thought buried in premise 2. Why would we think 2 true? Can we use it in our argument? It seems right. I mean, we do think that everything must be caused. In fact, we *do* have something to support this assumption: the philosopher Aristotle analyzed *motion*, and wrote that



> *Anyone who has ever carefully studied nature affirms the existence of motion, because without motion there can't be any change, including coming-to-be or perishing. And anything that comes-to-be is moved on by something capable of moving in such a way as to make something come to be. And for that thing to cause something to come to be, it must itself be moved by something else, and so on. And it is impossible that there be an infinite series of past movers. There must have been a first mover, the principle of motion for everything else: an unmoved mover.*[*]

In his analysis, he gives us two important features that a good causal argument should have.

Uh, wait. A *causal* argument? I thought it was a *cosmological* argument. *Wtf, BJ?* That's possibly confusing, but really, if you stop to think about it, it should make some sense. There are other ways we can look at the universe and attempt to argue how it demonstrates God's existence.[†] But because this particular kind of cosmological argument looks at cause and effect, this kind of argument (a species of cosmological argument) is called a ***causal*** argument.

> *X is a **causal** argument iff x is a cosmological argument that infers the existence of a cause from the experience of effects.*

Okay, so where were we? Right. Two features of a causal argument.

Universal Principles

Notice how Aristotle's argument, which we'll put into standard form,

1) argues for a very special kind of being (without presupposing it exists!),
2) starts with experience, and
3) includes a universal principle.

Here's the argument in standard form:

Aristotle's Unmoved Mover Argument (UMM)

1. There are things in motion, which including coming-to-be and perishing.
2. Whatever comes-to-be must be moved by something else in order to come-to-be.
3. There cannot be an infinite series of past movers.

---

4. So, there must have been a first unmoved mover.

First, notice that premise 1 gives us our empirical premise. We *experience* things moving. By the way, our own first attempt started with experience, too. (Premise 1: the physical universe exists.) Both arguments move into a general understanding of causation. Premise 2 of UMM looks at the general notion of movement. But it's premise 3 that gives us what is missing from our intuitive attempt. It's here that Aristotle gives us a *universal principle*.

> *X is a **universal principle** iff x is a principle or rule that applies to everything within a given domain.*

There are different domains with different principles. For example, in chapter 2 we saw universal principles that apply to statements or reality. Regarding statements, the domain would be that of truth. Regarding reality, the domain would be possibility. If we were talking about ethics, we would want a principle applicable to everything within the domain of moral acceptability, or goodness. If we were discussing aesthetics, we'd want a principle of beauty. Here, we're talking about what we experience, so we're in the domain of physics. Thus, whatever universal principle we need will be one that governs physical reality.

We see the universal principle in premise 3. Here, Aristotle claims that in the domain of causation, there cannot be an infinite regress. If we look back to our intuitive attempt, we can see that we're close to such a principle in premise 2—but it's not ever stated. And since an argument must leave *nothing* to chance, must never *just assume* anything (nothing is obvious to

[*] This is from Aristotle's *Physics,* book 8. The paraphrase is mine. Aristotle discusses this also in his *Metaphysics*, 12.

[†] For example, we could argue from the fact that nothing in the universe is necessary (that the universe could possibly have been different than it is or that things go out of existence) that there must be something that is necessary that holds all non-necessary possibilities (or contingencies) together. This is a cosmological argument that has nothing to do with causes, but with contingencies. Hence, this kind of cosmological argument is called a ***contingency*** argument.

everyone, even if maybe it seems so to you!), we have to make that principle explicit like Aristotle does here.

This then gives us an insight into what we need, if we want to make our intuitions into a good—a valid—argument. We need *both* an empirical premise *and* a universal principle. So let's see if we can make something of our intuitions.

Making Something of Our Intuitions

So maybe we can borrow from Aristotle, and make our argument more solid—that is, maybe we can make a real argument (not a fallacy festival!) using Aristotle's structure and two important features:

The First Attempt (no.1)

1. The universe exists.
2. Everything that exists has a cause.
3. There cannot be an infinite series of previous causes.

---

4. So, there must have been a first uncaused cause: God.

Now this seems more like it! First, no begging the question. We can be *sure* that the existence of God isn't smuggled into any of our premises. And at least when we think of how this argument *feels*, it feels pretty darn persuasive. But of course, how an argument *feels* is far different than whether the argument is logical! And we need to analyze it for its logical power—not leaving the matter of God's existence at the mercy of our extremely finicky emotions.

But—wait, hang on. If we look at this argument with a very careful critical eye, we'll find a huge—devastatingly huge—problem. **No.1** has a ***logical*** defect. What?

Let's just look at two of the statements—premise 2 and the conclusion 4:

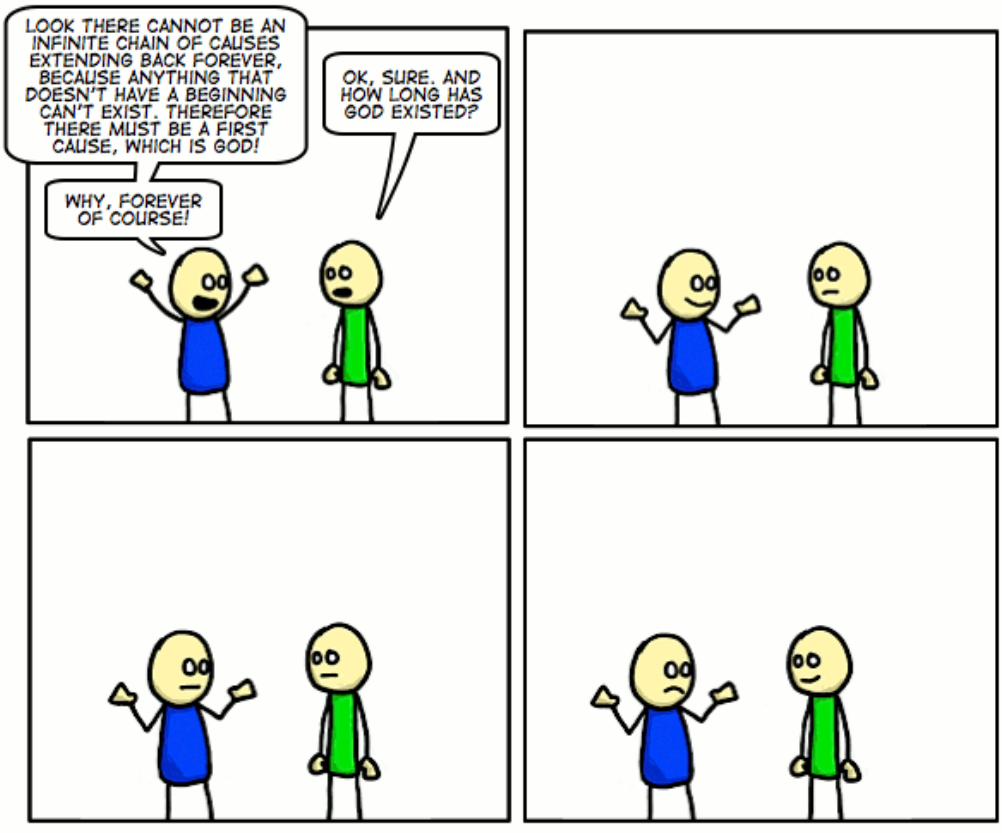
2. Everything that exists has a cause.

4. So, there must have been a first uncaused cause: God.

Now wait a minute—if *everything* that exists has a cause, and if God exists, then *God must have a cause*. But that's not at all what we wanted to say!

Here's the logical problem: *if 2 is true, then 4* ***must*** *be false, and if 4 is true, then 2* ***must*** *be false!* That is, this argument is ***necessarily invalid!*** To look at this in another way: a valid argument is one where *if all the premises are true, then the conclusion cannot be false*. So if we make 2 (the premise) true, then the conclusion…oh, wait. If 2 is true, then 4 *must* be false. This argument cannot possibly be valid.

And if we say, *yeah, well 2 can be false*. Then we don't get the oomph of a sound argument, hence no reason to believe that God must exist. So let's step back. We *are* closer than we were at first; don't lose heart. This is a part of the process of reasoning, of *doing* philosophy.



Rethinking the First Attempt

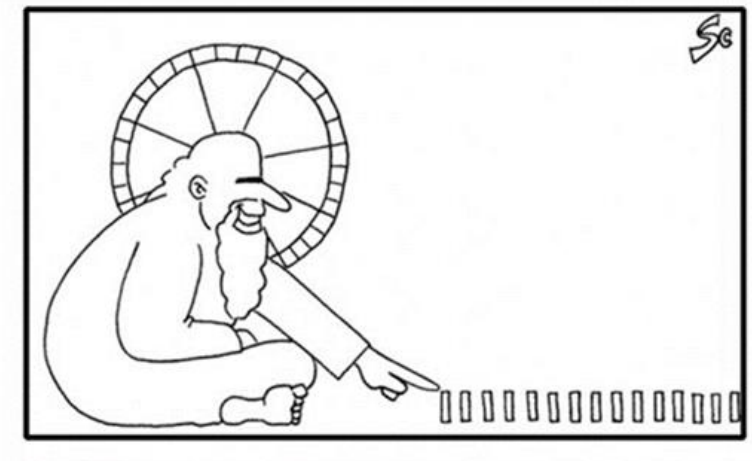
Okay. So we roll up our sleeves, because now things are going to get serious. We're so close we can taste it. What went wrong with **No.1**? Well, it was the logical contradiction between 2 and 4. That was the serious defect. So if we can find another way to think about this, maybe we can repair the error and build a reasonable—and valid—argument.

Well, we could try to fix 2. It's pretty obvious that somebody who wants this argument to work wants to say rather that *everything but God has a cause*. But we can't say *that* without reverting to our initial problem of smuggling God into the premises (begging the question).

Besides, why think that only God (if God exists) would be the only thing without a cause? Why not that the whole universe exists without a cause? If we were to presume that special case for one, why not for the other? Unless we want no proof and just random assertions, this will get us nothing. And since we want the truth, we can't settle for unjustified and unjustifiable claims.

Some might say, *well, we could change 2 to say that 'everything must have some or other cause,'* meaning that things can either *be caused by something else* or can *be self-caused*. God, therefore, caused God. Seems perfect! Now God can be caused (2 doesn't contradict 4) because God is *self-caused*.

But—this actually makes matters worse. Much worse. And convoluted. Consider the whole process of causation If I say x causes y's existence, then I mean that x must *already exist* to cause y to exist. The thing that causes the other to exist must be around *before* the thing being caused. But if I say x = God and y = God, then I'm saying that God must exist to cause God to exist. That's just crazy talk.



Something cannot exist before it exists. If x existed before x existed, then x would already exist and not need any cause to make x exist.

Something exists *first*, then can cause other things to happen. If what x causes to happen is supposed to be its own existence, then the very fact that this thing already exists demonstrates it doesn't need any help in that department. In short, things can't cause themselves to exist.

In short, we really can't fix premise 2. It's a mess.

Maybe there's something wrong with our universal principle itself. To recover from our painful logical inconsistency between 2 and 4, we need to rethink. This is an *a posteriori* argument. That means that it starts with our experiences. So—when thinking about causation and the world around us—what exactly *do* we experience?

We don't experience *existence* being caused. Existence is a state. We don't experience stars, cars, trains, or planes being caused. These are objects. Objects aren't caused. What *are* caused are *events*. A state is the way something just happens to be. But events are happenings. So if, for example, you think of your skin color, that's a state. On the other hand, if you got that skin color by playing volleyball on the beach all day one particularly hot and sunny day (and now you're a lobster), that *playing volleyball all day* is an event. Your hitting that perfect point is an event. Your looking like a watermelon Jolly Rancher is a state. Events are caused; states aren't.

So this gives us a clue. When we say we experience things existing, if we would speak more carefully, we mean that we experience *things coming into existence*. Sure, that makes sense. We see things born. Right before I moved here, our cat had kittens. One day, she was a single kitty, the next she was a single mother. One day we discovered a little kitty nest with a couple teeny fuzzy felines nestled under a very protective mommy—something existed there that didn't before. We

experienced them *coming into* existence. Events cause events!

In fact, that's what Aristotle told us when he said that anything that comes-to-be is moved by something else. So that's the ticket! We can follow his argument more carefully, and finally posit our final argument.

The Final Version: *CAUSAL*

In our experiences of the world, we see things out there, like kittens and lattes and MCC students and ice and hybrid vehicles, things that are caused to come into existence. But whatever comes into existence must have *something else* cause it to come into existence (we learned this when we played around with self-causation!). But like Aristotle noted, when something is not moving, it needs something to initially set it into motion—to give it that push. But like Aristotle also noted, we can't have a series of past causes that stretches on back infinitely through time. An infinite regress of past causes is impossible, so there must have been a first cause. This first cause can't be something that comes into existence, and it can't be something self-caused, so it must be something that has *always* existed, with the ability to cause other things to come into existence.

See how seeming roadblocks can really be tools in making a better path? If we hadn't gotten ourselves tripped up in the logical contradiction, we might not have found how to more clearly express what we were trying to get at regarding causation. All that thinking we can now put into a tidy argument, and we'll set it up in standard form:

CAUSAL*

1. There are things that come into existence.
2. Whatever comes into existence is caused to exist by something else.
3. There cannot be an infinite series of past causes.

---

4. So there was a first (uncaused) cause (God).

So let's check it. Do we presuppose God's existence in the premises? No. And we know we cleaned up that logical defect. Now. If all the premises are true—do the guarantee the truth of the premise? Is the argument *valid*?

Why yes, yes it is.

What we have left to do, now that we've finally come up with a pretty good little argument, is to test it for soundness. And that's what our last section on this particular argument will do. It doesn't matter much if we have a valid argument if it turns out all the premises aren't true. Even though the argument is *good*, it doesn't give us reason to embrace the conclusion unless we can demonstrate it is sound.

Testing For Validity and Soundness

Before we test it, let's check it to get a mental lock on its features. First, the argument is *a posteriori*, so that means it must have an ***empirical premise***. Check. It does in premise 1, which states that things come into existence. Second, the argument must have a ***universal principle***. Check. It does this in premise 3, which tells us there can't be an infinite regress of past causes. These two things are crucial for this argument to work. We can't reason anything from experience to general conclusion about anything else if we don't have a principle. So these two in mind, we look at the truth of the premises.

The easiest and best way to proceed is simply to go down the line. Is premise 1 true? Well, obviously. How about premise 2? Yes, we already went over that when trying to fix our bad premise from the Initial Version. So that leaves premise 3. What evidence do we have that there *cannot* be an infinite series of past causes? It looks like this premise is the one we're going to need to spend most of our energy on.

It just so happens that the argument we slowly came to is an illustrious and long-lived argument that was first developed by the Muslim philosophers and theologians of the Kalam (a medieval Muslim

* That's ***causal***, not ***casual***.

philosophical tradition) and famously restated by Thomas Aquinas.* It also happens that this particular argument has gained new popularity in American theological-philosophical circles in the last fifty years. It's a biggie, this one.

Although the original Kalam argument doesn't itself rely specifically on it, our little argument follows Aquinas in basing its understanding of how causation works on the motion observations of the great Aristotle (briefly discussed above), and finally, the whole causal principle is analyzed by the unsurpassed thinker, Immanuel Kant.† Heavy hitters in Western thought. Fortunately, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Kant all presented defenses of the Causal Regress Principle.

Aristotle's Defense

Let's suppose you're sitting in the Lyceum, the school Aristotle founded. And let's suppose you're listening to this great man lecture. Here's how he might have put his defense of this universal principle, which we'll now give a name to: ***the causal regress principle*** (or the CRP, for short).

"The CRP," he begins, after shuffling around looking for his notes, "looks obviously true."

This is because it *seems* pretty obvious, when you think about the nature of infinity, that there can't be an *actual* infinite number of anything. In the actual world, such a series, or collection, or set—whatever—is *incoherent*.‡

Why?

Well, *suppose* there were actually an infinite number of marbles. And suppose that half of these marbles were black, and the other half were white. One of the interesting properties of infinity—as your math teachers probably told you—is that if you cut an infinite number in *half*, you'll find that both halves will be the same size. *Infinite*. Thus, if I were to take away all the black marbles, the collection I am left with is no smaller than that collection with which I began. The number is still infinite!

But it is *absurd* to speak of an actual collection of things, a subset of which is the same size as the whole set of them. We can talk about a *potential* infinite, I suppose, in the same sense that we could just keep on counting and counting and counting the marbles and—of course—no matter how long we kept on counting, we'd have only enumerated *finitely* many (if even a very large number) marbles. Maybe we can say there are innumerably many things in an actual set, but it seems clear to me that we cannot make sense of an *actual* infinite number of anything.§ That is, there is no *actual* infinite.

Kant's Defense

After your course with Professor Aristotle, you go down the hall (in our dream college) to listen to the lecture by Professor Kant. He's defending the very same CRP, but you're surprised to see that his defense is *way* different than Aristotle's. He enters the class, precisely on time and immaculately attired, as is his custom. No nonsense and very organized, Herr Doktor Kant jumps right in.

> *Everybody agrees, when we consider it, that an infinite series of events doesn't have an end—a terminus or point of completion. But, my dear students, the series of past events does terminate! It does so* ***right now!*** *At this present moment, the*

* One might say the Kalam argument is slightly different, in that it doesn't clearly unpack the causal regress principle; however, it is clearly implied and necessary for the Kalam argument to preserve validity.

† Oh, and we'll see how it is defended by a popular American apologist, who's become the go-to guy among Christian thinkers in evangelical circles.

‡ I bet it's pretty groovy by now that you understand all the terminology at work here! He's talking about what's possible in α, and claiming also that an infinite regress is *incoherent.* Oh, the power of understanding!

§ A similar defense of the CRP is presented by American theologian & apologist, William Lane Craig. He claims that an "actual infinite" cannot exist, arguing that

1. An infinite temporal regress of events would constitute an actual infinite.
2. An actual infinite cannot exist.

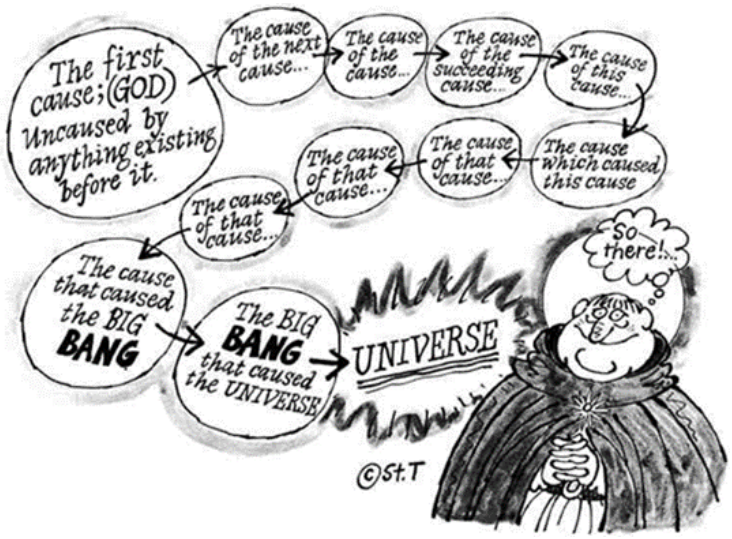
3. So an infinite temporal regress of events cannot exist.

series ends. This proves that the series cannot be infinite. Let us put our argument into good form, shall we?

1. By definition, *x is an infinite series if x has no end, or point of completion.*
2. Thus, any series that does have an end cannot be an infinite series.
3. But the series of past causes in time has an end point—right this very moment!

4. Therefore, the series of past causes in time cannot be infinite.

And with that, believing the case to be demonstrated, Kant dismisses the class.



Aquinas's Defense

Wow. Two defenses, each as good as the next! Since you're out of Kant's class early (a huge surprise, given how carefully he organizes things), you decide to sneak into the good Doctor's lecture across the hall. What a great thing to realize that Aquinas is also defending this very principle! You find a seat near the back, and get your pen and pad out just in time to catch the gist of his defense:

> *Consider a series of past causes. There will be an earlier, intermediate, and a final element. Now if we consider causation, we know that if we eliminate a cause, we've eliminated its effect. So, if one eliminates the first element of a series, then one would eliminate the intermediate elements, and by so doing, eliminate the final element. Therefore, in a beginningless series, there would be no first element, no intermediate elements, and so no final element—which just means there'd be no elements at all! This is nonsense, because a series with nothing in it isn't a series at all. Therefore, we can't have a causal series that goes on and on infinitely backwards. There must be a first element.*

Weighing the Defenses

So you go to the on-campus café—some great little place with amazing salads, good coffee, fantastic sandwiches, and low prices. You sit by the fireplace (of course), and go over your notes.

Contra Aristotle

But as you review Aristotle's defense of that Causal Regress Principle, you begin to have some worries.

His defense of the CRP is that you can't have an *actual* infinite, there are no actual infinite sets of things.

But—his class came right after your math class, and you distinctly remember your instructor talking about infinite sets. In fact, the more you think about it, if we can't have an actual infinite set, why do we even have mathematics, which is, after all, the *science* of infinite sets? We *do* have infinite sets—the set of all real numbers is one. We know that if we have some integer n, we can always have n+1. Always. Infinity. Real numbers. Actual numbers. That are right here in α.

Aristotle said that this would cause a contradiction, but how? Because half of the set of infinity is still infinitely large? Sure, it's a *weird* property, but it's not *absurd* or *incoherent*. In fact, if it were incoherent, it'd not be possible at all, let alone in the actual world, yet we use infinity in mathematics all the time.

And here's another weird thought. Doesn't the theist—the one who wants to defend the CRP (premise 3 in the argument for God's existence)—doesn't this person want <u>*God*</u> to have infinite knowledge? Infinite power? Infinite goodness? Why in the world would a defender of 3 want to use *this* defense of the CRP? If we say that there cannot possibly be an infinite set of anything, then there cannot possibly be an infinite set of God's attributes or God's knowledge.

But surely God knows everything (remember, God is *omniscient*), so God knows all the numbers. Surely God can count. Well, then that means that God knows all the members of an infinite set. And God

knows all the mathematical operations, like 1+1=2 and 2+1=3 and 3+1=4 and 4+1=5 and 5+1=6 and 6+1=7 and 7=1-8 and 8+1=9 and 9+1=10 and—well, there are infinitely many such true propositions. Like, 1×2=1 and 2×2=4 and 4×2=8 and 8×2=16 and 16×2=32 and—well there are infinitely many of those too! In fact, each kind of basic mathematical operation has an infinite set, which is the same infinite size of the whole set of all existing mathematical operations. And God knows them all (if God exists).*

If God exists, then God's knowledge is infinite. So this defense—by our brilliant Professor Aristotle—is not viable. There is no logical problem with an actual infinite set. In fact, theists want at least one such infinite set to exist: the set of all things God knows.

Contra Kant

That was frustrating, but you still have the other defenses. So. What of Kant's? He says that a causal series cannot be infinite because no infinite series has an end point, and this series does, namely the current moment. Seems good.

But. But wait. Again, you think of what you know of infinity from your math class. Number lines can end at 0 but go back forever, through -1, -2, -3, -4, -5, -6, -7, -8….and so on. Infinite sets *can* have an end point, just no beginning. In fact, number lines were really easy—grade school stuff. Since we can make perfectly good sense of an infinite series with an end point, we have to toss out Kant's defense, too.

Contra Aquinas

Finally, you think after reviewing Aquinas's defense, here's a good argument. You read it over a couple more times, because you're being very careful. After all, it was a lot of work to make ***CAUSAL***, and you really want to be sure you can defend premise 3, the CRP. Carefully, you put his argument into standard form:

1. If x is a causal series, then x will include an earlier, intermediate, and final element.
2. If a cause is eliminated in a causal series, then the effect of that cause is likewise eliminated.
3. So if the first element of a causal series is eliminated, then all intermediate elements would be eliminated.
4. And if all the intermediate elements are eliminated, then the final element will be eliminated.
5. So a causal series without a beginning will be a series with no elements at all.
6. A series with no elements is incoherent.

---

7. Therefore, there must be a first element; that is, there cannot be an infinite regress of past causes.

Then you catch it. You reread premise 3, and your heart sinks. That's the same mistake we made when we made our intuitive argument! It's very subtle, but Aquinas has committed a fallacy. He's smuggled a first cause into his argument that is supposed to *argue for* a first cause. He's begged the question, *assuming there is a first cause* when he hasn't yet shown it. You can't *take away* a first something if there isn't a first something. You can't take away something that hasn't yet been demonstrated. Not without smuggling it in. Aquinas just *presumes* that any causal series must have a start.

Final Considerations

So do we close our notebooks and give up? Aristotle tried to demonstrate that *any* kind of infinite set would have to be only potentially infinite, not actually so. But this failed. Kant tried to demonstrate that any *series*, if it were infinite, would be endless, but we saw that an infinite series can be beginningless. And Aquinas tried to say that any *causal series* could not be without

*And the response to Craig runs along the same lines, but takes a more direct aim at the regress itself: that God would have to know it. While Craig argues (rightly) that God is only required to know what is logically knowable, this logical knowability extends to interestingly regressive knowables.

For example, if it is true that "Craig says an actual infinite cannot exist," (let's call that proposition "C"), then God knows that C. (God knows that Craig says this.) And since God knows all that is logically knowable, which includes reflexive states like "I know that x," then God knows that God knows that C. And again, on the same grounds, God knows that God knows that God knows that C. And so on, *ad infinitum*. A regress. And an infinite one. Hence, if God exists, then, being omniscient, God knows an infinite regress.

It follows that if God exists, then an actual infinite regress *can* exist—that is to say that God's existence does not require the rejection of an actual infinite or an infinite regress. This has the uncomfortable consequence of entailing a dilemma: either 1) God doesn't exist or 2) An actual infinite can exist (the CRP is false) and the argument for God's existence from it is unsound.

beginning, but he succeeds only by begging the question.

We find that the three best defenses of the CRP—defenses of our premise 3—fail. We cannot tell whether this argument is sound, even though it is valid. The CRP *feels* right for the theist (one who believes in the existence of God, as defined), but it can't be logically demonstrated. And we can't go on emotions or feelings. It's an unhappy thing. But there it is. This argument doesn't end the discussion on God's existence. But it's pretty nifty—let's look at it again:

CAUSAL

1. There are things that come into existence.
2. Whatever comes into existence is caused to exist by something else.
3. There cannot be an infinite series of past causes.

---

4. So there was a first cause (God).

The truth of 3 isn't defended. What of 4? Yes, if we could prove 3, 4 would follow and we'd have—

God?

Right?

Double Checking the Conclusion

The premises guarantee something, but is it *God*? Didn't we define God as *an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent being*? Where in this conclusion do we have all that? Is this first cause shown to be perfectly moral? No. All powerful? Well—powerful, but ALL powerful? No. ALL knowing? No. It could be a blind causation.

Well crap.

And not only that, remember, back when we were trying to grasp the CRP, that we noted that *events cause events*?

Well, God isn't an event. God is a *being*. So even if this valid argument were sound, even if every proof of the CRP worked—we'd not have demonstrated the existence of ***God***. Just the existence of some cause. Some event. And further? We have a cause that existed *at one time*. Sure, the cause doesn't ***come into existence***, but it surely might have ***gone out of existence***. We know this cause existed back then—whenever it was—but not now! Didn't we want to show that God *exists* not that God *existed at one time*?

It turns out that this argument doesn't prove what we wanted.

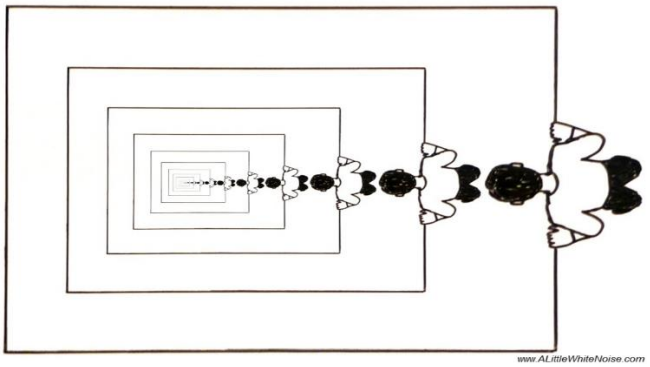
It turns out that were we to find a defense of the CRP that works, we would have proved *something*. We'd have proved that there was something —some event—that kicked everything into existence, but that something is not known to be omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, or even yet, a being.

But never despair.

First, we might have a true conclusion even if we cannot find a good argument (yet) to demonstrate it true. But in that case, we cannot say that we *know* the conclusion is true. And second—we're going to look at another, very technical argument that attempts to demonstrate God's existence by a different kind of causation.

However, this time, I'm going to let the thinker totally speak for himself, with only a few notes for clarification as we go along. The first little selection from Descartes sets up the point of *clear and distinct* perception, which is important to the understanding of the universal principle he uses, which is quite different than the Causal Regress Principle (CRP) that we've used so far. Read on, and you'll see.

But first, it's time for Task 59. Write a careful one- to two-page summary (according to formal writing requirements, which you can learn from your college writing center!), explaining how to set up and analyze an *a posteriori* argument (like CAUSAL). What kinds of premises must be present? What process do you follow in analyzing the argument for validity? Don't focus on just CAUSAL. Abstract the process and explain how you use this process for ***any*** causal argument. This summary is due when this part of the reading will be discussed in class.



TEAM PROJECT: ARGUING VALIDLY AGAINST GOD'S EXISTENCE

God Cannot Exist

As a team, build an *a posteriori* argument that attempts—deductively—to demonstrate the truth of this specific conclusion: ***God cannot exist***.

Now I realize you might not agree with this claim. In fact, I'm hoping you don't—because it's very hard to make an argument that works, and even harder if you already agree with the conclusion. This gives us the opportunity to practice the Rule "Imagine and debate against an Ideal Opponent." What would an eminently rational person use for evidence?

As a team, then, you'll want to start with your conclusion: God cannot exist. Then, following the philosophical procedure, define your term (God) as your first premise.

You're making an *a posteriori* argument, so you'll need an empirical premise and a universal principle. What sorts of things do people experience that give them reason to conclude God doesn't exist? Once your team agrees, put that down as a premise. Now carefully, thoroughly, and as a team, discuss what you can derive from these premises that would conclude that God cannot exist.

Objections to your argument are <u>not</u> to be a part of this project. There will be ample class discussion on such objections as this discussion proceeds. Rather, make your argument itself as airtight as you can. We'll challenge it, later.

You will need to turn in your team's argument *in standard form*. Make sure every team member agrees on the argument and its presentation. Your instructor will set the due date for this project. Write that date on the assignment, along with the names of all your participating team members. Turn in *one* paper for the whole team. Please write legibly

Reading Descartes

As you begin to study a primary text *for* God's existence, I recommend you put into practice the skills we're developing here.

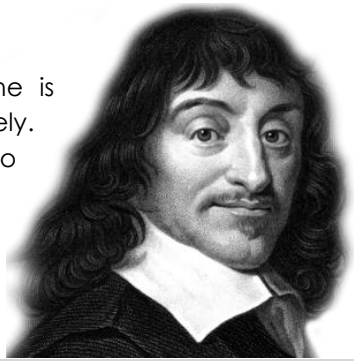
- Scribble notes in the column of the text.
- Engage in a conversation with Descartes.
- If you think he's putting something into an argument, try to put it into standard form.
- Make sure you understand when he's defining terms.
- And ready yourself, we're entering the land of Critical Question assignments.

ANOTHER COSMOLOGICAL APPROACH

Although it's true that the Kalam argument has been around for centuries, we studied it in its modern shape, and we talked about it in contemporary terms. Most of the arguments for God's existence are not so accessible: they use technical jargon (no, Virginia, that last stuff wasn't near as technical as it gets!), and they rely on careful logical distinctions. It's for this reason that I have chosen to leave some of my personal favorites out of this textbook (the ontological arguments, which rely wholly on logic itself). Come find me if you want a riveting discussion on the logical necessity of Being.

Anywho, you've reached a turning point in our intellectual journey. You're ready. You understand how to build an argument, and you've practiced analyzing it for soundness. Now you're going to read one of the Great Philosophers. Rene Descartes is considered the Father of Modern Philosophy. Not that he was the only guy doing what he did when he did it, but that's just how much influence he had and still has on Western Thought.

Descartes (pronounced "Dey-cart", but don't you dare omit that final "s" from his name), was a brilliant French thinker who not only reshaped the Western approach to doing philosophy, but he is also the guy who gave us the Cartesian coordinates. Mister Math Mind. That means that he is using terminology *very* precisely. And that means that I'm going to need to give him some conceptual set up before you read one of his arguments for God's existence.



IMPORTANT CARTESIAN CONCEPTS

Regarding Clear and Distinct Perception

Principles of Philosophy

Descartes[*]

43. *That we shall never err if we give our assent only to what we clearly and distinctly perceive.*

But it is certain we will never admit falsity for truth, so long as we judge only of that which we clearly and distinctly perceive; because, as God is no deceiver, the faculty of knowledge which he has given us cannot

NOTES

[*] Available on gutenberg.org. All quotations from Descartes' *Principles* are from this public domain translation.

NOTES

be fallacious, nor, for the same reason, the faculty of will, when we do not extend it beyond the objects we clearly know. And even although this truth could not be established by reasoning, the minds of all have been so impressed by nature as spontaneously to assent to whatever is clearly perceived, and to experience an impossibility to doubt of its truth.

44. *That we uniformly judge improperly when we assent to what we do not clearly perceive, although our judgment may chance to be true; and that it is frequently our memory which deceives us by leading us to believe that certain things were formerly sufficiently understood by us.*

It is likewise certain that, when we approve of any reason which we do not apprehend, we are either deceived, or, if we stumble on the truth, it is only by chance, and thus we can never possess the assurance that we are not in error. I confess it seldom happens that we judge of a thing when we have observed we do not apprehend it, because it is a dictate of the natural light never to judge of what we do not know. But we most frequently err in this, that we presume upon a past knowledge of much to which we give our assent, as to something treasured up in the memory, and perfectly known to us; whereas, in truth, we have no such knowledge.

45. *What constitutes clear and distinct perception*.

There are indeed a great many persons who, through their whole lifetime, never perceive anything in a way necessary for judging of it properly; for the knowledge upon which we can establish a certain and indubitable judgment must be not only clear, but also, distinct. I call that clear which is present and manifest to the mind giving attention to it, just as we are said clearly to see objects when, being present to the eye looking on, they stimulate it with sufficient force. and it is disposed to regard them; but the distinct is that which is so precise and different from all other objects as to comprehend in itself only what is clear.

46. It is shown, from the example of pain, that a perception may be clear without being distinct, but that it cannot be distinct unless it is clear.

For example, when any one feels intense pain, the knowledge which he has of this pain is very clear, but it is not always distinct; for men usually confound it with the obscure judgment they form regarding its nature, and think that there is in the suffering part something similar to the sensation of pain of which they are alone conscious. And thus perception may be clear without being distinct, but it can never be distinct without likewise being clear.

DESCARTES' CAUSAL ADEQUACY PRINCIPLE (THE CAP)

The argument in *Meditation Three* (below) is complicated by a number of difficult concepts. Understanding these concepts, however, is essential to understanding Descartes' causal argument for the existence of God. So we're going to take a detour into Cartesian thinking so as to better understand the universal principle he uses for his causal argument.*

Kinds of Things

Everything that exists can be categorized into one of three kinds. I'm going to chuck a bunch of definitions at you, then explain them.

Don't look at me like that.

*X is a **property** iff x is a way a substance can be.*

*X is a **substance** iff x is something that exists independently and can carry properties.*

*X is **accidental** iff x is the way a substance happens to be, but is not necessary to that substance.*

*X is **essential** iff x is a property of some substance that is necessary to that substance.*

*X is a **mode** iff x is an accidental property.* †

*X is an **attribute** iff x is a necessary property.*

*X is a **mind** iff x is a substance that carries only thinking attributes.*

*X is a **body** iff x is a substance that carries only extended attributes.*

These last four definitions are not universally accepted by philosophers, but are what Descartes means when he uses the terms, so you will need to understand them. Furthermore, when we discuss the philosophy of mind, we'll return to these definitions and come to a better understanding as to why contemporary philosophers question them. But since Descartes basically started the conversation, we'll start with his terminology.

Property Talk: Modes & Attributes

First, we start with *substances*. These are things that exist out there in reality. So there are cars and bees and twenty-one-speed bicycles and trees and microbes and numbers and people and vanilla lattes and overcooked hamburgers. Each of these things are *in-themselves* thingiemabobs. They exist as independent entities somehow. But how do you tell Bob the bicycle from Stan the bicycle? It's their properties. Bob is over there and Stan is right here, for example. *Location* is a way something can be in the world. So location is a property. Bob our beloved bicycle is a bright blue. And Stan is a sizzling chartreuse. Color is a property. Bob and Stan both have pedals, too. And derailleurs. And handlebars. And seats. These are ways Bob and Stan exist in the world. But it's interesting, now, because whether or not a bike has wheels, pedals, a derailleur, and handlebars is a different way to be in the world than its location and color. If you take away the derailleur, you don't have the same kind of bike. You might not even have a bike at all. If you take away the wheels, you don't have a bike, rather, a bike frame. So the properties that are *mandatory* for the bike to be what it is and not something else are those *essential* properties, or what Descartes calls *attributes*. More carefully, at least for Descartes, there are only two attributes: *extension* (the attribute of bodies) and *thought* (the attribute of minds).

Think of it this way. If you're a body, then the one thing you need to have, in order to exist at all, is three-dimensionality. You need to be extended into space. All the other properties you have are *ways in which you take up space*. So these properties depend on your extension. So take it away, and it's impossible for you to exist in space. If, on the other hand, you're a mind, then the one thing you need to have, in order to exist at all, is thought. Whether its conscious, subconscious, daydreaming, carefully deliberating, or passively absorbing a binge-watching session of "Breaking Bad," your mental substance is chock full of thought properties. Each specific thought is itself an accidental property (a mode), but the fact that your mind is thinking is essential for it to exist at all. Minds don't stop thinking—if they do, they stop existing. Hence the joke: *Descartes is sitting in a bar. The*

* The term *Cartesian* literally means "Descartes's" or "from Descartes" or "having to do with Descartes." Even the Cartesian coordinates you know and treasure from geometry studies are called that because good old Rene Descartes discovered them.

† Please note that if you go on to study modern philosophy on a more detailed level, you will find that the concept of "mode" is more complicated than presented here. Nevertheless, taking mode to mean "accidental property" will work for our purposes.

bartender asks him, "Want another drink?" Descartes says, "I think not" and promptly disappears.

So we look at it this way: there are many different *kinds* of bodies, but for Descartes, what is substantial about them is that they are bodies, and what is essential to bodies is extension. In the same way, there are many different kinds of minds (human, perhaps some animals, perhaps some superhuman beings like angels or divinities), but what is essential about them is that they are thinking things, regardless what the particular thoughts they contain at any moment might be.

Most important for our discussion is that properties—colors, shapes, thoughts, heights, etc.—cannot exist floating around on their own. Instead properties are always properties *of* a substance. For example, a given mode (accidental property) of being one foot tall does not exist all by itself floating around in space—instead it is (say) Jasper the Wonder Cat who is one foot tall. Blueness does not exist on its own, rather every blue property is the blueness of a substance (like, my cup). Substances are what *have* the properties.

Reality (or Being)

Whew! You've made it thus far. Now we can get down and dirty with the Causal Adequacy Principle (CAP). It requires us to look at how ideas can reflect reality. This requires a few more terms. Quit looking at me like that.

> *X is **formal reality** iff x is the amount of 'being' or 'existence' something has.*
>
> *X is **representative** (sometimes called 'objective') **reality** iff x is the amount 'being' or 'existence' the content of an idea has.*

Again, this is Cartesian terminology. Actually, a lot of thinkers used this kind of terminology until around the late 1700s, so even though we don't think quite like this anymore, it's helpful to get a grip on it.

We can think of something in terms of how complex it is. The more complex something is, the thinking went, the more *being* that thing has. So the more complex something is, the more *formal reality* that thing has. Consider some examples:*

1. The Empire State Building has more formal reality than a stone.
2. A horse has more formal reality than an single blade of grass.
3. A book (the substance) has more formal reality than its color (a mode).
4. A cat (the substance) has more formal reality than its shape (a mode).

This gives us a logical bit of knowledge. *Substances have more formal reality than either attributes or modes*. Why? Because substances can exist regardless whatever particular mode they happen to have. And they exist independently of modes. Modes are like parasites, existing only through their substance hosts. And attributes only describe the substance. It's a thing that exists *in this way* (extended or thinking). So substances have more formal reality than properties, no matter what kind of property you name.

It also lets us see that more complicated substances have more formal reality than less complicated substances. A building is a substance (body) that is

* This discussion has its roots in Jason Waller's teaching handout for his 2006 Intro to Philosophy course at Purdue. Hooray for good friends and office mates.

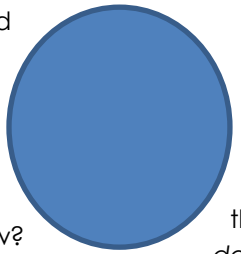
way more complicated than a rock (body). So it has more formal reality. A *living* body is often more complicated than an inert one,* so we can say that a blade of grass has more formal reality than a chunk of petrified wood. And some living bodies—Jasper the wonder cat and Scout his faithful feline companion—are more complex than others—Alvin the Amoeba. So we can see that some substances have more formal reality than others.

Ideas and Representation

Okay, so minds are substances whose attribute is thought, and each individual idea a mind has is a mode. Ideas are accidental properties of minds. Minds can survive stream of consciousness. At the moment I am thinking about coffee, the next moment about food, then about *Doctor Who,* then about how I need a cough drop and then about while I'm getting one maybe I should look in the mirror, then about how I think maybe I've gained some facial weight, and so on. My mind goes all over the place, from idea to idea to idea, yet it survives. I'm still here!

Ideas, since they're properties, have formal reality. Just like the weight of a book is real, just like the color, texture, odor, and mass of that book is real, so too is the idea of that book. Properties have formal reality, even if they're *thought* properties. What's the complexity of an idea? Well, huh. It's an idea. Is one idea more complex than another?

Your first instinct might be to say, *yes, yes, BJ, some are more complex than others*. Well, in a way. And we'll get to that way in a moment. First, I want you to think about the idea "building" and the idea "blue." Now is one more complicated than the other? Again, you'd be tempted to say *yes*. How? What makes (I'm guessing) *building* more complex than *blue*? Surely it isn't the fact that they're just ideas. Isn't it the *content* that's more complex? Huh. So let's not go there. Not yet. is *building* more complex than *blue* in the same way a building (substance) is more complex than blue (mode)? Actually, no. Buildings are substances, sure (they're bodies), but the idea *building* is not a substance. It's a mode. It's an accidental property of a mind. It's an *idea*. Just like the idea *blue*.



And it turns out, if we think very carefully, that all ideas have exactly the same amount of formal reality as all other ideas. They're all mind-dependent, accidental properties. That's it.

What about the seeming difference, then? Well, *this* is where we get *representative* reality. Ideas do more than just occupy mental capacities; they represent. (Represent!) It isn't that the idea *building* is *itself* more complicated than the idea *blue*; rather, it's that the thing that *building* represents is more complicated than the thing *blue* represents. So ideas, *as* ideas, have no more or less being (formal reality) than any other ideas. But some ideas have more complex *content* (representative reality) than other ideas.

The Causal Adequacy Principle (or CAP)

Deep breath: you're ready! So we start with this basic intuition: *nothing comes from nothing.* According to Descartes (and many others), if something exists out there, we can always find something that caused that thing to come into existence (hence the first half of this chapter!). So consider Jasper the Blammo Cat.

Question: Why does Jasper the BC exist?

Answer: Because his mother (Mama Cat) got pregnant and had kittens.

Question: Why does Jasper the BC have grey and white fur?

Answer: Because his mother and father had such and so DNA and passed it on …

No matter which property about Jasper we pick, there will always be an answer to the question, *why does this exist?* There are no features of my blammo

* I know, I know. Don't go bringing things like a comparison between amoebas and computer chips, or I'll start giving *you* looks. I'm just trying to get you the gist of this. To be alive is to have a whole host of functions that, as a general rule, nonliving things don't have. Hence the complexity. As always, this is to be taken as a general introduction, not the final say on all things metaphysical.

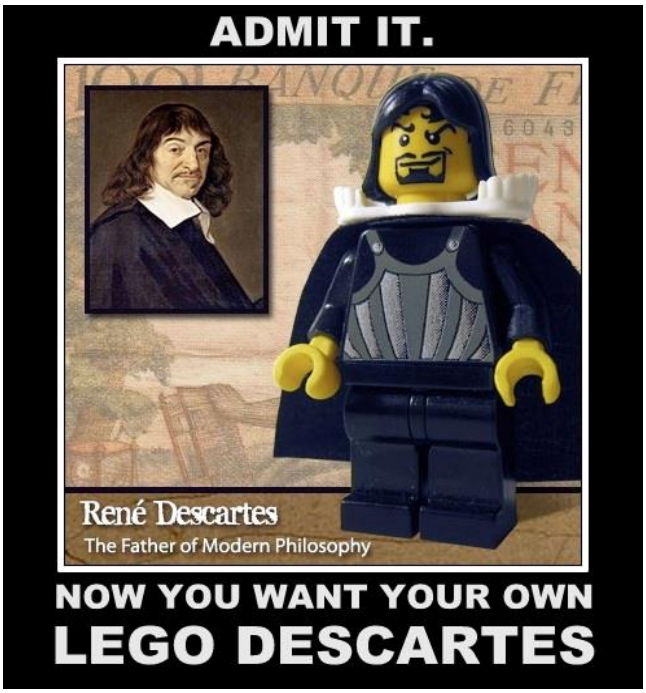
buddy that popped into existence uncaused. Every property he has he got *from something*.

Why does Jasper have a scratch by his nose? (Because apparently, he annoyed his roommate kitty, Scout.) Why is Jasper so huge? (Genes. He's a Maine Coon.) Why does he always wind up with a Rasta patch by his tail? (Because he can't seem to reach that spot to avoid getting a kitty dred.) Each of these questions has an answer because each of these properties—nose scratch, size, hair mat—had a cause to make it come to be. It would be incomprehensible (inconceivable!) to claim blammo kitty has a kitty dred without any cause. It doesn't make sense to claim that he has a hair mat by his tail and yet *nothing caused that hair mat to develop*. If he has a hair mat, then there must be an *explanation* for the mat.

In the same way we can think about how things come to be—and we see that we can't get something from nothing—we can think about how *ideas* come to be. So we can first think about how an idea came to be caused in a mind. Well, certainly something had to cause it to come into being.

Here's a little experiment. Purple rhino. Now, before you read that, you were, I'm pretty sure (though not absolutely certain), you weren't thinking about purple rhinos. But now, you've got that idea in your mind, and you're stuck with it for a while (at least until I'm done with this discussion). How did that idea come to be in your mind? Well, *I* caused it. The immediate kick-in-the-mind that brings an idea is called an *efficient* cause. (We'll talk about the different kinds of causes later, but for now, know this term as Descartes uses it.) But more carefully, how is it possible for you to have an idea that includes *both* the idea *rhino* and the idea *purple*? The content of that idea's pretty complex (it has a lot of representative reality). Surely you don't have any *rhino* in you. And I don't have any rhino in me.* So how can either of us have this idea? Well, there's something *out there in reality* that the idea can represent. There are rhinos out there. (At least for now.†) That is, *there's something out there that has sufficiently complicated formal reality for this idea to have this amount of representative reality*.

If nothing comes from nothing, then you can't get really complicated ideas without there being something already out there that's really complicated. If you have a complicated idea, you must have something complicated that caused the idea. So something like a rhino, that has all the right kind of complexity in the right kinds of ways, has the power to cause in me—and then in you—the idea of rhino. How did you get that idea? Well, originally, you saw one. Maybe in a National Geographic special or in a photograph, but you saw one. Then when I mentioned it, bam! There's that idea again.



* For the politically savvy stickler, I said *rhino* not *RINO*.

† Whether they continue to be out there, and what your responsibility might be in this situation, do look in the Ethics section of this textbook, specifically under the Utilitarianism chapter (chapter 17) where we look to the work of Peter Singer.

How about the purple part? Well, We have this amazing capacity to glue together ideas into new ideas. Innovation. But we couldn't just invent a new color. We don't have that power. Rather, there's something *out there* in the physical world (light) that we experience and gives us the idea that we can have in our mind even when we're not experiencing it. So we can glue together our idea *rhino* with our idea *purple* and we get a new idea. Such is how we (as a species) invented hippogriffs, Uruk-hai, direwolves,* djinns, and jolly green giants. We glued together ideas we gained through experiences, and invented new ideas, using our capacity of *imagination*.

But we can get no such complex ideas without already-extant complex things to have ideas *of*. Hence, we get the ***Causal Adequacy Principle* (CAP)**:

> **CAP:** *The cause of an idea x must have at least as much formal reality as x has representative reality.*

More complex things can cause more complex ideas; less complex things can cause less complex ideas. But if a very simple thing caused a very complex idea, then the complexity of the content of the idea would have no explanation or cause (which is impossible).

The CAP is, if you think about it, a corollary of one of our Rules of Discourse. Or at least it seems Descartes thinks it is. You can't get something from nothing. Don't conclude something stronger than your evidence allows. Descartes explains his understanding of the CAP in *Principles* 17:

> 17. *That the greater objective (representative) perfection there is in our idea of a thing, the greater also must be the perfection of its cause.*
>
> When we further reflect on the various ideas that are in us, it is easy to perceive that there is not much difference among them, when we consider them simply as certain modes of thinking, but that they are widely different, considered in reference to the objects they represent; and that their causes must be so much the more perfect according to the degree of objective perfection contained in them. For there is no difference between this and the case of a person who has the idea of a machine, in the construction of which great skill is displayed, in which circumstances we have a right to inquire how he came by this idea, whether, for example, he somewhere saw such a machine constructed by another, or whether he was so accurately taught the mechanical sciences, or is endowed with such force of genius, that he was able of himself to invent it, without having elsewhere seen anything like it; for all the ingenuity which is contained in the idea objectively only, or as it were in a picture, must exist at least in its first and chief cause, whatever that may be, not only objectively or representatively, but in truth formally or eminently.

You're about to read his whole argument that God exists, using the CAP as his universal principle,. But he summarizes his thinking that this argument works in *Principles* 18-20. I recommend you read this and use it as an overview of the selection from his *Meditations,* below. It'll help you follow his argument.

> 18. *That the existence of God may be again inferred from the above.*
>
> Thus, because we discover in our minds the idea of God, or of an all-perfect Being, we have a right to inquire into the source whence we derive it; and we will discover that the perfections it represents are so immense as to render it quite certain that we could only derive it from an all-perfect Being; that is, from a God really existing. For it is not only manifest by the natural light that nothing cannot be the cause of anything whatever, and that the more perfect cannot arise from the less perfect, so as to be thereby produced as by its efficient and total cause, but also that it is impossible we can have the idea or representation of anything whatever, unless there be somewhere, either in us or out of us, an original which comprises, in reality, all the perfections that are thus represented to us; but, as we do not in any way find in ourselves those absolute perfections of which we have the idea,

* Not to be confused with the extinct dire wolves.

we must conclude that they exist in some nature different from ours, that is, in God, or at least that they were once in him; and it most manifestly follows [from their infinity] that they are still there.

19. *That, although we may not comprehend the nature of God, there is yet nothing which we know so clearly as his perfections.*

This will appear sufficiently certain and manifest to those who have been accustomed to contemplate the idea of God, and to turn their thoughts to his infinite perfections; for, although we may not comprehend them, because it is of the nature of the infinite not to be comprehended by what is finite, we nevertheless conceive them more clearly and distinctly than material objects, for this reason, that, being simple, and unobscured by limits,* they occupy our mind more fully.

20. *That we are not the cause of ourselves, but that this is God, and consequently that there is a God.*

But, because everyone has not observed this, and because, when we have an idea of any machine in which great skill is displayed, we usually know with sufficient accuracy the manner in which we obtained it, and as we cannot even recollect when the idea we have of a God was communicated to us by him, seeing it was always in our minds, it is still necessary that we should continue our review, and make inquiry after our author, possessing, as we do, the idea of the infinite perfections of a God: for it is in the highest degree evident by the natural light, that that which knows something more perfect than itself, is not the source of its own being, since it would thus have given to itself all the perfections which it knows; and that, consequently, it could draw its origin from no other being than from him who possesses in himself all those perfections, that is, from God.

So there you are. You've got concepts and definitions in hand, and you're ready to go. Descartes' *Meditations* include *six* meditations, each one dealing with an important philosophical argument. He is, in this exercise, trying to demonstrate what can be known through careful reason alone. So carefully follow his thinking, and see whether you can piece together his argument.

That was a lot of technical stuff, so you know I'm going to make you slow down and digest it with a Task. For Task 60, write a two-page summary of the Causal Adequacy Principle (CAP). Explain all important concepts, and of course, define all terms (in standard form!). Write this as if writing to a friend who's not taken a philosophy class (so be thorough!), but be sure to follow all college writing criteria. This is due when the class discussion over this section is due.

But wait, there's more! To make sure you are engaging with the reading of the following lengthy text, prepare a Critical Question (CQ) over it. This means that you will need to read the following text *actively*. Jot down questions in the columns. Underline confusing terms, maybe draw boxes around hard areas. Write notes to yourself. And then when you're done reading it, look back over your scribblings, and compose a question. Remember to follow all the CQ criteria, though: which are thoroughly and carefully explained in chapter 2 of this textbook (go back and review them!).

Briefly, though, remember that you are to write a paragraph—with a topic sentence, of course—that asks your question, explains why this (of any possible questions!) is the one that really screams to be asked, and then attempts to answer it *from Descartes' perspective*. That is, do you very best to figure out what he might say to answer your question, given what you *do* understand of Descartes' text and of philosophy in general. Preparing a CQ will do wonders to help you understand a philosophical text. welcome, my friend, to the world of CQs.

And now, without further ado, here's Descartes.

* What of them we do conceive is much less confused. There is, besides, no speculation more calculated to aid in perfecting our understanding, and which is more important than this, inasmuch as the consideration of an object that has no limits to its perfections fills us with satisfaction and assurance. [Descartes' note]

THIRD MEDITATION

from Meditations on Philosophy

Rene Descartes[*]

I will now close my eyes, I will stop my ears, I will turn away my senses from their objects, I will even efface from my consciousness all the images of corporeal things; or at least, because this can hardly be accomplished, I will consider them as empty and false; and thus, holding converse only with myself, and closely examining my nature, I will endeavor to obtain by degrees a more intimate and familiar knowledge of myself. I am a thinking (conscious) thing, that is, a being who doubts, affirms, denies, knows a few objects, and is ignorant of many,—who loves, hates, wills, refuses, who imagines likewise, and perceives; for, as I before remarked, although the things which I perceive or imagine are perhaps nothing at all apart from me and in themselves, I am nevertheless assured that those modes of consciousness which I call perceptions and imaginations, in as far only as they are modes of consciousness, exist in me.

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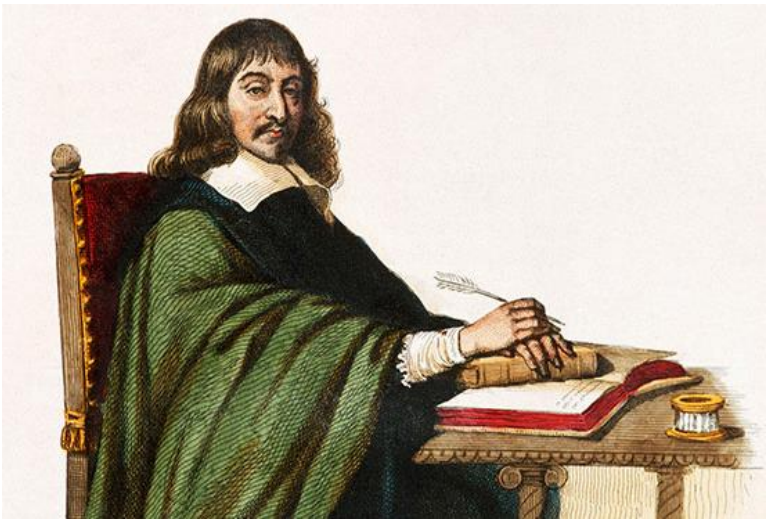

And in the little I have said I think I have summed up all that I really know, or at least all that up to this time I was aware I knew. Now, as I am endeavoring to extend my knowledge more widely, I will use circumspection, and consider with care whether I can still discover in myself anything further which I have not yet hitherto observed. I am certain that I am a thinking thing; but do I not therefore likewise know what is required to render me certain of a truth ? In this first knowledge, doubtless, there is nothing that gives me assurance of its truth except the clear and distinct perception

[*] Public domain translation, available on the Online Classical Library at www.classicallibrary.org.

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of what I affirm, which would not indeed be sufficient to give me the assurance that what I say is true, if it could ever happen that anything I thus clearly and distinctly perceived should prove false; and accordingly it seems to me that I may now take as a general rule, that all that is very clearly and distinctly apprehended (conceived) is true.

Nevertheless I before received and admitted many things as wholly certain and manifest, which yet I afterward found to be doubtful. What, then, were those? They were the earth, the sky, the stars, and all the other objects which I was in the habit of perceiving by the senses. But what was it that I clearly and distinctly perceived in them? Nothing more than that the ideas and the thoughts of those objects were presented to my mind. And even now I do not deny that these ideas are found in my mind. But there was yet another thing which I affirmed, and which, from having been accustomed to believe it, I thought I clearly perceived, although, in truth, I did not perceive it at all; I mean the existence of objects external to me, from which those ideas proceeded, and to which they had a perfect resemblance; and it was here I was mistaken, or if I judged correctly, this assuredly was not to be traced to any knowledge I possessed.

But when I considered any matter in arithmetic and geometry, that was very simple and easy, as, for example, that two and three added together make five, and things of this sort, did I not view them with at least sufficient clearness to warrant me in affirming their truth? Indeed, if I afterward judged that we ought to doubt of these things, it was for no other reason than because it occurred to me that a God might perhaps have given me such a nature as that I should be deceived, even respecting the matters that appeared to me the most evidently true. But as often as this preconceived opinion of the sovereign power of a God presents itself to my mind, I am constrained to admit that it is easy for him, if he wishes it, to cause me to err, even in matters where I think I possess the highest evidence; and, on the other hand, as often as I direct my attention to things which I think I apprehend with great clearness, I am so persuaded of their truth that I naturally break out into expressions such as these: Deceive me who may, no one will yet ever be able to bring it about that I am not, so long as I shall be conscious that I am, or at any future time cause it to be true that I have never been, it being now true that I am, or make two and three more or less than five, in supposing which, and other like absurdities, I discover a manifest contradiction. And in truth, as I have no ground for believing that Deity is deceitful, and as, indeed, I have not even considered the reasons by which the existence of a Deity of any kind is established, the ground of doubt that rests only on this supposition is very slight, and, so to speak, metaphysical. But, that I may be able wholly to remove it, I must inquire whether there is a God, as soon as an opportunity of doing so shall present itself; and if I find that there is a God, I must examine likewise whether he can be a deceiver; for, without the knowledge of these two truths, I do not see that I can ever be certain of anything. And that I may be enabled to examine this without interrupting the order of meditation I have proposed to myself which is, to pass by

degrees from the notions that I shall find first in my mind to those I shall afterward discover in it, it is necessary at this stage to divide all my thoughts into certain classes, and to consider in which of these classes truth and error are, strictly speaking, to be found.

Of my thoughts some are, as it were, images of things, and to these alone properly belongs the name *idea*; as when I think represent to my mind a man, a chimera, the sky, an angel or God. Others, again, have certain other forms; as when I will, fear, affirm, or deny, I always, indeed, apprehend something as the object of my thought, but I also embrace in thought something more than the representation of the object; and of this class of thoughts some are called volitions or affections, and others judgments.

Now, with respect to ideas, if these are considered only in themselves, and are not referred to any object beyond them, they cannot, properly speaking, be false; for, whether I imagine a goat or chimera, it is not less true that I imagine the one than the other. Nor need we fear that falsity may exist in the will or affections; for, although I may desire objects that are wrong, and even that never existed, it is still true that I desire them. There thus only remain our judgments, in which we must take diligent heed that we be not deceived. But the chief and most ordinary error that arises in them consists in judging that the ideas which are in us are like or conformed to the things that are external to us; for assuredly, if we but considered the ideas themselves as certain modes of our thought (consciousness), without referring them to anything beyond, they would hardly afford any occasion of error.

But among these ideas, some appear to me to be innate, others adventitious, and others to be made by myself (factitious); for, as I have the power of conceiving what is called a thing, or a truth, or a thought, it seems to me that I hold this power from no other source than my own nature; but if I now hear a noise, if I see the sun, or if I feel heat, I have all along judged that these sensations proceeded from certain objects existing out of myself; and, in fine, it appears to me that sirens, hippogriffs, and the like, are inventions of my own mind. But I may even perhaps come to be of opinion that all my ideas are of the class which I call adventitious, or that they are all innate, or that they are all factitious; for I have not yet clearly discovered their true origin.

What I have here principally to do is to consider, with reference to those that appear to come from certain objects without me, what grounds there are for thinking them like these objects. The first of these grounds is that it seems to me I am so taught by nature; and the second that I am conscious that those ideas are not dependent on my will, and therefore not on myself, for they are frequently presented to me against my will, as at present, whether I will or not, I feel heat; and I am thus persuaded that this sensation or idea (*sensum vel ideam*) of heat is produced in me by something different from myself, viz., by the heat of the fire by which I sit. And it is very reasonable to suppose that this object impresses me with its own likeness rather than any other thing.

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But I must consider whether these reasons are sufficiently strong and convincing. When I speak of being taught by nature in this matter, I understand by the word nature only a certain spontaneous impetus that impels me to believe in a resemblance between ideas and their objects, and not a natural light that affords a knowledge of its truth. But these two things are widely different; for what the natural light shows to be true can be in no degree doubtful, as, for example, that I am because I doubt, and other truths of the like kind; inasmuch as I possess no other faculty whereby to distinguish truth from error, which can teach me the falsity of what the natural light declares to be true, and which is equally trustworthy; but with respect to seemingly natural impulses, I have observed, when the question related to the choice of right or wrong in action, that they frequently led me to take the worse part; nor do I see that I have any better ground for following them in what relates to truth and error.

Then, with respect to the other reason, which is that because these ideas do not depend on my will, they must arise from objects existing without me, I do not find it more convincing than the former, for just as those natural impulses, of which I have lately spoken, are found in me, notwithstanding that they are not always in harmony with my will, so likewise it may be that I possess some power not sufficiently known to myself capable of producing ideas without the aid of external objects, and, indeed, it has always hitherto appeared to me that they are formed during sleep, by some power of this nature, without the aid of aught external.

And, in fine, although I should grant that they proceeded from those objects, it is not a necessary consequence that they must be like them. On the contrary, I have observed, in a number of instances, that there was a great difference between the object and its idea. Thus, for example, I find in my mind two wholly diverse ideas of the sun; the one, by which it appears to me extremely small draws its origin from the senses, and should be placed in the class of adventitious ideas; the other, by which it seems to be many times larger than the whole earth, is taken up on astronomical grounds, that is, elicited from certain notions born with me, or is framed by myself in some other manner. These two ideas cannot certainly both resemble the same sun; and reason teaches me that the one which seems to have immediately emanated from it is the most unlike.

And these things sufficiently prove that hitherto it has not been from a certain and deliberate judgment, but only from a sort of blind impulse, that I believed existence of certain things different from myself, which, by the organs of sense, or by whatever other means it might be, conveyed their ideas or images into my mind and impressed it with their likenesses.

But there is still another way of inquiring whether, of the objects whose ideas are in my mind, there are any that exist out of me. If ideas are taken in so far only as they are certain modes of consciousness, I do not remark any difference or inequality among them, and all seem, in the same manner, to proceed from myself; but, considering them as images, of

which one represents one thing and another a different, it is evident that a great diversity obtains among them. For, without doubt, those that represent substances are something more, and contain in themselves, so to speak, more objective reality that is, participate by representation in higher degrees of being or perfection, than those that represent only modes or accidents; and again, the idea by which I conceive a God sovereign, eternal, infinite, immutable, all-knowing, all-powerful, and the creator of all things that are out of himself, this, I say, has certainly in it more objective reality than those ideas by which finite substances are represented.

Now, it is manifest by the natural light that there must at least be as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect; for whence can the effect draw its reality if not from its cause? And how could the cause communicate to it this reality unless it possessed it in itself? And hence it follows, not only that what is cannot be produced by what is not, but likewise that the more perfect, in other words, that which contains in itself more reality, cannot be the effect of the less perfect; and this is not only evidently true of those effects, whose reality is actual or formal, but likewise of ideas, whose reality is only considered as objective. Thus, for example, the stone that is not yet in existence, not only cannot now commence to be, unless it be produced by that which possesses in itself, formally or eminently, all that enters into its composition, in other words, by that which contains in itself the same properties that are in the stone, or others superior to them; and heat can only be produced in a subject that was before devoid of it, by a cause that is of an order, degree or kind, at least as perfect as heat; and so of the others. But further, even the idea of the heat, or of the stone, cannot exist in me unless it be put there by a cause that contains, at least, as much reality as I conceive existent in the heat or in the stone for although that cause may not transmit into my idea anything of its actual or formal reality, we ought not on this account to imagine that it is less real; but we ought to consider that, as every idea is a work of the mind, its nature is such as of itself to demand no other formal reality than that which it borrows from our consciousness, of which it is but a mode that is, a manner or way of thinking. But in order that an idea may contain this objective reality rather than that, it must doubtless derive it from some cause in which is found at least as much formal reality as the idea contains of objective; for, if we suppose that there is found in an idea anything which was not in its cause, it must of course derive this from nothing. But, however imperfect may be the mode of existence by which a thing is objectively or by representation in the understanding by its idea, we certainly cannot, for all that, allege that this mode of existence is nothing, nor, consequently, that the idea owes its origin to nothing.

Nor must it be imagined that, since the reality which considered in these ideas is only objective, the same reality need not be formally (actually) in the causes of these ideas, but only objectively: for, just as the mode of existing objectively belongs to ideas by their peculiar nature, so likewise the mode of existing formally appertains to the causes of these ideas (at

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least to the first and principal), by their peculiar nature. And although an idea may give rise to another idea, this regress cannot, nevertheless, be infinite; we must in the end reach a first idea, the cause of which is, as it were, the archetype in which all the reality or perfection that is found objectively or by representation in these ideas is contained formally and in act. I am thus clearly taught by the natural light that ideas exist in me as pictures or images, which may, in truth, readily fall short of the perfection of the objects from which they are taken, but can never contain anything greater or more perfect.

And in proportion to the time and care with which I examine all those matters, the conviction of their truth brightens and becomes distinct. But, to sum up, what conclusion shall I draw from it all? It is this: if the objective reality or perfection of any one of my ideas be such as clearly to convince me, that this same reality exists in me neither formally nor eminently, and if, as follows from this, I myself cannot be the cause of it, it is a necessary consequence that I am not alone in the world, but that there is besides myself some other being who exists as the cause of that idea; while, on the contrary, if no such idea be found in my mind, I shall have no sufficient ground of assurance of the existence of any other being besides myself, for, after a most careful search, I have, up to this moment, been unable to discover any other ground.

But, among these my ideas, besides that which represents myself, respecting which there can be here no difficulty, there is one that represents a God; others that represent corporeal and inanimate things; others angels; others animals; and, finally, there are some that represent men like myself.

But with respect to the ideas that represent other men, or animals, or angels, I can easily suppose that they were formed by the mingling and composition of the other ideas which I have of myself, of corporeal things, and of God, although they were, apart from myself, neither men, animals, nor angels.

And with regard to the ideas of corporeal objects, I never discovered in them anything so great or excellent which I myself did not appear capable of originating; for, by considering these ideas closely and scrutinizing them individually, in the same way that I yesterday examined the idea of wax, I find that there is but little in them that is clearly and distinctly perceived. As belonging to the class of things that are clearly apprehended, I recognize the following, viz, magnitude or extension in length, breadth, and depth; figure, which results from the termination of extension; situation, which bodies of diverse figures preserve with reference to each other; and motion or the change of situation; to which may be added substance, duration, and number. But with regard to light, colors, sounds, odors, tastes, heat, cold, and the other tactile qualities, they are thought with so much obscurity and confusion, that I cannot determine even whether they are true or false; in other words, whether or not the ideas I have of these qualities are in truth the ideas of real objects. For although I

before remarked that it is only in judgments that formal falsity, or falsity properly so called, can be met with, there may nevertheless be found in ideas a certain material falsity, which arises when they represent what is nothing as if it were something. Thus, for example, the ideas I have of cold and heat are so far from being clear and distinct, that I am unable from them to discover whether cold is only the privation of heat, or heat the privation of cold; or whether they are or are not real qualities: and since, ideas being as it were images there can be none that does not seem to us to represent some object, the idea which represents cold as something real and positive will not improperly be called false, if it be correct to say that cold is nothing but a privation of heat; and so in other cases.

To ideas of this kind, indeed, it is not necessary that I should assign any author besides myself: for if they are false, that is, represent objects that are unreal, the natural light teaches me that they proceed from nothing; in other words, that they are in me only because something is wanting to the perfection of my nature; but if these ideas are true, yet because they exhibit to me so little reality that I cannot even distinguish the object represented from nonbeing, I do not see why I should not be the author of them.

With reference to those ideas of corporeal things that are clear and distinct, there are some which, as appears to me, might have been taken from the idea I have of myself, as those of substance, duration, number, and the like. For when I think that a stone is a substance, or a thing capable of existing of itself, and that I am likewise a substance, although I conceive that I am a thinking and non-extended thing, and that the stone, on the contrary, is extended and unconscious, there being thus the greatest diversity between the two concepts, yet these two ideas seem to have this in common that they both represent substances. In the same way, when I think of myself as now existing, and recollect besides that I existed some time ago, and when I am conscious of various thoughts whose number I know, I then acquire the ideas of duration and number, which I can afterward transfer to as many objects as I please. With respect to the other qualities that go to make up the ideas of corporeal objects, viz, extension, figure, situation, and motion, it is true that they are not formally in me, since I am merely a thinking being; but because they are only certain modes of substance, and because I myself am a substance, it seems possible that they may be contained in me eminently.

There only remains, therefore, the idea of God, in which I must consider whether there is anything that cannot be supposed to originate with myself. By the name God, I understand a substance infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and by which I myself, and every other thing that exists, if any such there be, were created. But these properties are so great and excellent, that the more attentively I consider them the less I feel persuaded that the idea I have of them owes its origin to myself alone. And thus it is absolutely necessary to conclude, from all that I have before said, that God exists.

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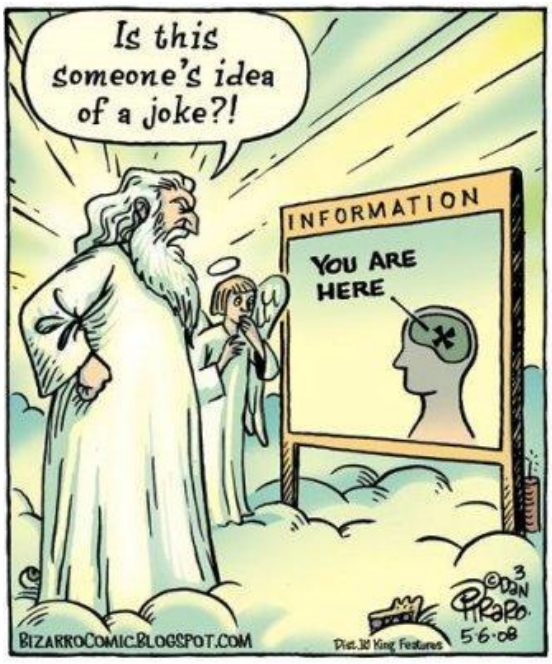

For though the idea of substance be in my mind owing to this, that I myself am a substance, I should not, however, have the idea of an infinite substance, seeing I am a finite being, unless it were given me by some substance in reality infinite.

And I must not imagine that I do not apprehend the infinite by a true idea, but only by the negation of the finite, in the same way that I comprehend repose and darkness by the negation of motion and light: since, on the contrary, I clearly perceive that there is more reality in the infinite substance than in the finite, and therefore that in some way I possess the perception (notion) of the infinite before that of the finite, that is, the perception of God before that of myself, for how could I know that I doubt, desire, or that something is wanting to me, and that I am not wholly perfect, if I possessed no idea of a being more perfect than myself, by comparison of which I knew the deficiencies of my nature?

And it cannot be said that this idea of God is perhaps materially false, and consequently that it may have arisen from nothing in other words, that it may exist in me from my imperfections as I before said of the ideas of heat and cold, and the like: for, on the contrary, as this idea is very clear and distinct, and contains in itself more objective reality than any other, there can be no one of itself more true, or less open to the suspicion of falsity. The idea, I say, of a being supremely perfect, and infinite, is in the highest degree true; for although, perhaps, we may imagine that such a being does not exist, we cannot, nevertheless, suppose that his idea represents nothing real, as I have already said of the idea of cold. It is likewise clear and distinct in the highest degree, since whatever the mind clearly and distinctly conceives as real or true, and as implying any perfection, is contained entire in this idea. And this is true, nevertheless, although I do not comprehend the infinite, and although there may be in God an infinity of things that I cannot comprehend, nor perhaps even compass by thought in any way; for it is of the nature of the infinite that it should not be comprehended by the finite; and it is enough that I rightly understand this, and judge that all which I clearly perceive, and in which I know there is some perfection, and perhaps also an infinity of properties of which I am ignorant, are formally or eminently in God, in order that the idea I have of him may become the most true, clear, and distinct of all the ideas in my mind.

But perhaps I am something more than I suppose myself to be, and it may be that all those perfections which I attribute to God, in some way exist potentially in me, although they do not yet show themselves, and are not reduced to act. Indeed, I am already conscious that my knowledge is being increased and perfected by degrees; and I see nothing to prevent it from thus gradually increasing to infinity, nor any reason why, after such increase and perfection, I should not be able thereby to acquire all the other perfections of the Divine nature; nor, in fine, why the power I possess of acquiring those perfections, if it really now exist in me, should not be sufficient to produce the ideas of them.

Yet, on looking more closely into the matter, I discover that this cannot be; for, in the first place, although it were true that my knowledge daily acquired new degrees of perfection, and although there were potentially in my nature much that was not as yet actually in it, still all these excellences make not the slightest approach to the idea I have of the Deity, in whom there is no perfection merely potentially but all actually existent; for it is even an unmistakable token of imperfection in my knowledge, that it is augmented by degrees. Further, although my knowledge increase more and more, nevertheless I am not, therefore, induced to think that it will ever be actually infinite, since it can never reach that point beyond which it shall be incapable of further increase. But I conceive God as actually infinite, so that nothing can be added to his perfection. And, in fine, I readily perceive that the objective being of an idea cannot be produced by a being that is merely potentially existent, which, properly speaking, is nothing, but only by a being existing formally or actually.

And, truly, I see nothing in all that I have now said which it is not easy for any one, who shall carefully consider it, to discern by the natural light; but when I allow my attention in some degree to relax, the vision of my mind being obscured, and, as it were, blinded by the images of sensible objects, I do not readily remember the reason why the idea of a being more perfect than myself, must of necessity have proceeded from a being in reality more perfect. On this account I am here desirous to inquire further, whether I, who possess this idea of God, could exist supposing there were no God.

And I ask, from whom could I, in that case, derive my existence ? Perhaps from myself, or from my parents, or from some other causes less perfect than God; for anything more perfect, or even equal to God, cannot be thought or imagined.

But if I were independent of every other existence, and were myself the author of my being, I should doubt of nothing, I should desire nothing, and, in fine, no perfection would [I be wanting]; for I should have bestowed upon myself every perfection of which I possess the idea, and I should thus be God. And it must not be imagined that what is now wanting to me is perhaps of more difficult acquisition than that of which I am already possessed; for, on the contrary, it is quite manifest that it was a matter of much higher difficulty that I, a thinking being, should arise from nothing, than it would be for me to acquire the knowledge of many things of which

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I am ignorant, and which are merely the accidents of a thinking substance; and certainly, if I possessed of myself the greater perfection of which I have now spoken in other words, if I were the author of my own existence, I would not at least have denied to myself things that may be more easily obtained as that infinite variety of knowledge of which I am at present destitute. I could not, indeed, have denied to myself any property which I perceive is contained in the idea of God, because there is none of these that seems to me to be more difficult to make or acquire; and if there were any that should happen to be more difficult to acquire, they would certainly appear so to me (supposing that I myself were the source of the other things I possess), because I should discover in them a limit to my power.

And though I were to suppose that I always was as I now am, I should not, on this ground, escape the force of these reasonings, since it would not follow, even on this supposition, that no author of my existence needed to be sought after. For the whole time of my life may be divided into an infinity of parts, each of which is in no way dependent on any other; and, accordingly, because I was in existence a short time ago, it does not follow that I must now exist, unless in this moment some cause create me anew as it were, that is, conserve me. In truth, it is perfectly clear and evident to all who will attentively consider the nature of duration, that the conservation of a substance, in each moment of its duration, requires the same power and act that would be necessary to create it, supposing it were not yet in existence; so that it is manifestly a dictate of the natural light that conservation and creation differ merely in respect of our mode of thinking and not in reality.

All that is here required, therefore, is that I interrogate myself to discover whether I possess any power by means of which I can bring it about that I, who now am, shall exist a moment afterward: for, since I am merely a thinking thing (or since, at least, the precise question, in the meantime, is only of that part of myself), if such a power resided in me, I should, without doubt, be conscious of it; but I am conscious of no such power, and thereby I manifestly know that I am dependent upon some being different from myself.

But perhaps the being upon whom I am dependent is not God, and I have been produced either by my parents, or by some causes less perfect than Deity. This cannot be: for, as I before said, it is perfectly evident that there must at least be as much reality in the cause as in its effect; and accordingly, since I am a thinking thing and possess in myself an idea of God, whatever in the end be the cause of my existence, it must of necessity be admitted that it is likewise a thinking being, and that it possesses in itself the idea and all the perfections I attribute to Deity. Then it may again be inquired whether this cause owes its origin and existence to itself, or to some other cause. For if it be self-existent, it follows, from what I have before laid down, that this cause is God; for, since it possesses the perfection of self-existence, it must likewise, without doubt, have the power of actually possessing every perfection of which it has the idea--in

other words, all the perfections I conceive to belong to God. But if it owe its existence to another cause than itself, we demand again, for a similar reason, whether this second cause exists of itself or through some other, until, from stage to stage, we at length arrive at an ultimate cause, which will be God.

And it is quite manifest that in this matter there can be no infinite regress of causes, seeing that the question raised respects not so much the cause which once produced me, as that by which I am at this present moment conserved.

Nor can it be supposed that several causes concurred in my production, and that from one I received the idea of one of the perfections I attribute to Deity, and from another the idea of some other, and thus that all those perfections are indeed found somewhere in the universe, but do not all exist together in a single being who is God; for, on the contrary, the unity, the simplicity, or inseparability of all the properties of Deity, is one of the chief perfections I conceive him to possess; and the idea of this unity of all the perfections of Deity could certainly not be put into my mind by any cause from which I did not likewise receive the ideas of all the other perfections; for no power could enable me to embrace them in an inseparable unity, without at the same time giving me the knowledge of what they were and of their existence in a particular mode.

Finally, with regard to my parents from whom it appears I sprung, although all that I believed respecting them be true, it does not, nevertheless, follow that I am conserved by them, or even that I was produced by them, in so far as I am a thinking being. All that, at the most, they contributed to my origin was the giving of certain dispositions (modifications) to the matter in which I have hitherto judged that I or my mind, which is what alone I now consider to be myself, is enclosed; and thus there can here be no difficulty with respect to them, and it is absolutely necessary to conclude from this alone that I am, and possess the idea of a being absolutely perfect, that is, of God, that his existence is most clearly demonstrated.

There remains only the inquiry as to the way in which I received this idea from God; for I have not drawn it from the senses, nor is it even presented to me unexpectedly, as is usual with the ideas of sensible objects, when these are presented or appear to be presented to the external organs of the senses; it is not even a pure production or fiction of my mind, for it is not in my power to take from or add to it; and consequently there but remains the alternative that it is innate, in the same way as is the idea of myself.

And, in truth, it is not to be wondered at that God, at my creation, implanted this idea in me, that it might serve, as it were, for the mark of the workman impressed on his work; and it is not also necessary that the mark should be something different from the work itself; but considering only that God is my creator, it is highly probable that he in some way

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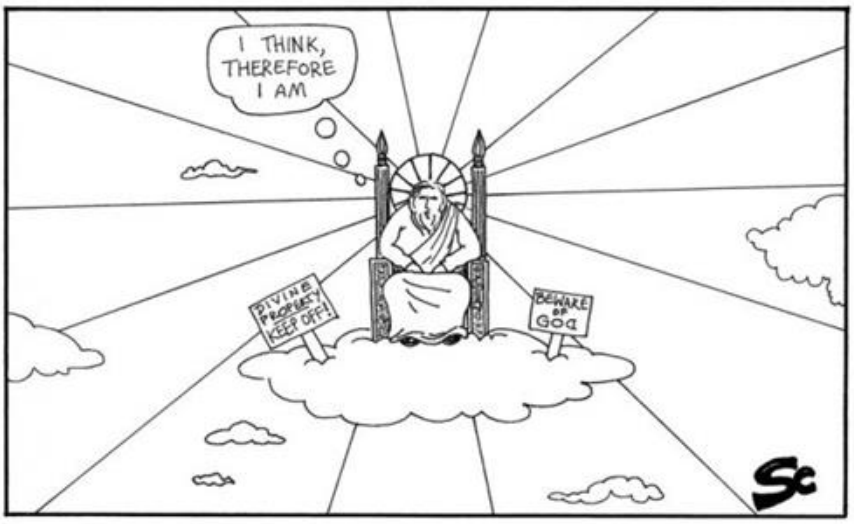
fashioned me after his own image and likeness, and that I perceive this likeness, in which is contained the idea of God, by the same faculty by which I apprehend myself, in other words, when I make myself the object of reflection, I not only find that I am an incomplete, imperfect and dependent being, and one who unceasingly aspires after something better and greater than he is; but, at the same time, I am assured likewise that he upon whom I am dependent possesses in himself all the goods after which I aspire and the ideas of which I find in my mind, and that not merely indefinitely and potentially, but infinitely and actually, and that he is thus God. And the whole force of the argument of which I have here availed myself to establish the existence of God, consists in this, that I perceive I could not possibly be of such a nature as I am, and yet have in my mind the idea of a God, if God did not in reality exist--this same God, I say, whose idea is in my mind--that is, a being who possesses all those lofty perfections, of which the mind may have some slight conception, without, however, being able fully to comprehend them, and who is wholly superior to all defect and has nothing that marks imperfection: whence it is sufficiently manifest that he cannot be a deceiver, since it is a dictate of the natural light that all fraud and deception spring from some defect.

But before I examine this with more attention, and pass on to the consideration of other truths that may be evolved out of it, I think it proper to remain here for some time in the contemplation of God himself--that I may ponder at leisure his marvelous attributes--and behold, admire, and adore the beauty of this light so unspeakably great, as far, at least, as the strength of my mind, which is to some degree dazzled by the sight, will permit. For just as we learn by faith that the supreme felicity of another life consists in the contemplation of the Divine majesty alone, so even now we learn from experience that a like meditation, though incomparably less perfect, is the source of the highest satisfaction of which we are susceptible in this life.



The Utterly Indestructible and Unhelpful Proof of God's Existence

We spent a careful discussion analyzing ***CAUSAL***. You have the tools. Can you put Descartes' causal argument into standard form? Can you test its premises? Sure you can. So see what you find out. Don't forget to define terms, obey the rules of discourse and all. His argument is certainly valid. Is it sound? What are its merits? Its weaknesses? For Task 61, attempt to put his argument into standard form. Remember to number each premise. Does he have an empirical premise and universal principle? How does he defend this principle? After you present his argument in standard form, attempt to explain how he tries to defend the validity of this argument. Then, analyze his defense briefly. Does it work? Remember to keep your emotions out of this: how does his logic work?

ON THE MEDITATIONS—ESPECIALLY THE THIRD

A little setup, Maestro. Descartes worked in the 1400s when the philosophical tradition was deeply nestled in the grip of the Holy Roman Empire—like everything else. The Church dictated everything that could be said or written, and the consequences for impiety were as deadly then as they were for infidel Athenians like Socrates centuries before.

Descartes, however, was no infidel. He believed in God, but he also believed that knowledge, which of course (he thought) *came* from God, could logically—without using God as a starting-point—demonstrate that God *must* exist. Seems harmless enough to us nowadays, but actually, Descartes was on very thin ice. What he was doing by trying to prove God's existence on logic alone was *anathema*. And he got into big trouble for it.

But that's the social context. Let's look at the conceptual context of our reading.

Since the time of Aristotle, a lot of water had passed under the philosophical bridge. The great scholastic thinkers (Augustine, Anselm, Abelard, Al Ghazali, Avicenna, Aquinas—what is it with names that start with *A*?) had carefully developed a tradition that now defines the university education, and they had shaped their questioning by following Aristotle (mostly) and Plato. But somewhere in the most middle of the Middle Ages, the questions started *beginning* with the assumption that God existed. Perhaps that was with Anselm, who argued that the very *concept* of God, once rightly understood, *mandated that God exist necessarily*.* From then on, philosophers tended to believe, and *then* offer arguments defending their beliefs.

Francis Bacon began a change in this approach by positing the very

* This is the most famous of the Ontological Arguments I mentioned above. Anselm argues *indirectly*. He defines God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." In short, the Greatest Conceivable Thing. Back in those days, people believed in different *kinds* of existence, not like today, where we realize that existence isn't a property like weight or age. By the way, this realization we have from Kant's devastating refutation of Anselm's argument. Still, the argument is breathtaking in its genius. Anselm argues indirectly by supposing God (as defined) *doesn't* exist. Then what might happen? If he comes up with a contradiction, then following bivalence, it must be that the supposal was the cause of the crazy. (See indirect arguments in chapter 6.) Of course, the *whole thing* hangs on the notion of different kinds of existence, so Kant's refutation obliterates the argument. It doesn't make it any less beautiful, though. Here it is, in case you're interested:

1. X is ***God*** iff x is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.
2. Suppose God doesn't exist.
3. It is possible to conceive of God as defined in premise 1 as actually existing.
4. Existence in actuality is greater than existence in thought alone.
5. So it is possible to conceive of something (premise 1) as greater than God (premise 2).
6. So it is possible to conceive of something greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived.
7. Premise 6 is logically impossible (incoherent).
8. So by bivalence, the supposal in premise 2 must be logically rejected.
9. So God must exist necessarily.

The Argument of Meditation Three

Descartes begins the Meditation by following his careful method: review your work. By the end of Meditation Two, he knew that he was a thinking thing—a *Res Cogitans*. Whatever else a *res cogitans* is, who knows; but we *do* know that a mind (easy English translation for the Latin) is a thing that has *thoughts*. And that's about all we need, for this discussion.†

All he has is mind and logic. Everything else can be doubted, so it isn't adequate to destroy skepticism and build a castle of knowledge. So he looks to the *contents* of his mind: thoughts. And as he thinks about these thoughts, he notes that they are all *representations* of other things. *As thoughts*, they're just the same as any other thoughts, but as *representations*, they're richly different from each other. (And that, you of course understand, because you can see him building into the Causal Adequacy Principle).

There are *three* kinds of ideas (thoughts):

- *innate*,
- *adventitious,* and
- *factitious*.

The *innate* ideas are those that we conceive without external cause: mathematical and logical relations, for example. The *adventitious* ideas are those that we conceive on the event of causal stimulus (light hits my eye, and I get the idea of color). And the *factitious* ideas are the ones we invent via imagination.

The innate and adventitious ideas we can't make up. I cannot invent the idea of a color or an odor or a sound. They are forced upon me, really. And when the stimuli smack against me, I cannot help but have the corresponding idea. And I cannot invent logical relations. They naturally fall out of what Descartes calls the Natural Light of Reason. Things like Leibniz's Law, the Principle of Non-Contradiction, and the Law of Excluded Middle can't be faked. They just *are*. And when we understand concepts like "bachelor" or "dead" then we cannot *but* understand them to be identical to "unmarried man" or "no brain activity," respectively.

Of course, factitious ideas (fictions) *are* made up by us. We invent them when we glue the other kinds of ideas together.

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† Although we *will* revisit this when we look into the problems that it tangled us up into regarding minds, bodies, and other people. See chapter 14.

beginnings of scientific method in England. Around about the same time, Rene Descartes decided he wanted to challenge the radical skepticism that had begun to permeate philosophical thought. Whereas Bacon was a scientific (empirical) thinker, Descartes was a mathematical mind. Bacon began with our senses, which Descartes believed led to this whole skeptical problem. He wanted to begin with the skepticism itself, and see what we could salvage of what we think we know.

In the First Meditation, he decides to use the skeptical method of systematic doubting as a way to undermine the Skeptics. He's going to beat them at their own game, and shut them up forever (so he thinks).

So he sits down in his comfortable chair by the fireplace, and sets out to doubt. Anything that can be even *remotely* doubted he tosses into a heap in the middle of his mind, unworthy of being the starting place of all certainty.

Can I trust my senses?

No. The sun seems sometimes closer, sometimes farther away, depending on how light refracts. So I could be deceived about what I see. Also, the same thing in dim or bright light appears different. No dice. Taste, sound, feel, smell—all these things can also be wrong. It thus turns out I cannot know—with certainty—anything I apprehend through my senses. If they can be *sometimes* wrong, I am not at present certain they are currently *right*. Toss!*

*And if you're interested, the Problem of Perceptual Knowledge is the knotty content of chapter 15 in this text.

The Argument of Meditation Three, *continued.*

Descartes then offers the ***Causal Adequacy Principle*** (CAP): that "there must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect," because you can't get something from nothing.

So what do we know of the mind, then? Only that it is an idea-having thing. And what of ideas? That they are all exactly the same in reality: ideas. Since ideas are *properties* of minds, and since they come and go, they are just *modes*. Their reality is only borrowed from the thinking thing's thinking.

Whatever gives them reality in that mind must be at least as real as the content of the idea. So if I have an idea of heat, then there must be something that has the power to cause warmth. A *mind* can't make that up (minds aren't bodies—so they don't have temperature). So there must be *something out there* that has enough oomph to cause me to have that idea.

Now this is exciting. Just the *having* of an idea not only guarantees an idea haver, but it seems also to guarantee idea causers.

Descartes now sets out to catalog his ideas by kind. There are sensible ones (flavors, textures, etc.), ones about bodies (rocks, mountains), and more complex ones about self-moving bodies (animals, birds, and people). But there's this really interesting one about God.

The sensible ones include the more complex ones about bodies. I get ideas about 'Eliz' for example, by having ideas of sound, scent, and so on, but I get them all compounded and mixed together in such an intricate way that I get "person." Still, Descartes muses, I could be wrong about that. Maybe I invented Eliz by mixing up a bunch of ideas I got in other ways. That is, maybe I have a bunch of adventitious ideas and I smashed them all together into a factitious one (a fiction), like we do when making up things like Hermione Granger, Hogwarts, Panem, or Katniss Everdeen.

Such inventions, then, don't require anything other than me and my fertile imagination. Alas, we aren't yet ready to argue for the existence of other people. But God is another kind of idea.

Descartes' idea of God is *very complex*, indeed:

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But wait. Maybe God, being all-good, would ensure that I can trust my senses. Huh. But how do I know God is all-good? Maybe, Descartes muses, instead of a good God, there's an evil demon that constantly manipulates me into having false beliefs! Can't prove it isn't the case. I don't know one way or the other. So my knowledge of God? Toss!

Well, heck. By the end of the First Meditation, Descartes is frustrated. He can't find anything that is absolutely indubitable.

Meditation Two begins with a careful review. And in the process, he realizes that there *is* something that he cannot doubt, no matter how he tries.

Think about it: when I am being deceived, there's something there *to be deceived*. When I am being confused, there's something there *to be confused*. When I question, there's a questioner; when I worry, there's a worrier. AHA!

Not that it's any huge revelation, of course. Augustine wrote centuries earlier in his *Confessions* that the possibility of certainty was present in the very existence of doubt: being deceived *proves beyond doubt* that we exist. Building on Augustine's thought, Descartes worked a more careful deduction: *any thinking* entails* a thinking thing.

For Descartes, unlike for Augustine, *this* becomes the starting point of all philosophy. The bedrock of Descartes' argument must be certainty itself, not a widely-accepted axiom. Otherwise, the certitude of his derived theorems could all fall into

* The word *entails* is a very strong logical relation. It means *logically guarantees*.

The Argument of Meditation Three, *continued.*

He writes,

> *By the name God, I understand a substance infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and by which I myself, and every other thing that exists, if any such there be, were created.*

And from this, his argument simply flows like a waterfall:

1. I have an idea of God as a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and the ground of existence for all existing things.
2. There must be at least as much formal reality in the cause of an idea is there is representative reality in the idea itself (the CAP).
3. I do not have enough formal reality to cause this idea.
4. There must be something else that does have enough reality to cause this idea in me.

---

5. So God must exist.

A magnificent argument, indeed.

the same skepticism he is trying to obliterate.

A certainty like this is what he calls *clear and distinct*—and it is understood by the *natural light of reason*. In other words, careful logic itself brings us to acknowledgement of the unshakable truth: *Cogito ergo sum*. I think, therefore I am.

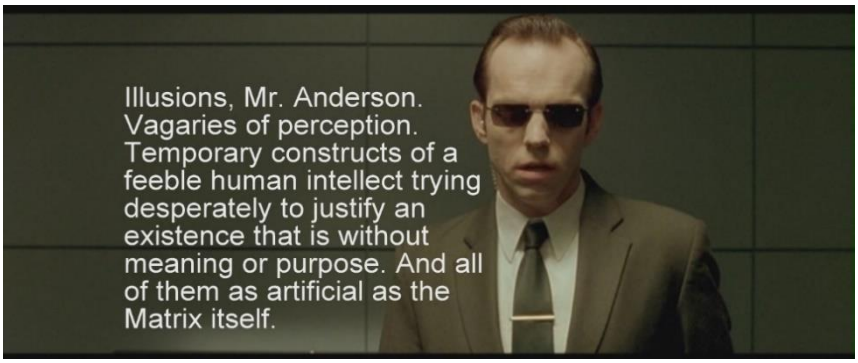
Satisfied with the bedrock, Descartes ends his Second Meditation with a determination to use it to mathematically derive *proofs* (theorems based on this certainty) that God exists, that we have free will, and that not only do we have bodies, but what we know through them we can trust, including that there are other bodied things running around a sensible world.

In short, from the *Cogito*, Descartes intends, in the remaining four Meditations, to shut down skepticism forever and prove beyond doubt all that we think we know about reality

ANALYZING DESCARTES' MEDITATION THREE ARGUMENT(s)

Descartes actually has *two* arguments for God's existence in Med. 3—though they are *so* closely intertwined they are often treated as just one. I'll unpack the both of them, so you can see how interwoven they are, and then set out to explore some of the better known objections to the third meditation arguments.

The *first* basic argument focuses on the *having of the concept*, and the second focuses on the *preserving existence*.



The first one, of course, rests on the Causal Adequacy Principle (CAP) which can be understood as requiring three related axioms:

(1) There is at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause.
(2) Something cannot arise from nothing.
(3) What is more perfect cannot arise from what is less perfect.
(4) The second one derives a correlative claim from the CAP:

(5) The same power and action are needed to preserve something as would be needed to create something.

Descartes' Med. 3 argument, as stated above, holds that

1. I have an idea of God as a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and the ground of existence for all existing things.
2. There must be at least as much formal reality in the cause of an idea is there is representative reality in the idea itself (the CAP).
3. I do not have enough formal reality to cause this idea.
4. There must be something else that does have enough reality to cause this idea in me.

---

5. So God must exist.

For the purposes of this discussion, we'll call this argument ***MED. 3.*** His second argument (also in the third meditation), we'll call ***PRESERVE.*** It looks like this:

PRESERVE

1. I am a thinking thing that both persists and has an idea of God as a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and the ground of existence for all existing things (for short, call this a "perfect substance").
2. As a thinking thing, my only sure power is to have thoughts.
3. So I do not have enough power either to create myself or to preserve my own existence.
4. There must be something that has enough reality to create me and to preserve my existence.
5. So whatever created me must have the power of thinking and have the concept of God as a perfect substance.
6. Parents and biological events do not have the power to both create me and to preserve me as a thinking thing.

---

7. So there must be some perfect substance that both created and preserves my existence.*

The first thing we can notice is that ***PRESERVE*** stands or falls with ***MED. 3***. It's a corollary (an argument that , if the former argument works, should also work).

When Descartes published the *Meditations*, it received a lot of feedback, both from philosophers and from scholars and royals (that is, people who could read).

Caterus's Objection

One important objection to the first premise of ***MED. 3***. It comes from the Dutch theologian (religious scholar) Caterus.† Noting that our senses cannot reject apprehending their proper object (I can't *not* hear a blaring sound if it's blasting in my ear; I can't *not* see a bright light when it's shone into my face), he writes,‡

> If you see fool's gold and take it to be the real thing, there's nothing wrong with your vision—the error arises from your judgment. So Descartes is quite right to put all error down to the faculties of judgment and will. But now use this rule to get the conclusion: 'I am vividly and clearly aware of an infinite being; so this being is a true entity and something real.'
>
> Are you vividly and clearly aware of an infinite being? If so, what becomes of the maxim that all we can know about an infinite thing are aspects of it that don't involve its infinity—or, in more technical language, the infinite *qua* infinite is unknown?
>
> There is good reason to think that the maxim is true. When I am thinking about a chiliagon, and construct for myself a confused representation of some figure that I take to be a chiliagon, I don't clearly imagine the chiliagon itself, since I don't clearly see the thousand

* Here's an extra credit task! Study the objections to ***MED. 3*** from Caterus, Mersenne, and Hobbes. Then write a careful paragraph explaining how they are just as effective against ***PRESERVE***. Double power objections! Turn this in when the homework is due for this section, and earn up to one Task's worth of extra credit points.

† Notice this! The objectors to Descartes' arguments are *all* people who believe God exists (that is, they're all theists). To reject the argument does not mandate that you reject the existence of God. It is only to say that this argument fails.

‡ From *Objections to the Meditations and Descartes' Replies*.

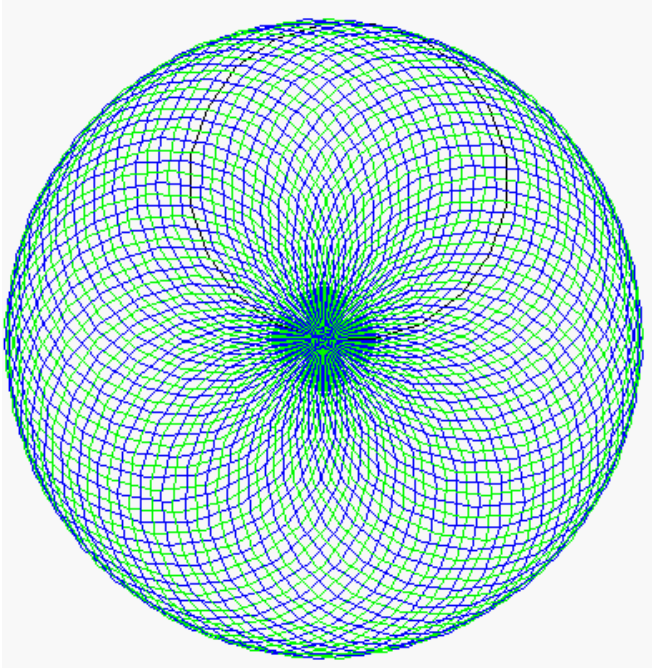
> sides. And if this is so, i.e. if I am to be defeated by a mere thousand, then how can I clearly rather than confusedly think of the infinite?
>
> Perhaps that's what Aquinas meant when he denied that the proposition 'God exists' is self-evident. He considers Damascene's objection to that: 'The knowledge of God's existence is naturally implanted in all men; so the existence of God is self-evident.' Aquinas replied that what is naturally implanted in us is knowledge that God exists, with this understood only in a general or 'somewhat confused' manner, as he puts it; it is just the knowledge that God, i.e.—the-ultimate-felicity-of-man—exists. But this, he says, isn't straightforwardly knowledge that God exists; any more than knowing that someone is coming isn't the same as knowing anything about Peter, even though it is Peter who is coming. He says in effect that God is known under some general conception, as the ultimate end, or as the first and most perfect being, or even (this being a conception that is confused as well as general) as the thing that includes all things; but he is not known through the precise concept of his own essence, for in essence God is infinite and so unknown to us.

Let's unpack Caterus's objection. He aims his concerns squarely at the first premise: *I have an idea of God as a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and the ground of existence for all existing things.*

Do you? He asks. Do you *really*?

Recall that in the third meditation, Descartes distinguishes two ways of thinking: ***conceiving*** and ***imagining*** (related to the three ways we can get ideas). Conception is what Descartes refers to those ideas that are logically pure, "demonstrated by the natural light." Imagination gives us muddy ideas, flights of fancy, and so on.

Caterus reminds us of Descartes' own example of the chiliagon,* a thousand-sided geometric figure. When I try to imagine a thousand-sided figure, I cannot ever be certain that what I see doesn't have, say, 999 sides, or 1012 sides. I can't know!



a chiliagon is impossible to distinguish from a circle

But this part of Caterus's objection rests on a mistake. Descartes reminds him (in his reply) that our inability to *imagine* something does not entail either that this thing cannot exist or that we cannot *conceive* of it. Indeed, that's the whole point of the chiliagon example. We can all conceive of a chiliagon, even while at the same time being wholly unable to imagine one. We can (and do!) conceive of infinity, but remain incapable of imagining it. A chiliagon has 1000 sides, but a circle has infinitely many points, hence infinitely many (or no) "sides." We can conceive without being able to imagine.

So if Descartes has a *conception* of God as defined, our inability to imagine such a thing is irrelevant.

But this is where the other prong of Caterus's objection takes aim. He argues that one cannot even *conceive* of God—being ourselves finite substances, we cannot grasp infinite substances. We cannot but glimpse at what God is. We have little concept of *being* in ourselves—and to derive from this that we can conceive—that is, clearly and fully understand—*infinite being* is certainly far from obvious. One would need to argue carefully and hard that the idea one has of God is truly ***clear and distinct***—uncloudy, totally understood.

* Pronounced *kill-ey-a-gon.*

Here's a way to see the objection:

CATERUS

1. The idea of God is either an image or a concept.
2. If it is an image, then it is too limited to really be an idea of God.
3. If it is a concept, then we as finite beings are too limited to have the idea.
4. So either we have an idea that cannot prove the existence of God or we do not have an idea that can.

5. So we cannot prove God exists by our having the idea of God.

How might Descartes respond? Unfortunately, he aims the bulk of his reply to Caterus on more technical parts of the discussion.

He has to say that he *can* conceive of God, clearly, distinctly, as perfectly as he conceives of his own existence.

Mersenne's Objection

But this leaves him open to the next concern. Marin Mersenne, "the father of acoustics," was a fellow Frenchman a brilliant mathematician, musical theorist, and theologian. He was a intellectual big wig, so when he wrote to Descartes about his concerns, you can be sure they were carefully studied.

He writes,

> From the idea of a supreme being that you find in your mind, and that you say couldn't possibly have been produced by you, you *bravely* infer that there must exist a supreme being who alone can be the origin of this idea. However, we can find simply within ourselves a sufficient basis for our ability to form the idea in question, even if the supreme being didn't exist or we didn't know that he exists and never thought about his existing.
>
> For surely each of us can think as follows:
>
> I can see that just because I *think* I have some degree of perfection, and hence that others also have a similar degree of perfection. This gives me the basis for thinking of any number of degrees, and piling up higher and higher degrees of perfection up to infinity. Even if there were only one degree of heat or light, I could always have the thought of further degrees, continuing the process of addition up to infinity. Using the same line of thought, surely I can take a given degree of *being*—the one I perceive myself to have—and add to that any degree you like, thus constructing the idea of *perfect* being from all the degrees that can be added on.

Mersenne's first objection to **MED. 3** can be summed up thus: you're imagining God. You know you have *power*, so you're imagining things with *more power*, and keeping it up until you come up with *infinite power*. And you're doing the same thing with all the divine attributes.

Add this to Caterus's objection, and you see that an idea might *seem* clear and distinct because it involves logic, but if it is based on something limited and then *extended*, there is no reason to infer from this idea that such a imagined thing must exist.

Mersenne objects to more than the first premise, though. He also attacks the CAP itself. Although his objection is easily dismissed for its Fifteenth Century scientific limitations, we can update it without any significant changes.

Consider the claim that an effect can't be more perfect (more complete, more "real") than its total cause. But consider evolutionary processes. We always get more complex from less complex. Or consider a simple chemistry problem. If you combine hydrogen and oxygen on a microscopic level, you get H_2O, but not wetness. At a certain point, when you get enough molecules together, you get *wet*, something more than what the original elements have. Or consider (a problem we'll discuss in chapter 14) consciousness. If you look at DNA strands, it turns out the human genome has a 90% similarity to that of the cat, 80% similarity to that of a cow, and 60% similarity to that of a fruit fly! But humans have a level of consciousness that is far more complex than that of a fly—and still importantly more complex than other mammals' rationality capacities. From scant differences, we have opera, space travel, complex scientific and literary understanding—and cats have soft fur and a soothing purr.

Whatever reality we have (super complex) is caused by less complex reality (evolution, genes, etc.).

But Mersenne isn't finished, yet. He argues that the CAP is false, but also that even so, Descartes doesn't *have to* get his idea of God from God (and ultimately, that he has no idea of God):

> How do you know that the idea would have come to you if instead of growing up among educated people you had spent your entire life alone in a desert? You derived this idea from thoughts you had in earlier meditations, from books, or from discussion with friends and so on, and not simply from your mind or from an existing supreme being. So you need to provide a clearer proof that you couldn't have this idea if a supreme being didn't exist; and when you have provided that, we'll all surrender! But there's good evidence that the idea does come from previously held notions, for example the fact that the natives of Canada—the Hurons and other primitive peoples—have no awareness of any idea of this sort, presumably because their intellectual past doesn't provide the materials for such an idea. Now, you could have formed your idea of a supreme being on the basis of your work in physics; the idea you could get from that would refer only to this corporeal world, which includes every kind of perfection that you can conceive. In that case, the most you could infer is the existence of an utterly perfect corporeal being—unless you add something further that lifts us up to an incorporeal or spiritual plane. We may add that you can form the idea of an angel by the same method as the idea of a supremely perfect being; but this idea isn't produced in you by an angel, although the angel is more perfect than you. The fact is that you don't have the idea of God.

Let's sum up his objection as neatly as we can.

MERSENNE

1. ***MED. 3*** relies on one having a clear and distinct idea of God that *must* come from God, and it relies on the Causal Adequacy Principle.
2. The idea of God is not guaranteed to be clear and distinct (it could come from imagined additions or compoundings).
3. The idea of God is not guaranteed to come from God (it could come from education, mathematical background, etc.)
4. The Causal Adequacy Principle is proven false by science.

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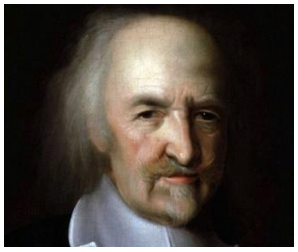
5. So the argument of ***MED. 3*** is unsound.
6. So God is not proven to exist (by ***MED. 3***)

Hobbes's Objection



If there's any philosopher Rene Descartes disliked, it was Thomas Hobbes, not the least for which the fact that the English philosopher wrote strong and pinpoint-accurate philosophical criticisms of Descartes' work.

Hobbes nicely sums up the worries presented by Mersenne and Caterus, concluding that no human actually has the idea of God in the way it is required for ***MED. 3***. He looks carefully at the idea of God itself, and how we can come to have it. Noting the list of properties (attributes) of God that Descartes presents, Hobbes writes,

> When I consider the attributes of God in order to get an idea of God and to see whether that idea contains anything that couldn't have been derived from myself, what I think I find is this: What I think of in connection with the name 'God' doesn't originate in myself but needn't be derived from any source other than external *material* objects.
>
> By the term 'God' I understand a ***substance***, i.e. I understand that God exists, though I get this not from an idea but from reasoning.
>
> ***Infinite***, i.e. I can't conceive or imagine any supposed limits or outermost parts of it without being able to imagine further parts beyond them; so that what the term 'infinite' presents me with is not an idea of the infinity of God but an idea of my own boundaries or limits.
>
> ***Independent***, that is, I don't conceive of a cause that produced God; which makes it clear that the *only* idea I have linked to the term 'independent' is the memory of my own ideas, which began at different times and hence are dependent on the causes that started them up.
>
> Hence 'God is independent' simply means that God is one of the things for which I can't imagine an origin. And 'God is infinite' means that God is one of the things that we don't conceive of as having bounds.

The Cartesian Circle

What response does Descartes have for his objectors? Not much, unfortunately. He mostly responds that he's *already* proven he has the idea of God, and that's enough to prove God exists.

That is, we get an insight into what happens when a philosopher falls in love with their own careful argument. (We'll see this again in chapter 16 with a different philosopher.) Having spent so much time working this out, Descartes is unable to see its flaws, hence unable to work on its improvement.

The problem can be summed up in what is now called the ***Cartesian Circle***. It's a very subtle *begging the question* fallacy. It looks like this:

1. Whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true.
2. I clearly and distinctly perceive that God is omnipotent, benevolent, and truthful.

---

3. So God has created me in a way that whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is true.

That is to say that he cannot prove that his idea is correct unless he got it from God—that the idea isn't adventitious or factitious, but innate.

Another way to see the problem is to look at two claims that Descartes holds as true and necessary:

(1) I clearly and distinctly perceive any claim that *p*, only if I am certain that God exists and is not a deceiver (*q*).

(2) I can be certain that *q* only if I clearly and distinctly perceive that *p*.

If both (1) and (2) are true, then I can never be certain of *either p* or *q*!

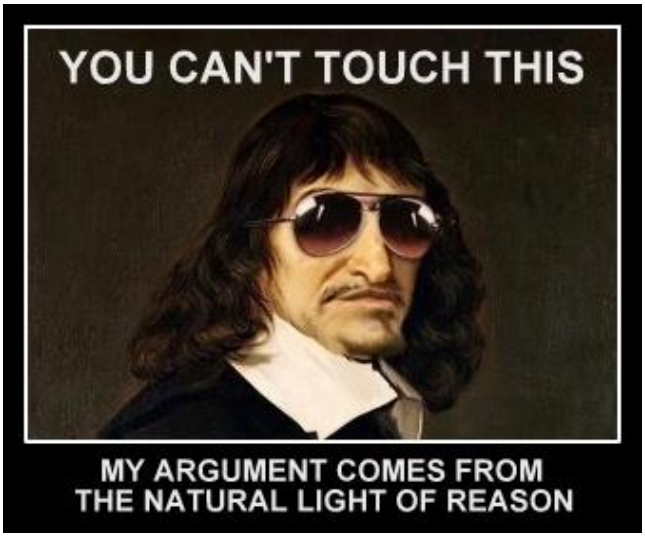
This rules out any idea of God—for what sort of idea is it that has no origin and no limits?

Supremely intelligent. What, may I ask, is the idea through which Descartes understands the operation of God's understanding?

Supremely powerful. Again, through what idea is power understood—power that relates to future things, i.e. things that don't yet exist? My own understanding of power comes from an image or memory of past events, and I arrive at it as follows: 'It did that, so it was able to do that, so if it continues to exist it will be able to do that again—which is to say that it has the power to do that.' And these are all ideas that could have arisen from external objects.

The creator of all that exists. I can construct a sort of image of creation from what I have seen, e.g. a man being born or growing from a single point (as it were) to the size and shape that he now has. That's the only sort of idea anyone has to go with the term 'creator'.

But our ability to imagine the world to have been created isn't an adequate proof of the creation! Even if it had been demonstrated that there exists something infinite, independent, supremely powerful etc., it still wouldn't follow that a *creator* exists. Unless anyone thinks that the following inference is correct: 'There exists a being whom we believe to have created all things; therefore, the world was in fact created by him at some stage'!




HELLO EVERYONE, MY NAME IS SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, WELCOME TO SKEPTIHOLICS ANONYMOUS. TODAY WE HAVE A NEW MEMBER, LET'S ALL WELCOME HIM.
HI EVERYONE, I'M RENE DESCARTES, AND I'M A SKEPTIHOLIC.
HI DESCARTES
HI DESCARTES
HI DESCARTES
I GUESS I'VE ALWAYS BEEN A BIT OF A SKEPTIC. JUST REGULAR STUFF, YOU KNOW, I WOULD LOOK OUT MY WINDOW AND SEE MEN CROSSING A BRIDGE.
BUT THEN I WOULD WONDER WHETHER THEY MIGHT INSTEAD BE ONLY COATS AND HATS THAT CONCEAL ROBOTS.
WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE.
BUT I REALLY HIT ROCK BOTTOM WHEN I STARTED TO DOUBT THAT THERE WAS ANY EXTERNAL WORLD AT ALL, AND EVEN MATHEMATICAL TRUTHS. I WASN'T EVEN CERTAIN TWO AND TWO EQUALLED FOUR!
WOW, THAT'S INTENSE, MAN. HOW DID YOU GET OUT?
I FOUND GOD. I REALIZED THAT HE WAS NECESSARILY GOOD, AND SO WOULDN'T DECEIVE ME.

Arguments against the Existence of God

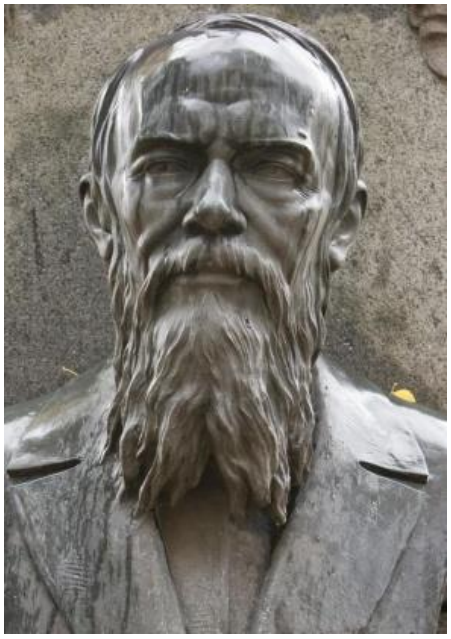
RELIGION IS TOO IMPORTANT A MATTER TO ITS DEVOTEES TO BE A SUBJECT OF RIDICULE. IF THEY INDULGE IN ABSURDITIES, THEY ARE TO BE PITIED RATHER THAN RIDICULED.

(IMMANUEL KANT)

Let's start right away with a primary text. Prepare a critical question (CQ) on the following selection from Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. It will introduce us to the problem of evil, a powerful argument against God's existence.

Yes, it's from a novel. And yes, it's philosophy, too. Remember to follow all the CQ criteria, noted in chapter 2.

Direct your question to Ivan, the one who presents the argument.



NOTES

"REBELLION" FROM *BROTHERS KARAMAZOV*

Fyodor Dostoevsky[*]

"I must make you one confession," Ivan began. "I could never understand how one can love one's neighbors. It's just one's neighbors, to my mind, that one can't love, though one might love those at a distance. I once read somewhere of John the Merciful, a saint, that when a hungry, frozen beggar came to him, he took him into his bed, held him in his arms, and began breathing into his mouth, which was putrid and loathsome from some awful disease. I am convinced that he did that from 'self-laceration,' from the self-laceration of falsity, for the sake of the charity imposed by duty, as a penance laid on him. For any one to love a man, he must be hidden, for as soon as he shows his face, love is gone."

"Father Zossima has talked of that more than once," observed Alyosha; "he, too, said that the face of a man often hinders many people not practiced in love, from loving him. But yet there's a great deal of love in mankind, and almost Christ-like love. I know that myself, Ivan."

"Well, I know nothing of it so far, and can't understand it, and the innumerable mass of mankind are with me there. The question is, whether that's due to men's bad qualities or whether it's inherent in their nature. To my thinking, Christ-like love for men is a miracle impossible on earth. He was God. But we are not gods. Suppose I, for instance, suffer intensely. Another can never know how much I suffer, because he is another and not I. And what's more, a man is rarely ready to admit another's suffering (as though it were a distinction). Why won't he admit it, do you think? Because I smell unpleasant, because I have a stupid face, because I once trod on his foot. Besides, there is suffering and suffering; degrading, humiliating suffering such as humbles me—hunger, for instance—my benefactor will perhaps allow me; but when you come to higher suffering—for an idea, for instance—he will very rarely admit that, perhaps because my face strikes him as not at all what he fancies a man should have who suffers for an idea. And so he deprives me instantly of his favor, and not at all from badness of heart. Beggars, especially genteel beggars, ought never to show themselves, but to ask for charity through the newspapers. One can love one's neighbors in the abstract, or even at a distance, but at close quarters it's almost impossible. If it were as on the stage, in the ballet, where if

[*] Public domain. Available at gutenberg.org.

beggars come in, they wear silken rags and tattered lace and beg for alms dancing gracefully, then one might like looking at them. But even then we should not love them. But enough of that. I simply wanted to show you my point of view. I meant to speak of the suffering of mankind generally, but we had better confine ourselves to the sufferings of the children. That reduces the scope of my argument to a tenth of what it would be. Still we'd better keep to the children, though it does weaken my case. But, in the first place, children can be loved even at close quarters, even when they are dirty, even when they are ugly (I fancy, though, children never are ugly). The second reason why I won't speak of grown-up people is that, besides being disgusting and unworthy of love, they have a compensation—they've eaten the apple and know good and evil, and they have become 'like gods.' They go on eating it still. But the children haven't eaten anything, and are so far innocent. Are you fond of children, Alyosha? I know you are, and you will understand why I prefer to speak of them. If they, too, suffer horribly on earth, they must suffer for their fathers' sins, they must be punished for their fathers, who have eaten the apple; but that reasoning is of the other world and is incomprehensible for the heart of man here on earth. The innocent must not suffer for another's sins, and especially such innocents! You may be surprised at me, Alyosha, but I am awfully fond of children, too. And observe, cruel people, the violent, the rapacious, the Karamazovs are sometimes very fond of children. Children while they are quite little—up to seven, for instance—are so remote from grown-up people; they are different creatures, as it were, of a different species. I knew a criminal in prison who had, in the course of his career as a burglar, murdered whole families, including several children. But when he was in prison, he had a strange affection for them. He spent all his time at his window, watching the children playing in the prison yard. He trained one little boy to come up to his window and made great friends with him.... You don't know why I am telling you all this, Alyosha? My head aches and I am sad."

"You speak with a strange air," observed Alyosha uneasily, "as though you were not quite yourself."

"By the way, a Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow," Ivan went on, seeming not to hear his brother's words, "told me about the crimes committed by Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ears to the fences, leave them so till morning, and in the morning they hang them—all sorts of things you can't imagine. People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that's a great injustice and insult to the beasts; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws, that's all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it. These Turks took a pleasure in torturing children, too; cutting the unborn child from the mother's womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mothers' eyes. Doing it before the mothers' eyes was what gave zest to the amusement.

NOTES

NOTES

Here is another scene that I thought very interesting. Imagine a trembling mother with her baby in her arms, a circle of invading Turks around her. They've planned a diversion: they pet the baby, laugh to make it laugh. They succeed, the baby laughs. At that moment a Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby's face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out its little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby's face and blows out its brains. Artistic, wasn't it? By the way, Turks are particularly fond of sweet things, they say."

"Brother, what are you driving at?" asked Alyosha.

"I think if the devil doesn't exist, but man has created him, he has created him in his own image and likeness."

"Just as he did God, then?" observed Alyosha.

"'It's wonderful how you can turn words,' as Polonius says in *Hamlet*," laughed Ivan. "You turn my words against me. Well, I am glad. Yours must be a fine God, if man created Him in his image and likeness. You asked just now what I was driving at. You see, I am fond of collecting certain facts, and, would you believe, I even copy anecdotes of a certain sort from newspapers and books, and I've already got a fine collection. The Turks, of course, have gone into it, but they are foreigners. I have specimens from home that are even better than the Turks. You know we prefer beating—rods and scourges—that's our national institution. Nailing ears is unthinkable for us, for we are, after all, Europeans. But the rod and the scourge we have always with us and they cannot be taken from us. Abroad now they scarcely do any beating. Manners are more humane, or laws have been passed, so that they don't dare to flog men now.

"But they make up for it in another way just as national as ours. And so national that it would be practically impossible among us, though I believe we are being inoculated with it, since the religious movement began in our aristocracy. I have a charming pamphlet, translated from the French, describing how, quite recently, five years ago, a murderer, Richard, was executed—a young man, I believe, of three and twenty, who repented and was converted to the Christian faith at the very scaffold. This Richard was an illegitimate child who was given as a child of six by his parents to some shepherds on the Swiss mountains. They brought him up to work for them. He grew up like a little wild beast among them. The shepherds taught him nothing, and scarcely fed or clothed him, but sent him out at seven to herd the flock in cold and wet, and no one hesitated or scrupled to treat him so. Quite the contrary, they thought they had every right, for Richard had been given to them as a chattel, and they did not even see the necessity of feeding him. Richard himself describes how in those years, like the Prodigal Son in the Gospel, he longed to eat of the mash given to the pigs, which were fattened for sale. But they wouldn't even give him that, and beat him when he stole from the pigs. And that was how he spent all his childhood and his youth, till he grew up and was strong enough to go away and be a thief. The savage began to earn his living as a day laborer in

Geneva. He drank what he earned, he lived like a brute, and finished by killing and robbing an old man. He was caught, tried, and condemned to death. They are not sentimentalists there. And in prison he was immediately surrounded by pastors, members of Christian brotherhoods, philanthropic ladies, and the like. They taught him to read and write in prison, and expounded the Gospel to him. They exhorted him, worked upon him, drummed at him incessantly, till at last he solemnly confessed his crime. He was converted. He wrote to the court himself that he was a monster, but that in the end God had vouchsafed him light and shown grace. All Geneva was in excitement about him—all philanthropic and religious Geneva. All the aristocratic and well-bred society of the town rushed to the prison, kissed Richard and embraced him; 'You are our brother, you have found grace.' And Richard does nothing but weep with emotion, 'Yes, I've found grace! All my youth and childhood I was glad of pigs' food, but now even I have found grace. I am dying in the Lord.' 'Yes, Richard, die in the Lord; you have shed blood and must die. Though it's not your fault that you knew not the Lord, when you coveted the pigs' food and were beaten for stealing it (which was very wrong of you, for stealing is forbidden); but you've shed blood and you must die.' And on the last day, Richard, perfectly limp, did nothing but cry and repeat every minute: 'This is my happiest day. I am going to the Lord.' 'Yes,' cry the pastors and the judges and philanthropic ladies. 'This is the happiest day of your life, for you are going to the Lord!' They all walk or drive to the scaffold in procession behind the prison van. At the scaffold they call to Richard: 'Die, brother, die in the Lord, for even thou hast found grace!'

"And so, covered with his brothers' kisses, Richard is dragged on to the scaffold, and led to the guillotine. And they chopped off his head in brotherly fashion, because he had found grace. Yes, that's characteristic. That pamphlet is translated into Russian by some Russian philanthropists of aristocratic rank and evangelical aspirations, and has been distributed gratis for the enlightenment of the people. The case of Richard is interesting because it's national.

"Though to us it's absurd to cut off a man's head, because he has become our brother and has found grace, yet we have our own speciality, which is all but worse. Our historical pastime is the direct satisfaction of inflicting pain. There are lines in Nekrassov describing how a peasant lashes a horse on the eyes, 'on its meek eyes,' every one must have seen it. It's peculiarly Russian. He describes how a feeble little nag has foundered under too heavy a load and cannot move. The peasant beats it, beats it savagely, beats it at last not knowing what he is doing in the intoxication of cruelty, thrashes it mercilessly over and over again. 'However weak you are, you must pull, if you die for it.'

"The nag strains, and then he begins lashing the poor defenseless creature on its weeping, on its 'meek eyes.' The frantic beast tugs and draws the load, trembling all over, gasping for breath, moving sideways, with a sort of unnatural spasmodic action—it's awful in Nekrassov. But that's only a

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horse, and God has given horses to be beaten. So the Tatars have taught us, and they left us the knout as a remembrance of it. But men, too, can be beaten.

“A well-educated, cultured gentleman and his wife beat their own child with a birch-rod, a girl of seven. I have an exact account of it. The papa was glad that the birch was covered with twigs. ‘It stings more,’ said he, and so he began stinging his daughter. I know for a fact there are people who at every blow are worked up to sensuality, to literal sensuality, which increases progressively at every blow they inflict. They beat for a minute, for five minutes, for ten minutes, more often and more savagely. The child screams. At last the child cannot scream, it gasps, ‘Daddy! daddy!’ By some diabolical unseemly chance the case was brought into court. A counsel is engaged. The Russian people have long called a barrister ‘a conscience for hire.’ The counsel protests in his client's defense. ‘It's such a simple thing,’ he says, ‘an everyday domestic event. A father corrects his child. To our shame be it said, it is brought into court.’ The jury, convinced by him, give a favorable verdict. The public roars with delight that the torturer is acquitted. Ah, pity I wasn't there! I would have proposed to raise a subscription in his honor! Charming pictures.

“But I've still better things about children. I've collected a great, great deal about Russian children, Alyosha. There was a little girl of five who was hated by her father and mother, ‘most worthy and respectable people, of good education and breeding.’ You see, I must repeat again, it is a peculiar characteristic of many people, this love of torturing children, and children only. To all other types of humanity these torturers behave mildly and benevolently, like cultivated and humane Europeans; but they are very fond of tormenting children, even fond of children themselves in that sense. It's just their defenselessness that tempts the tormentor, just the angelic confidence of the child who has no refuge and no appeal, that sets his vile blood on fire. In every man, of course, a demon lies hidden—the demon of rage, the demon of lustful heat at the screams of the tortured victim, the demon of lawlessness let off the chain, the demon of diseases that follow on vice, gout, kidney disease, and so on.

“This poor child of five was subjected to every possible torture by those cultivated parents. They beat her, thrashed her, kicked her for no reason till her body was one bruise. Then, they went to greater refinements of cruelty—shut her up all night in the cold and frost in a privy, and because she didn't ask to be taken up at night (as though a child of five sleeping its angelic, sound sleep could be trained to wake and ask), they smeared her face and filled her mouth with excrement, and it was her mother, her mother did this. And that mother could sleep, hearing the poor child's groans! Can you understand why a little creature, who can't even understand what's done to her, should beat her little aching heart with her tiny fist in the dark and the cold, and weep her meek unresentful tears to dear, kind God to protect her? Do you understand that, friend and brother, you pious and humble novice? Do you understand why this infamy must

be and is permitted? Without it, I am told, man could not have existed on earth, for he could not have known good and evil. Why should he know that diabolical good and evil when it costs so much? Why, the whole world of knowledge is not worth that child's prayer to 'dear, kind God'! I say nothing of the sufferings of grown-up people, they have eaten the apple, damn them, and the devil take them all! But these little ones! I am making you suffer, Alyosha, you are not yourself. I'll leave off if you like."

"Never mind. I want to suffer too," muttered Alyosha.

"One picture, only one more, because it's so curious, so characteristic, and I have only just read it in some collection of Russian antiquities. I've forgotten the name. I must look it up. It was in the darkest days of serfdom at the beginning of the century, and long live the Liberator of the People! There was in those days a general of aristocratic connections, the owner of great estates, one of those men—somewhat exceptional, I believe, even then—who, retiring from the service into a life of leisure, are convinced that they've earned absolute power over the lives of their subjects. There were such men then. So our general, settled on his property of two thousand souls, lives in pomp, and domineers over his poor neighbors as though they were dependents and buffoons. He has kennels of hundreds of hounds and nearly a hundred dog-boys—all mounted, and in uniform. One day a serf-boy, a little child of eight, threw a stone in play and hurt the paw of the general's favorite hound. 'Why is my favorite dog lame?' He is told that the boy threw a stone that hurt the dog's paw. 'So you did it.' The general looked the child up and down. 'Take him.' He was taken—taken from his mother and kept shut up all night. Early that morning the general comes out on horseback, with the hounds, his dependents, dog-boys, and huntsmen, all mounted around him in full hunting parade. The servants are summoned for their edification, and in front of them all stands the mother of the child. The child is brought from the lock-up. It's a gloomy, cold, foggy autumn day, a capital day for hunting. The general orders the child to be undressed; the child is stripped naked. He shivers, numb with terror, not daring to cry....'Make him run,' commands the general. 'Run! run!' shout the dog-boys. The boy runs.... 'At him!' yells the general, and he sets the whole pack of hounds on the child. The hounds catch him, and tear him to pieces before his mother's eyes!... I believe the general was afterwards declared incapable of administering his estates. Well—what did he deserve? To be shot? To be shot for the satisfaction of our moral feelings? Speak, Alyosha!"

"To be shot," murmured Alyosha, lifting his eyes to Ivan with a pale, twisted smile.

"Bravo!" cried Ivan, delighted. "If even you say so.... You're a pretty monk! So there is a little devil sitting in your heart, Alyosha Karamazov!"

"What I said was absurd, but—"

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"That's just the point, that 'but'!" cried Ivan. "Let me tell you, novice, that the absurd is only too necessary on earth. The world stands on absurdities, and perhaps nothing would have come to pass in it without them. We know what we know!"

"What do you know?"

"I understand nothing," Ivan went on, as though in delirium. "I don't want to understand anything now. I want to stick to the fact. I made up my mind long ago not to understand. If I try to understand anything, I shall be false to the fact, and I have determined to stick to the fact."

"Why are you trying me?" Alyosha cried, with sudden distress. "Will you say what you mean at last?"

"Of course, I will; that's what I've been leading up to. You are dear to me, I don't want to let you go, and I won't give you up to your Zossima."

Ivan for a minute was silent, his face became all at once very sad.

"Listen! I took the case of children only to make my case clearer. Of the other tears of humanity with which the earth is soaked from its crust to its center, I will say nothing. I have narrowed my subject on purpose. I am a bug, and I recognize in all humility that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is. Men are themselves to blame, I suppose; they were given paradise, they wanted freedom, and stole fire from heaven, though they knew they would become unhappy, so there is no need to pity them. With my pitiful, earthly, Euclidian understanding, all I know is that there is suffering and that there are none guilty; that cause follows effect, simply and directly; that everything flows and finds its level—but that's only Euclidian nonsense, I know that, and I can't consent to live by it! What comfort is it to me that there are none guilty and that cause follows effect simply and directly, and that I know it?—I must have justice, or I will destroy myself. And not justice in some remote infinite time and space, but here on earth, and that I could see myself. I have believed in it. I want to see it, and if I am dead by then, let me rise again, for if it all happens without me, it will be too unfair. Surely I haven't suffered, simply that I, my crimes and my sufferings, may manure the soil of the future harmony for somebody else. I want to see with my own eyes the hind lie down with the lion and the victim rise up and embrace his murderer. I want to be there when everyone suddenly understands what it has all been for. All the religions of the world are built on this longing, and I am a believer. But then there are the children, and what am I to do about them? That's a question I can't answer. For the hundredth time I repeat, there are numbers of questions, but I've only taken the children, because in their case what I mean is so unanswerably clear. Listen! If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It's beyond all comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony. Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of the future? I understand solidarity in sin among men. I understand solidarity in retribution, too; but there can be no

such solidarity with children. And if it is really true that they must share responsibility for all their fathers' crimes, such a truth is not of this world and is beyond my comprehension. Some jester will say, perhaps, that the child would have grown up and have sinned, but you see he didn't grow up, he was torn to pieces by the dogs, at eight years old. Oh, Alyosha, I am not blaspheming! I understand, of course, what an upheaval of the universe it will be, when everything in heaven and earth blends in one hymn of praise and everything that lives and has lived cries aloud: 'Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed.' When the mother embraces the fiend who threw her child to the dogs, and all three cry aloud with tears, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' then, of course, the crown of knowledge will be reached and all will be made clear. But what pulls me up here is that I can't accept that harmony. And while I am on earth, I make haste to take my own measures. You see, Alyosha, perhaps it really may happen that if I live to that moment, or rise again to see it, I, too, perhaps, may cry aloud with the rest, looking at the mother embracing the child's torturer, 'Thou art just, O Lord!' but I don't want to cry aloud then. While there is still time, I hasten to protect myself, and so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its unexpiated tears to 'dear, kind God'! It's not worth it, because those tears are unatoned for. They must be atoned for, or there can be no harmony. But how? How are you going to atone for them? Is it possible? By their being avenged? But what do I care for avenging them? What do I care for a hell for oppressors? What good can hell do, since those children have already been tortured? And what becomes of harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price. I don't want the mother to embrace the oppressor who threw her son to the dogs! She dare not forgive him! Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother's heart. But the sufferings of her tortured child she has no right to forgive; she dare not forgive the torturer, even if the child were to forgive him! And if that is so, if they dare not forgive, what becomes of harmony? Is there in the whole world a being who would have the right to forgive and could forgive? I don't want harmony. From love for humanity I don't want it. I would rather be left with the unavenged suffering. I would rather remain with my unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, *even if I were wrong*. Besides, too high a price is asked for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter on it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept, Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket."

"That's rebellion," murmured Alyosha, looking down.

"Rebellion? I am sorry you call it that," said Ivan earnestly. "One can hardly live in rebellion, and I want to live. Tell me yourself, I challenge you—

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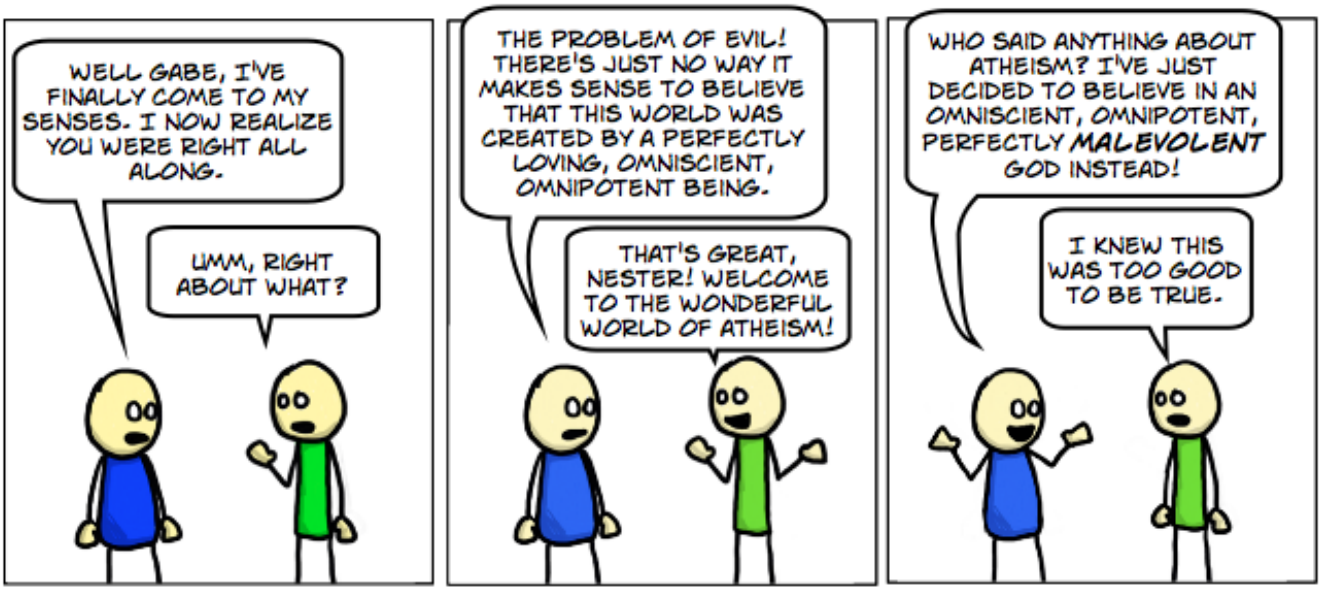
answer. Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature—that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance—and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth."

"No, I wouldn't consent," said Alyosha softly.

"And can you admit the idea that men for whom you are building it would agree to accept their happiness on the foundation of the unexpiated blood of a little victim? And accepting it would remain happy for ever?"



THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Perhaps the most powerful argument *against* the possibility of God's existence is based on what in philosophy we call the ***Problem of Evil***. The question is simple but stark: if God is so good, then why do horrible things happen? There are a number of ways theists attempt to answer this question, but before we get to the answers, we need first to understand the full import of the question itself.

Start with God

We begin by remembering our definition of God:

> *x is* ***God*** *iff x is an omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnibenevolent (morally perfect) being.*

So if there is a God, then God can do anything that is logically possible, God knows anything that is possibly knowable, and God is perfectly good. The problem, succinctly stated—and which we'll more fully explore momentarily—is that God and evil *cannot possibly* coexist. Like, at all.

Ever. There is *no possible world* where God and evil coexist. The very notion is *incoherent*.

> *Injustice upon earth renders the justice of heaven impossible.*
>
> *(Robert G. Ingersoll)*

Three Kinds of Evil

So what kind of thing is evil that God can't coexist with it? We'll have to unpack this. Traditionally, there are ***three kinds of evil.***

Metaphysical Evil

This gets pretty technical, actually. And we just don't have time or resources to explore and understand the ins and outs of metaphysical evil. (Like you were surprised; you just went through the CAP discussion!)

I'll give you the short and sweet.

Basically, everything that is has something called ***being***. And this *being* is defined by the nature of whatever a thing is. Thus, the *being* of a cat is composed of the essence of a cat (including the essence of all parts of a cat); the *being* of a solar system the essence of a solar system (including all the necessary parts of a solar system). This much we somewhat get from our discussion on reality, above.

Metaphysical evil is simply *limitation of being*. And this gets us the traditional notion of evil off the ground. If *being* is good, then more *being* is better. Unlimited being is perfect. But the universe can't be unlimited (that's the complicated discussion we don't have time to cover here, so take my word for it).

Since the universe has limits, it has metaphysical evil. That evil is the fact that things have to be finite, that they can't have unlimited *being*.

Notice right away that evil isn't always something horrible or jaw-dropping. It's limitations. In fact, the traditional (that is, before about the 1800s) understanding of evil is that it is a ***privation.*** That is, it is a *lack*.

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The Evidential Problem of Evil

So what sort of argument is Ivan offering? What is his problem with God, that is so huge that he wants to "return his ticket"?

Given the causal arguments, above, we can, as rational people, plausibly conclude that God exists. But Ivan's case is compelling—painfully so. Dostoevsky created this litany from the headlines in the Petersburg news—he didn't invent these stories, he reported what he'd read. And this shouldn't shock any of us—the news around here 125 years later isn't much different. In short, Ivan reminds us that we have reason to believe that there is horror in this world.

Let's let the claim "God exists" be represented by the constant, **G**. Let's further let the claim "There is evil in the world" be represented by the constant, **E.** So we have reason to believe that G, and we have reason to believe that E. Remember the definition of God? Let's break it down into its constitutive claims.* We have three claims:

> God is all-**k**nowing (or omniscient);
>
> God is all-**p**owerful (or omnipotent); and
>
> God is perfectly good (or omni-**b**enevolent).

Let's let the constants **K**, **P**, and **B** stand for these three claims. So we can say that

> If God exists, then God (as defined) is all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly good.

To make our claim's logic clear, we can rewrite this as

> ***IF*** G, then K and P and B.

* "Constitutive" just means "something that is a part of the constitution, or necessary make up of something else."

Three Kinds of Evil,

continued.

Natural Evil

But let's keep to the privation model, for a bit. And let's limit our scope from *everything that is in alpha* (the actual world) to *everything in the physical universe*. Metaphysical evil, technically, includes things like freedom, wisdom, mathematics, and possibility. None of these things are physical, are things you can experience with your senses.

So if we look at only the *physical* world, we see that sometimes things lose being that they're supposed to have (even given the limitations of metaphysical evil). Stars implode, and black holes suck whole galaxies into them, never to be known again. Let's get even smaller in scope. Here on Earth, tsunamis wipe out whole cities, earthquakes crush buildings, mammoth forest fires destroy whole ecosystems. That is, these events take *being* away. Animals that are, in essence, living things, no longer live. Things no longer are what they are supposed to be.*

So we can say that ***natural evil*** occurs when *physical being* is removed from something. It also occurs when *physical being* that is supposed to be there (for whatever reason) isn't.

For example, we call the devastation of a tsunami evil. We say that the destruction of a forest is evil. But we also say that a child born blind or a puppy born without legs has encountered a natural (or physical) evil.

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* "Supposed to be" is here very loosely used. Please understand it to be a standard set either by design (buildings, etc.), by convention (cities, communities, etc.), or by genus (scientific categorization).

Now remember how we define all our terms? What does it mean to be omniscient? Omnipotent? Omnibenevolent? Ask carefully-thinking theists and they will generally affirm that it means that

> *If God is omniscient, then God knows about all evil in the world (if there is any).*
>
> *If God is omnipotent, then God has the power to eliminate all evil in the world (if there is any).*
>
> *If God is omnibenevolent, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil in the world (if there is any).*

So to make our argument clear so far, we can say this:

1. We have reason to believe G.
2. If G, then K and P and B.
3. If K, then God knows about all evil in the world.
4. If P, then God has power to eliminate all evil in the world.
5. If B, then God has desire to eliminate all evil in the world.

But, as Ivan reminds us, we have reason to believe there is evil in this world. Notice, before we just said that *if* there was evil, then God (if God exists) would know about it, have power to alter it, and have the desire to alter it. Now, we're saying that, yes, in fact, there is evil in the world. That gives us this next premise:

6. We have reason to believe E.

But, our belief in 6 conflicts with 3, 4, and 5. That is, *it isn't the case that all evil is eliminated from the world.*

At least, there's some serious tension there. What to do? Well, we've certainly got reason to believe God exists, and we've certainly got reason to believe there is evil in the world. So we don't want to get rid of premise 1 or premise 6. That's where we're stuck.

What does this entail? The fact that there still is evil in the world, if God exists, gives us reason to believe (at least) one of the following three things:

> God doesn't know about all evil in the world.
>
> God doesn't have the power to eliminate all evil in the world.
>
> God doesn't have the desire to eliminate all evil in the world.

Hang on a second. If God doesn't know about it, then K is false. God can't be all-knowing. And if God can't eliminate it all, then P is false. God can't be all-powerful. And though

Three Kinds of Evil,

continued.

The child never had the full *being* of his eyes (they don't work properly); the puppy never had the full *being* of puppyhood (puppies are supposed to have legs).

Now this understanding of evil is more intuitive. When we see a huge storm wipe out a village, we are horrified, and mobilize with charity and volunteer work. We see that event as horrible. Philosophers have traditionally called such horrors *natural evil*.

Importantly, note that natural evil is ***not*** *(necessarily)* ***caused by human activity.*** Insurance companies understand this. They call such things "acts of God," and tend to look for ways to avoid covering such things in your policy.

Moral Evil

The most common way we think of evil is actually one of even smaller scope. If we want to continue with the traditional privation model, we can say that ***moral evil*** is that privation that is caused by human action.

This kind of evil has attached to it a sense of responsibility or blame. So think of that puppy or child, again. It would be natural evil for that puppy to be born legless or for that child to lose sight from cancer. But what if the puppy was born legless because its mother was exposed to extreme radiation emanating from a poorly-insulated nuclear plant? Or what if the child was born blind because her family lived under a regime that routinely malnourished its population? Same effect, but human responsibility—it gives us pause.

continued...

many might say that God might not want to eliminate all evil, what they have to admit they're saying is that God isn't perfectly good. So this gives us our next premise:

7. If E and G, then either K is false, or P is false, or B is false.

But, hang on again. God is ***defined*** as all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly good. If you take one of those away, you don't have God anymore. You've got something *less* than God. Remember, if you take away a necessary condition for something x, you've not got x any more, but something else!

So if we have to remove one of these necessary conditions for God in order to account for evil, we've got a huge problem. What we must do is make God *less* than our definition of God. We have to say that whatever it is that does exist isn't the same thing as our defined entity.*

Let's add these to our argument (to spell it all out logically):

8. By Leibniz's Law, if x has a property that y does not have, then x ≠ y.
9. So if K or P or B is false, then whatever exists ≠ God (as defined).

That is, we must conclude

10. We have reason to believe that G is false.

In short, we have reason to believe that God doesn't exist.

Here's the argument all together for clarity:

Let G = "God exists." Let K = "God is all-knowing."
Let P = "God is all-powerful." Let B = "God is perfectly good (benevolent)." Let E = "There is evil in the world."

EVIDENTIAL

1. We have reason to believe G.
2. If G, then K and P and B.
3. If K, then God knows about all evil in the world.
4. If P, then God has power to eliminate all evil in the world.
5. If B, then God has desire to eliminate all evil in the world.
6. We have reason to believe E.
7. If E and G, then either K is false, or P is false, or B is false.
8. If x has a property that y does not have, then x ≠ y.
9. So if K or P or B is false, then whatever exists ≠ God (as defined).

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10. We have reason to believe G is false.

* Recall, then, that by Leibniz's Law, if what we've got *doesn't* share all the same properties as God (because we've taken one away), then it cannot be God. God minus K isn't God. God minus P isn't God. God minus B isn't God. It's something darn big, but it's not God.

Three Kinds of Evil,

continued.

This kind of evil has attached to it a sense of responsibility or blame. So think of that puppy or child, again. It would be natural evil for that puppy to be born legless or for that child to lose sight from cancer. But what if the puppy was born legless because its mother was exposed to extreme radiation emanating from a poorly-insulated nuclear plant? Or what if the child was born blind because her family lived under a regime that routinely malnourished its population? Same effect, but human responsibility—it gives us pause.

When natural evil happens and it's our fault (humans caused it), that's moral evil. Of course, the ancient notion of evil as privation (it was first posited by Augustine in the early 400s CE) isn't quite so intuitive (or maybe not even as plausible) today. But we'll want it in our toolbox for discussion.

Manageable vs. Unmanageable Evil

We can talk about evil rather by looking at it in terms of magnitude (instead of origin), by thinking about it as either *manageable* or *unmanageable* (posited first by Langdon Gilkey).

Manageable evil is that sort of evil we humans can somehow control, whereas ***unmanageable evil*** is that sort that is beyond our ability to tame or control. Notice that it somewhat amounts to the same thing as the three above (but doesn't give us that nifty notion of *privation*). We can control human behavior, to some extent. We can't control death, many forces of nature, the reality of our own necessary limitations, and so on.

Well how in the heck do you respond to that?

First, can you see that this is a carefully-constructed, and *valid* argument? If all the premises are true, we *must* accept the conclusion. Notice also that this argument isn't saying that God *doesn't* exist, rather that *we have reason to believe* that God doesn't exist. It's making an *epistemological* not a *metaphysical* claim.

Metaphysics, remember, has to do with what is the case, with the content of reality. In contrast, ***epistemology*** has to do with what we can know and have reason to believe. And this argument makes a claim about what it is rational to believe, not about what is ultimately the case. Okay, so this isn't really an argument about whether God exists or not, but an argument about what it's reasonable to believe.

Notice, one who endorses this might say, well, maybe God does exist. But a God who's not good, or a God who's not powerful, or an ignorant God is no God for me. Count me out. Most importantly, God is *supposed* to be good. If God doesn't care about the torture of children, then count me out. That's Ivan's argument, and it's the argument of many atheists today.

And whether you agree on the actual *existence* or *nonexistence* of God, you should feel the pull of this argument. There are countless books out there, even in theistic circles, about how to deal with evil. Books like

- *Where is God When it Hurts?*
- *Why Do People Suffer?*
- *The Problem of Pain*,
- *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil*,
- *How Could God Allow Suffering and Evil?*
- *Disappointment with God*, and
- *Is God to Blame?*

are bestsellers on the Christian shelves, even as I write. The argument is compelling. We feel it. It sometimes clings to the back of our throats with the sting of confusion, sometimes rolls down our faces inside the window of our tears.

So how do we respond to such an argument?

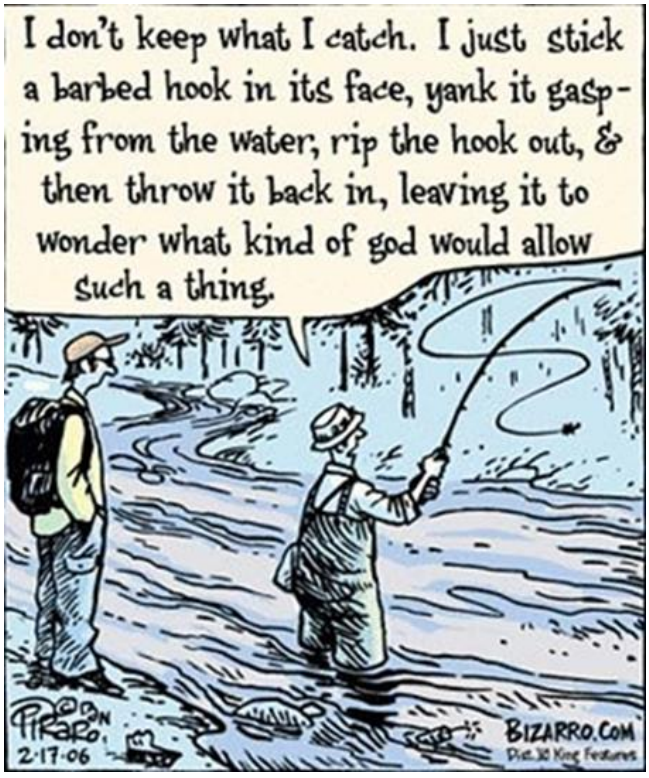
Analyzing *EVIDENTIAL* for Validity

The first thing to do when analyzing an argument, of course, is to determine whether it's a good argument of its type. This is a deductive argument, offering a guarantee. And as we look at it, we see it's valid. If the premises are all true, the conclusion **must** be true. So are all the premises true?

Let's roll down the list, quickly. Premise 1 is our reason for believing God exists. Now you might say, "*I* don't have any reason to believe God exists!" so you might say premise 1 is false. That's all well and good, but there are many (many!) others who *do* have reason to believe God exists, and these people are, on the whole, rational. So even if you personally don't believe there's a God, you do have *reason* to believe God exists if there are others who are quite rational, solid thinkers, who believe that God exists.

Recall that there is a difference between *what you actually believe* and *what you have reason to believe*. You might have reason to believe God exists, but it is, for you, greatly outweighed by your reason to believe God doesn't exist. This doesn't remove all reason you have to believe that God *does* exist, but it counterbalances, maybe even totally undermines your belief by offering better reasons for the contrary position. This premise comes before any evidence to the contrary, before any undermining or belief-defeating evidence. It's just looking at the brute fact that it isn't wholly unreasonable to believe there's a God.

Premise 2 is just the definition of God. Monotheists have accepted this as the basic definition since the early Middle Ages. We're not going to reject it now.* Premises 3, 4, and 5 unpack what each of these defining terms entail. Being all-knowing means that anything knowable is known, so if evil can be known, an all-knowing being would know about it. We can't reject that. Being all-powerful means that if something can be done, the all-powerful being can do it. So if evil can be eliminated, then this being has the power to eliminate it.



Can evil be eliminated? Consider: we can stop fires, can save people's lives, can get rid of all sorts of evils. Can God (if God exists) make it that a baby isn't born blind? That no puppies are born legless? Can God (if God exists) make it that people aren't tortured? That people don't die from agonizing cancers or lay helplessly bleeding in war-torn streets, after their limbs have been blown off by ill-aimed missiles?

Most theists say yes, yes God can do these things. In fact, this is the point of prayer, isn't it? At least, the point of petitionary prayer. Isn't supplication about asking God to eradicate evil? *Please God*, we pray, *please help us in our time of need*. Save our baby; cure the disease; free the prisoner; end the war. So, on the face of things, we can say that no theist will deny 4.

Premise 5 simply says that perfect goodness cashes out many ways, and one is that God wants good for us. Hebrew scripture has God saying "I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm

* That said, there are some groups who *would* deny this premise's truth. Some argue that God's knowledge is limited by time, that God learns as we do. Thus, they deny K, and this problem doesn't arise. Others argue that God's goodness is limited only to those he "elects," and God either doesn't care about or hates everyone who isn't elected (however this process occurs). Some few Muslims hold this view, as do Christians who adhere to a very strict Calvinism. This position rejects B, and again, this problem doesn't arise for such views.

However, the vast majority of theists hold that God has all three of these attributes (and more besides!), so the problem can't be removed by denying the truth of this premise. None of these theists would *want* to deny 1.

you, plans to give you hope and a future."* That is to say that God wants only the best for us. Christian Bibles have taken this belief many directions over the centuries—one way reads "plans of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope and a future." Islam holds that we are to be benevolent because Allah is merciful and benevolent to us.†

God, the theists believe, doesn't want evil to happen to us. God's plans are the opposite of evil. That is to say that theists hold that God *does* want to eliminate evil in the world. God wants to bring us peace of mind, to bring us good, not evil. So the theist, it seems, must accept the truth of 5, too.

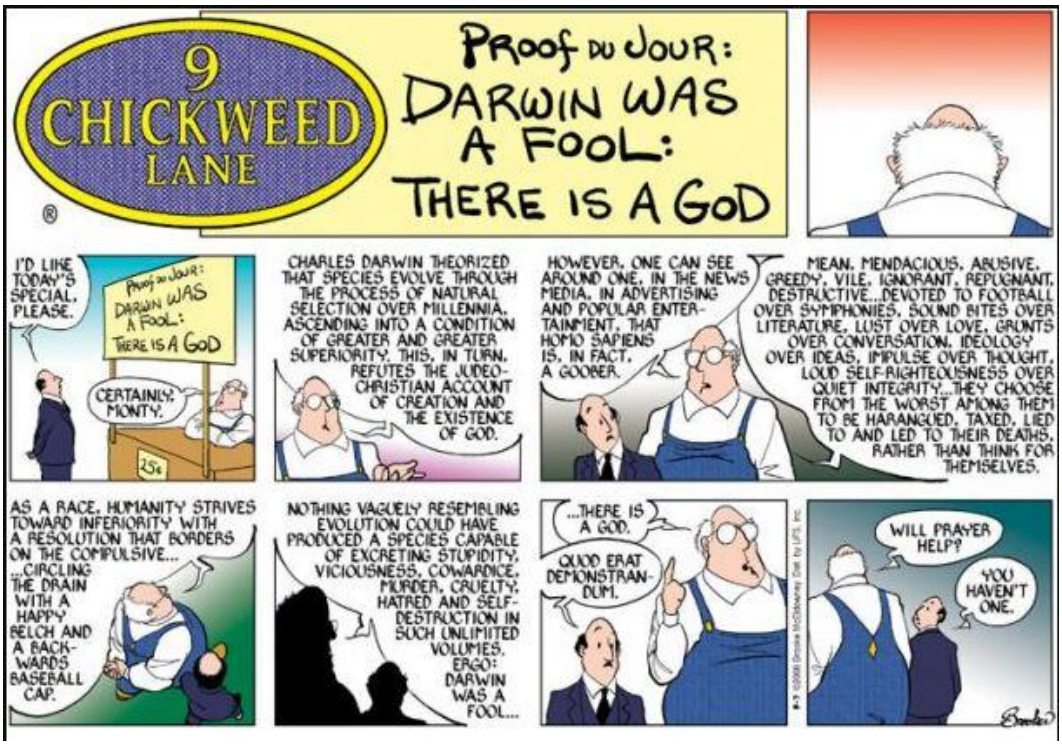
But…

But…

There's evil in the world. Do we accept premise 6? It seems apparent that we must. And this simply brings it down to the logical relation in 7. If we accept 2-6, we must accept 7. And if 7 is true, then Leibniz's Law tells us that whatever it is out there that exists, it's missing (at least) one necessary property of Godhood. So it can't be God (those are premises 8-9).

Thus, it seems, all analyzed, that this argument is a killer. We *do* have reason to believe that God does not exist.‡

Now what?



* Jer. 29:11, NIV.

† 2:182; 2:208; 6:127 (among other places).

‡ The Problem of Evil, as an argument denying the existence of anything that meets the definition of God was first posited by the Stoic philosopher Epicurus around 300 BCE. Clearly, this is not only a problem for modern theists.

THREE APPROACHES TOWARDS A RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

That we have *reason to believe* something x is not a guarantee that x *is true*. But it is a huge step in that direction. How might a theist respond to this problem?

I hope right now you're feeling, if you're a theist, squeamish. Uncomfortable. Wishing you could find a response. ANYTHING! That, by the way, is the pull of this argument. (This is what we meant by "compelling" in chapter four, and this argument is really compelling!) Never fear, theists have been responding to this argument for centuries. So will we, since we want the truth, not to win any debates for brownie points.

Total Refutation

One theistic approach in response is a ***total refutation***. This approach argues that premise 6 (there is evil in the world) is false. Actually, there *isn't* evil in the world at all. None.

That might sound wacky. It isn't. Remember the medieval notion of metaphysical evil as a *lack*? Privation theory is one way the refutation works. It says that evil is a gap, a lack, a hole. It's ***nothing***. Thus, it's not something you can remove or know. God knows every***thing***, can do any***thing***, but if evil is a big zero (where something might be), then it's not contradicting God's existence for there to be gaps.

We can say that 6 is false because it presupposes that evil is a ***thing*** that can be in the world, but that's incoherent (they say). Evil is not a ***thing*** at all. It's like the great Nothing in the *Neverending Story*. An empty blank. Not even a Void. Nothing.

This was a very popular approach until about the 1800s. But this presupposes a lot about the nature of reality that we've generally discarded. It makes assumptions that modern understanding of science and possibility considers nonsensical. *Everything*, we now say, exists. We can't talk about privation in this way. It's bizarre. Nowadays, the total refutation hangs on human ignorance. It is a position that argues that *there are no facts about evil in the world that make it unreasonable to believe in the existence of God alongside this evil.*

We don't know enough about evil, they say, to conclude it can't coexist with God. But this seems pretty flimsy to a lot of atheists and theists alike. It seems to cop out, to throw up our hands and say "who knows?!" It seems to ignore our quest for truth.

It also seems to ignore the appeal, in religious traditions, to seek God for knowledge and truth. It ignores the Jewish account of Jacob struggling all night with the angel of God for understanding. It ignores the meaning of *Israel* as "he who struggles with God."* Maybe we *should* know. Maybe we have a responsibility to know enough about the way things are. Or maybe we're using this lack of knowledge as an excuse to not pursue the truth of the matter, for whatever reason.

But what are the criteria for knowledge that would satisfy one who offers such a so-called 'refutation'? This kind of respondent tends to have an ever-rising bar. Once we know more, it's still not enough to *really* know, so we learn more, and nope, that's not enough, either. So on it goes, *ad infinitum*. That's not intellectually honest, because whatever counts as

* Gen. 32:22-32; Hos. 12.

sufficient reason to doubt God's existence is never clearly defined. That is to say, once one's evidence reaches the point that was once "adequate" for reasonable doubt, the standard is changed, the bar raised, the reasonableness of the doubt rejected.

And this is not intellectually honest.

Defense

A second approach is the ***defense***. This approach does not reject or deny the reality of evil or our ability to understand it. Rather, it attempts to show that there isn't any *logical* inconsistency or incompatibility or contradiction with the co-existence of God and evil.

These kinds of responses generally say that it's not just logical consistency we need, but plausibility: the story about how God and evil can coexist must both be consistent and "true for all we know." (That is, for all we know, it might be true. We have no reason to think it isn't true. It sure as heck could be true.) Thus, they counter this problem by offering counter-stories that, for all we know, are true.

Roughly, it looks like this: suppose the world requires evil in order to function properly. God, being K, P, and B, knows this, wants it to properly function, and thus allows evil to keep it working properly. For all we know, this is in fact the world we live in. So God is defended.*

The key here is that we don't *know* that this response scenario is false, so we have to accept ***EVIDENTIAL*** as, if not false, at least unconvincing. Actually, if it's unconvincing, the argument goes, then it fails as an argument for what it's reasonable to believe, hence, the conclusion is false.

This approach also faces problems—namely, fallacies. It offers an interesting story that is a useful starting point for discussion, but the claim hangs on what we *do not know*. But remember the rules of discourse: never conclude something stronger than your evidence allows. Thus, if you do not know x is false, you cannot assert from this lack of evidence that x must be true—even that x is *probably* true. Specifically, one fallacy people who take this approach make (depending on how they formulate their defense) is the ***argument from ignorance***, which says that "since you can't prove x is false, you should accept that x is true."

This is a little like saying something like "you can't prove false my claim that aliens abducted Elvis' brain and took it to Alpha Centauri, marinated it in motor oil, and decades later implanted the altered brain into Justin Bieber's head—so you have to accept this whole story is true. And that does explain quite a bit, eh?"

Not hardly.

Further, although ***EVIDENTIAL*** doesn't tell us absolutely that God doesn't exist (we don't know that), it does give us some very good reasoning to move in that direction, and some evidence for a claim that G is false (that "God exists" is false) is far more potent than zero evidence that this counter-scenario is true.

Theodicy

The third approach is the most promising. But you knew that, because you figured I'd save the best for last. A ***theodicy*** claims that

1. for every actual evil in the world, there's some state of affairs (SOFA) that gives any all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly good

* One philosopher who is famous for making such a defense is Peter van Inwagen. His book, *The Problem of Evil* was published by Oxford UP in 2006.

being (God) a morally sufficient reason for allowing this evil into the world, and

2. it is reasonable to believe that all evils taken collectively can be thus justified as morally acceptable.

The difference between a theodicy and a defense is that *while both attempt to show how God can coexist with evil* (whereas the refutation denies there is any evil sufficient to bring up the problem at all), the defense only shows that it is *likely* that there are good conditions that explain the coexistence. In contrast, *the theodicy offers explicit reasons*, attempts to demonstrate the compatibility of God and evil.

Notice how this avoids the problem the defense falls into. The defense doesn't give any direct evidence, just a "it's possible, and for all you know it's true—you can't prove it false!" approach (that is, a defense attempts to show only that some God-justifying reasons probably exist, even if we don't know them), whereas the theodicy says "x, y, and z are the case, and that's a really good set of reasons to reconsider."

So wat sorts of theodicies do we have that attempt to show ***EVIDENTIAL*** is making some mistake? What would give us reason to conclude that the argument is ill-conceived? There are a number of theodicies out there. We'll look only at two, because these are the most powerful counters to ***EVIDENTIAL***. (At least, they're the ones most people find persuasive.)

Soul Making

The first type of theodicy is called the ***soul-making*** argument. It argues that the evils in the world are justified (that God can coexist with evil) if one can legitimately see the world as a place God deliberately designed so that human beings, via their free choices, can become better people—undergoing spiritual growth (or soul-making) that ultimately makes them more fit to commune with God.

One example of this sort of theodicy is from the philosopher John Hick,* who writes,

> The value-judgement that is implicitly being invoked here is that one who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptation, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created ab initio in a state either of innocence or of virtue. In the former case, which is that of the actual moral achievements of mankind, the individual's goodness has within it the strength of temptations overcome, a stability based upon an accumulation of right choices, and a positive and responsible character that comes from the investment of costly personal effort.†

What Hick is saying is that a world where we have the opportunity to better ourselves is *morally superior*—***better than***—a world where no such opportunity occurs. And a world with evil in it is the kind of world where we have the opportunity to better ourselves, by means of overcoming this evil either by choosing not to succumb to it or by lessening its impact on others. The person who has overcome evil and

The quickest way to convert comic geeks is the "Argument from Batman."

* To see some of his fascinating work, start at http://www.johnhick.org.uk/jsite/.

† John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love,* revised edition, (New York: Harper and Row, 1978). pp. 255-56.

become virtuous is a better person than the one who was virtuous without having faced temptation.

In fact, the point of evil is that it enables other goods that a world without evil cannot enable—character virtues like courage or patience. Things like sympathy, forgiveness, mercy, deepened faith, hope, love, or friendship, the overcoming of temptation or fear, and perseverance. How would courage be possible—what would it even *mean* to call somebody 'courageous'—in a world where there was nothing to fear? Where there was no danger? And how could one ever be sympathetic or how could one overcome fear or triumph over temptation or learn to forgive if there was nothing forgivable or painful or sorrowful or afflicting or tempting? In a world with no offenses, no pain—no evil—such goods would be impossible.

According to Hick and others who put forth the soul-making theodicy, it is worth God's permitting evil in order to realize these goods. Hick argues that our problem—supposed by those who posit ***EVIDENTIAL***—is that we seem to think that the best possible world is one where there is no pain and everything is wonderful. But if that's not the best possible world, if people become better for facing evil than they ever could have been without the challenge, then we can say that evil's presence in the world doesn't at all give us reason to believe God doesn't exist.

This is a popular approach. Many Christian apologists and writers have taken it. But can we just embrace it without careful consideration? Of course not. Not if we want the truth.

Analyzing the Soul-Making Theodicy

There are three reasons to question this sort of theodicy. First—one might quickly assert—what about those evils that don't give us any chance to become better people? What about evils in the world that either a) don't affect human beings at all, or b) don't seem to offer any 'soul-making' outcomes?

What about horrible suffering? Say somebody suffers from agonizing cancer or is tortured mercilessly by a sadistic terrorist. How can such a situation better offer the victim of the suffering an opportunity to be a better person than a situation without such suffering? One might say that the agonizing suffering some experience at life's end (say, a death by Ebola or cancer or torture) isn't justifiable. It's not going to make that person a better person. If God planned such evil as this to give us the chance to be better people, then, arguably, those who suffered more would be those who need more work on their souls, in order to make them better people. But amazingly wonderful people suffer just as much as horrible rotten people. It doesn't compute.

But this isn't a refutation. In fact, it's rather difficult to refute something that isn't really giving hard evidence. And a theodicy doesn't give hard evidence for any position; it gives a "for all you know I'm right" suggestion for a position. It's very hard to refute suggestions.

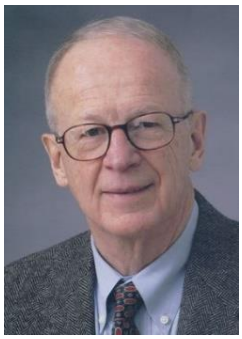
Notice that the theodicy has this much in common with the defense. The latter doesn't even give any reason—rather it offers "God works in mysterious ways" responses. The theodicy ultimately does the same. It gives a suggestion as to what God's ways might be, but in the end cannot offer any hard proof that this is the case, since, honestly, we can't exactly test the motives of God, if God exists.

Since we can't test this sort of counterargument, we might think we're stuck. But really, all we have is one option of response closed to us. So instead of attempting to prove the soul-making theodicy wrong, we follow the rules of discourse, and suppose it's right. We don't know one way or the other.

But we ***do*** want the truth. So what do we get if evil is here because God wants to make us better people? Is this a good reason to give up ***EVIDENTIAL***? Not necessarily.

What we have is a good reason to believe God cannot coexist with evil—if the theodicy is wrong—and a possibly good reason to believe God *can* coexist with evil—if it's right. Notice that the theodicy doesn't totally eradicate the reason to doubt. It just offers a scenario where God would logically coexist with evil. With at least that kind of evil that can make us better people.

But what about other evils in the world? What about the ones that don't give us the opportunity to become better people?



William Rowe offers such a response to this theodicy.* He responds to the soul making theodicy by presenting a very plausible thought experiment.

Suppose there is a horrible forest fire. This isn't surprising, given that there are horrible forest fires that happen frequently out west in California, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, Washington, British Columbia, and Montana. Now suppose further that this fire is on a preserve or some other track of land that is wholly isolated from human contact. This is a part of the forest that people seldom enter, and in fact, no human was there when the fire started. Thus, the fire is not human-caused. It is, according to our terminology, *physical evil*. Suppose further that the fire eventually ends itself before any human can respond. This keeps the entirety of the fire outside of human power or knowledge.

Now suppose that in the rapid advance of this fire, a fawn was separated from its mother, and trapped by a falling, burning tree. Unable to flee, its bones broken by the tree fall, it lays there trapped as the fire rages around it, and it experiences all the excruciating pain of being burned alive. Suppose, finally, that the fire advances so rapidly that the fawn is left behind, still struggling for life in the charring embers of the now-burnt section of the woods. Only after many days of suffering does that fawn finally die.

No humans were improved by this fawn's suffering. Yet if God is all-knowing, then God knows about the suffering of this fawn.† What about *this* kind of evil?

In fact, Rowe doesn't buy soul-making through intense suffering as something a perfectly good being would allow. He presents a tighter argument in his objection to the soul-making theodicy.

ROWE

1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

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3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

This is a pretty fierce response.

Rowe is careful to state that the possibility of lingering suffering—such as that for our poor fawn—*suggests* that premise 1 of ***ROWE*** is true. Furthermore, "the argument is valid; therefore, if we have rational grounds for accepting its premises," observes Rowe, "to that extent we have rational grounds for accepting atheism."

To what greater good might intense suffering enable? Certainly, the theist can (and will) argue that intense, prolonged suffering can be integral in the improvement of a person's soul. But there is another way, that might—indirectly—respond to Rowe's worry about evil that is seemingly irredeemable (in terms of permitting some greater good solely by virtue of the world being the sort that has evil). We'll see that in a different kind of theodicy.

Free Will

A second kind of theodicy is the argument for ***free will***. Interestingly, this notion of free will has been used

* Wm. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (1979): 335–41.

† Indeed, Christian scripture holds that God knows even when a tiny sparrow falls to the ground and dies (Mt. 10:29).

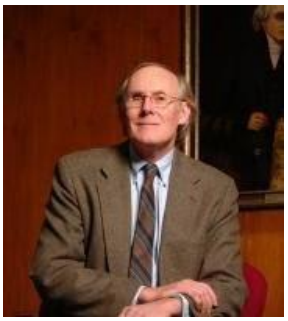
by both those who offer theodicies and those (like van Inwagen) who offer defenses. We'll worry about the theodicy only.

This argument for the compatibility of God and evil argues much on the same lines as the soul making theodicy, but it insists that evil is required for human free will to exist.

Alvin Plantinga offers this theodicy:

> A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures but He can't cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil.*

What this kind of theodicy does is place the blame of moral evil squarely on human shoulders. God is absolved of any responsibility, so it seems that God can coexist with moral evil.



Why? Maybe this is best stated by Clark Pinnock:

> God may be responsible for creating a world with moral agents capable of rebelling, but God is not to blame for what human beings do with their freedom. The gift of freedom is costly and carries precariousness with it. But to make a world with free beings is surely a worthwhile thing to do.†

In short, the world with moral evil is better than a world without it. Our having free will is better than our not having it. And if moral evil is a by-product of human free will, so be it. All things considered, this is a better world for it.

This theodicy also attempts to respond to ***ROWE*** by saying that *all* evil in the world has emerged as a consequence of human action. For the world to have moral evil, logically, it must have physical evil, too.

Even those situations like the prolonged, torturous death of a fawn, are explicable either as the consequence of human action (say, poor forest management) or as a necessary by-product of a world wherein human beings have free will. A world with evil in it—even evil that enables prolonged suffering—is a *better* world than one in which no suffering is possible. Thus, it is reasonable to believe that a world with horrific suffering is in fact a better world than one without such suffering.

One might be reminded of Leibniz's "best of all possible worlds" theodicy, where he carefully argues that God chose to make this world only because it was logically and metaphysically the best of all possible worlds (that is, worlds God could have possibly created), and that this world contains evil just shows that a world with evil in it is better than one without.‡

* Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* ((Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 30.

† Clark Pinnock, "God's Sovereignty in Today's World," Theology Today 53:1 (April 1996): 19.

‡ In his book *Theodicy*, written in the 1870s. Leibniz's argument requires a logical principle called the *Principle of Sufficient Reason*, which entails that nothing is done without sufficient reason, and that a perfectly wise (omniscient) being would know all the possible worlds and would choose the best one to create (or make actual).

One might also be reminded of Voltaire's scathing rejection of this "best of all possible worlds" talk through his satirical novel *Candide*, which was filled with anything but soul-making, free will preserving evil.

So how can we respond to this second theodicy, without resorting to the barbs of an angry satire? Are we satisfied with the free will theodicy? Does it *truly* answer our worry about horrific evil?

Analyzing the Free Will Theodicy

In this sort of theodicy, the greatest good isn't having self-determination. Free will is a means to an end. The ultimate good, in this view, is the ability to have genuine love, to have a true relationship between persons—ultimately, between a human being and God. In order to have such a relationship, one cannot be a pawn or puppet; one needs to be able to choose to relate.

The free will theodicy argues that in order for one to even have a meaningful relationship with other people or with God, one needs to have autonomy. That is to say that autonomous free will is a *necessary condition* for meaningful relationships. Thus, if you take this away, you lose the greater good that comes from authentic relationships.

Unfortunately, we can tease apart the *having* of free will from the *abuse* of free will. Certainly we can conceive of a person who has free will to choose between something good and something else good—it isn't even *conceptually* necessary that one of the options one must have to maintain free will be to do something evil.

Further, most theists who present the free will theodicy have as a part of their worldview the existence of an afterlife in heaven or paradise. Paradise is understood to be a place where no evil happens, where no one suffers. And yet everyone inhabiting heaven still has free will. So if the theist can conceive of a possible existence populated by agents who have free will but have no option of evildoing, then this approach seems at best disingenuous: the argument is that God created a world where there's evil to preserve human free will, yet God created heaven (another world) where there is human free will without evil. Why one place and not the other? There is no good answer.

Atheist Hell.

Conclusions on Theodicies

If we compare the soul-making theodicy with the free will theodicy, we see a clear distinction. There is no need for evil to preserve free will. We do not need to have evil choices to have choice. On the other hand, it seems plausible that we need to experience evil to some extent in order to make a great soul: to develop character traits that are meaningless in a world without such evil.

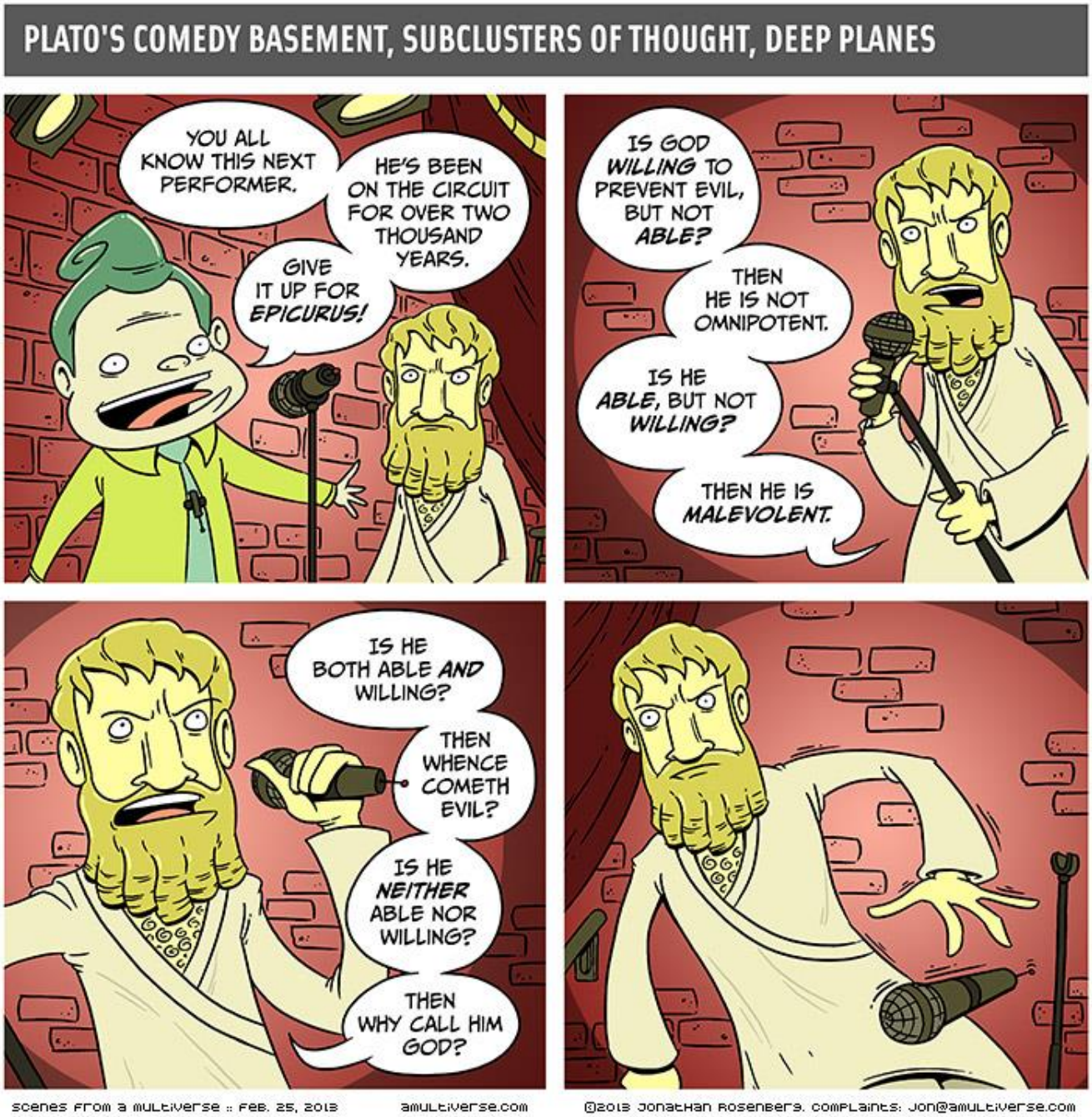
Still, we don't have a good answer to ***ROWE***.

But notice this: neither ***EVIDENTIAL*** nor ***ROWE*** ultimately conclude that God cannot *possibly* exist (although ***ROWE*** does seem to imply such a conclusion). Rather, they conclude that we have *reason to believe* that God doesn't exist, that atheism is a reasonable position. They're making an *epistemological* not a *metaphysical* claim.

In his paper where he develops ***ROWE***, William Rowe posited a position he called ***friendly atheism***. Appealing to the ***principle of charity*** (which, basically, we have unpacked into our rules of discourse),* Rowe argues that two people can experience the exact same evidence and come to contrary conclusions: one might experience extreme suffering and infer that there cannot be a God,

* See chapter 1.

whereas another can experience the *exact same* situation and infer that God must exist. Rowe concludes that we should respond then with respect and kindness, not derision.



THE LOGICAL PROBLEM OF EVIL

It would be nice if we could leave it at that. But ***ROWE*** gives us reason to think the only problem we have regarding the coexistence of God and evil is epistemic. In fact, a number of philosophers have posited a far stronger argument that concludes the coexistence of God and evil is *necessarily* impossible. Building on ***ROWE***, they argue a very simple argument, based on our definition of God as *all-knowing, all-powerful,* and *perfectly benevolent (good)*.

Let G = "God exists."

Let E = "There is evil in the world."

EVIL

1. E→ ~G
2. E / ~G.

The argument is symbolized to show how simple it is.* It simply says

1. If there is evil in the world, then God can't exist.
2. There is evil in the world.

3. So God can't exist.

We can see that this argument builds on ***ROWE***, and we can certainly see why it's argued, and how it's defended. First, it is clearly valid. In fact, it follows the most basic deductive argument structure, the *modus ponens*.* But is it *sound*?

The same arguments against ***EVIDENTIAL*** can be made here. Evil could exist either because of human free will or in order to enable free will or in order to enable secondary goods (like courage, etc.). Thus, the clear approach is to question the truth of premise 1.

And of course, as we've seen with ***EVIDENTIAL***, the atheist cannot truly know whether evil logically contradicts God's existence. Rather, the atheist can respond to this rejection of the truth of 1 with a modified argument:

Let G = "God exists."

Let E = "There is <u>unjustified</u> evil in the world."*

EVIL*

1. E*→ ~G
2. E* / ~G.

EVIL* responds to the objection the same way we responded to the theodicies. Sure, we'll say. We can accept that there is some evil in the world that makes us better people. And maybe some evil exists that is necessary for free will. But surely that's not the only kind of evil that exists in this world. We could still be free, could still become ever better people without *every* kind of evil that currently exists in the world.

What about this evil that *doesn't* make us better? What about this evil that doesn't enable our freedom? If God were all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly benevolent, God would know about all the evil—including this unjustified stuff—and would have the power to and the desire to remove it. But there it is. So God can't exist.

Logically.

Lest you be tempted, oh atheist, to insert a "BAM!" of happy refutation, let's first remember the rules of discourse, and then slow down to analyze ***EVIL*.*** Since it follows the same pattern as EVIL, we know that ***EVIL**** is valid. But is it sound?

How could we tell? ***EVIL**** narrowed the discussion to *unjustified* evil, and it is certainly logically clear that if in fact there were such a thing in existence, then God couldn't exist. So whereas premise 1 in ***EVIL*** was questionable, it isn't in ***EVIL****.On the other hand, we had no reason to question premise 2 in ***EVIL***.

But how could we be sure there is *unjustified* evil in the world? What test could we offer? If God exists, then God would be the sort of being whose justifications would be unknowable to us, since we're not all-knowing or perfectly good. It *might* be the case that there is unjustified evil in the world, but we have *absolutely no way of knowing* whether there is. That is to say that we cannot possibly know whether premise 2 of ***EVIL**** is true.

So although ***EVIL**** is a valid argument, we cannot ever know whether it is sound. So we have no good argument that conclusively denies the possibility of God's existence. It turns out, then, that we have good reason to believe God exists, good reason to believe God doesn't exist, and no concrete argument to confirm or disconfirm one position over the other.

To conclude our chapter on the arguments about God's existence, here's a final Task. As Task 62, write a two-page (double spaced) discussion on the problem of evil. What is the difference between ***EVIDENTIAL*** and ***EVIL***? What are they trying to prove? What responses are offered by those who try to refute these arguments? Explain the difference between refutations, defenses, and theodicies in your discussion. Remember to write clearly and carefully (follow college writing criteria!), but write as if to a friend who's not taken this class so that you take time to explain everything. Also, don't forget to define terms and to offer arguments in standard form.

* See chapter 6 for notation and info on valid arguments in truth-functional logic.