Apologetics Series, Podcast #1: Does God Exist?

# Introduction to the Apologetics Series

Apologetics is a rational defense for the truth of your religion or religious dogma. Catholicism is really good at this. The Catholic Faith is the most intellectual faith, in the sense that it provides the best bridge between reason and faith.

This only makes sense if it is the true religion. Since God created the natural order and the supernatural order, and theology is all about making a bridge between the two, by means of reason, the religion that actually teaches about the real supernatural order should be able to make the best bridge.

The purpose of this series is to provide the reasons for what we believe as Catholics. We cannot prove the faith. Otherwise, it is not faith; it is mathematics. But what we can do is provide motives of credibility, i.e. certain evidence that points to the truth of the Catholic Faith, but is not a demonstration. It only gets us to the point of seeing that the faith is true beyond a reasonable doubt.

Immortale Dei, 1885: “It cannot be difficult to find out which is the true religion, if only it be sought with an earnest and unbiased mind; for proofs are abundant and striking. We have, for example, the fulfillment of prophecies, miracles in great numbers, the rapid spread of the faith in the midst of enemies and in face of overwhelming obstacles, the witness of the martyrs, and the like. From all these it is evident that the only true religion is the one established by Jesus Christ Himself, and which He committed to His Church to protect and to propagate.”

This series is not meant to be directed towards Catholics, but to anyone out there of good will who wants to understand why Catholics believe what they believe. At the same time, it will be helpful for Catholics as well, for them to be strengthened in their faith.

## Preambles to the faith

But we are not going to start with specifically Catholic beliefs. Rather, we are going to start with what are called the preambles to the faith. These are things that can be proven by reason alone, but are also revealed by God. So, we do not need faith to believe them, but they are also things that we are obliged to believe as Catholics.

The first of these is the truth of the existence of God.

# Proving the Existence of God

We are going to use a metaphysical proof, not a scientific proof. I will explain later on why the metaphysical proof is much better.

Metaphysics is the study of “being”, that is, what it means to exist, what is true of all things that exist, just by the fact that they exist. It is by forming a notion of existence and what is necessary to exist that we are able to prove the existence of a first cause of all existing things.

Note: the Oath against Modernism by St. Pius X starts off with having the person profess their belief that the existence of God can be proved by reason!

First of all, I profess that God, the origin and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the natural light of reason from the created world (see Rom. 1:19), that is, from the visible works of creation, as a cause from its effects, and that, therefore, his existence can also be demonstrated.

## Preliminary analysis

That is what we are going to do, by giving St. Thomas’s third proof of the existence of God, the proof from contingency. Where do we start? With assumptions.

Assumptions have to be made about the most basic principles, because the most foundational principles cannot be proven. What if we are not willing to make these assumptions? Well, then we are not able to know anything about reality. Or prove anything about it.

Here are some things we are going to have to assume:

1. Nothing comes from nothing. There is no such thing as spontaneous creation. If a thing exists, it either exists on its own or it exists by reason of something else.
2. There must be a sufficient reason for the existence of everything. If something exists, there must be a reason why it exists. Otherwise, it would not exist. Things don’t just exist for no reason.

We ask the question of Leibniz: why is there something rather than nothing? We are looking for the cause of anything to exist at all. What makes for there to be beings?

It is clear that things do not exist just because we can think about them. And, if we look at the things that exist around us, we have to ask: do they exist of themselves? Are they self-existing? Is there something that we can perceive in them that demands existence? Such that if you are that thing, you have to exist?

The answer is ‘no’. There is nothing around us that must exist. Look at all of the nouns in the dictionary and see if you can find ‘existence’ in its definition. Does not exist. We do not include existence in the definition of anything because nothing around us:

* Presents itself as self-existing
* Provides a sufficient reason for its own existence

In philosophical language, we call such things contingent, i.e. they are things whose existence must necessarily rely on something outside themselves.

Illustration, Table from *The Realist Guide*: there are some things that could never exist, there are some things that do not exist, but could exist; and there are some things that exist.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **1. Impossible things** | **2. Possible, non-existing things** | **3. Existing things** |
| A square circle  A rock heavier than God can lift  Time travel  An infinite number | Bilbo Baggins  Winged horses  Velveeta cheese  The spaghetti monster | The planet Saturn  The land mass ‘Australia’  Your mind  Cockatoos |

The things in column 2 *could exist* but do not. The things in column 3 *do exist,* but could not. So, what makes for the difference? There must be a cause of the existence for those contingent things. They have an essence but no existence of themselves. How about they give themselves existence? Well, they cannot do that if they do not exist!

Quote from *The Realist Guide:* “When we come to the third column, the column of things that are real, we see that there must be some reason why they are so, that is, why they are something rather than nothing, in Leibniz’s words. If there wasn’t a need for an extra cause to move from column 2 to column 3, then we would have to say that there is no difference between existing and not existing, which is surely not the case! Those in column 2 have essence without existence, while those in column 3 have both. And so the cause that bridges the appalling gap between the two is one that accounts for existence, that is, the very fabric of reality as such. This cause we commonly called God.”

To recap the argument:

**M:** All contingently existing things need a cause for their existence.  
**m:** All of the things that we know of in the universe are contingently existing things.  
**C:** All of the things that we know of in the universe need a cause for their existence.

**Homework assignment:** take a look at the [famous debate](http://youtube.com/watch?v=K3SqQNquG8A) between Fr. Frederick Copleston, S.J. and the notorious atheist Bertrand Russell. Fr. Copleston made the argument from contingency. See my Quora summary of the debate [here](https://www.quora.com/What-is-your-review-of-Bertrand-Russell/answer/Paul-Robinson-410).

## Type of Cause

We come to the conclusion that there must be a cause who is responsible for the existence of contingent beings, some existence giver. There is an important distinction to be made about what type of causation is required to give existence.

Some people think of God as giving existence at the moment of conception and then you just have it from that point forward. Or God creates everything at the Big Bang and then goes on a smoke break! This is how things often work in our own causality. I pound a nail into the wall. When I am done, the nail stays there, and the activity of my causality is complete. There is no need for me as a cause to continue acting on the effect for the effect to remain.

It is different, however, for hanging a picture on the nail. For the picture to remain hanging there, the nail has to stay on the wall at all times and provide its support at every moment. In other words, the nail must exercise its causality on the picture at every moment for the effect of hanging to remain.

The same is true for everything around us “hanging out” in reality. If you do not have existence of yourself, then your existence provider must endow you with existence at every moment for you to exist. Otherwise, you will fall out of reality.

So, let us be very clear here, because so many who speak of St. Thomas’s arguments for God get this wrong ([like here](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TgisehuGOyY)): we are not going back in time to find a first cause of existence! We are looking for a cause of the existence of contingent beings *at every moment.*

Such is the nature of *per se* causality as opposed to *per accidens* causality.

## Attributes of the Metaphysical God

We may ask ourselves: what connection is there between this God Who can be known by natural reason and the God that Catholics worship? Are there any similarities between what reason tells us and what revelation tells us? Are there any contradictions?

Well, it turns out that we can know many things about God by the fact that He is the first cause of the existence of contingent beings:

1. **Simple –** God must be that being who is existing by definition. It must be part of His essence, or nature, to exist. As such, He is not created, but is self-existing. His being is not put together of different parts (essence and existence) but is absolutely simple.
2. **Unique** – there can only be one being for whom existence and essence are one and the same. Say there was a second such being. What would distinguish him from the other being, when they are both just pure act of existence? Nothing. There can only be one absolutely simple being.
3. **Omnipotent –** the power to give existence to another being is the power to make real whatever could exist. That is a power without limits. There is no pre-existing subject that is acted upon to limit the causality and there is the capability to bring *anything* into existence.
4. **Unchanging –** change is only possible when you have something to change to and a being that exists by its very nature can only change to non-existence. But He cannot change to non-existence because He is existing by His very nature. The fact that He is unchanging, though, does not mean that He is inactive! On the contrary, He is holding everything in existence at every moment.
5. **Eternal –** anything that is in time undergoes succession and so changes.
6. **Immaterial –** everything that is material is composed of parts, exists in time, undergoes change.
7. **Perfect –** to be imperfect means to be capable of completion in some way. But there is nothing that can complete pure existence.
8. **Pure Goodness –** to lack goodness is to fall short of what one is, of what one is meant to be. But a being that is pure act and always pure act is always at the top of his game.
9. **Omniscient –** the Creator of all things must know the things that it sustains in existence in order to do that. For God, that is everything.
10. **All-loving** – to love is to will the good of another. But God gives to all things their greatest good, their very reality and their ordering to their goal, without being able to receive anything from them, in Himself.

That is ten attributes about God that reason alone can figure out and they match up nicely with the God of revelation!

# Scientific Proof of the existence of God

William Lane Craig has popularized the kalam cosmological argument of the medieval Muslim philosophers. He does not believe that the metaphysical proofs work and, generally speaking, Protestants do not accept them. They are nominalists in philosophy rather than realists. They do not accept the ability of the mind to know ‘being’ and this leads them to agnosticism in philosophy.

The next best thing for Craig is to argue from the Big Bang. This proof works if you accept the Big Bang Theory, and [he has a snazzy video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CulBuMCLg0) to accompany the proof, but it is far inferior to the metaphysical proof in getting us to the Christian God.

M: Everything that has a beginning has a cause.  
m: The universe has a beginning.  
C: The universe has a cause.

Differences between the two types of proof

* **Major:** the kalam argument makes use of the principle of causality in relation to the accidental chain, to a becoming in time rather than a state of being. St. Thomas’s proofs abstract from time, referring as they do to the essential chain of causality, a state *in facto esse.*
* **Minor:** the kalam argument makes use of a premise that can only be established in a probabilistic fashion by complicated arguments of scientists. St. Thomas’s proofs rely on the most fundamental statements about reality, the fact that there is change or causation, etc.
* **Conclusion:** 
  + the kalam argument’s conclusion only has a probabilistic certitude, because of the weakness of its minor. As a result, one can put forward arguments against the minor without falling into irrationality and shutting off the possibility of all discussion. Such is the case if one denies St. Thomas’s minor, for instance by saying that there is no change or no causation.
  + The kalam argument concludes to an extremely thin God, one who gets the universe started, a God who can match the God of deism. St. Thomas’s arguments conclude to a God Who must act at each moment for anything to exist at all, a God who provides for His creatures at every moment.

For the next podcast, we will consider the main objections to the existence of God.