Elenctic Theology: Theology Proper

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*Part 1: Introduction, Names & Deficient Views of God*

## Introduction to Theology Proper

### The Definition of Theology Proper

#### Theology Proper is the systematic analysis of the doctrine of God which ordinarily includes an analysis of His existence, knowability, personhood, attributes, names, and general works, which includes the decree, creation, providence, and redemption.

#### The doctrine of the Trinity is treated in this category since an understanding of this doctrine is essential to a Christian understanding God’s nature and personality.

### Theological Objectives

#### Practically speaking, every substantive theological error has its root in a misunderstanding of God’s nature and His works.

#### The objective of the Christian theologian is to paint the most accurate picture of God as possible. When an accurate understanding of God has been obtained, one can proceed with the rest of the theological system.

## The Being of God

### The Definition of God

#### **The Problem of Definition**

##### God is humanly *incomprehensible.* The word “incomprehensible” here means it is impossible to *perfectly or completely* define God.

##### While it is granted that any definition of God will be limited, definitions of God can be *correct* with respect to stating true propositions about God.

#####  In sum, a definition *can accurately describe God*, but it *cannot conceptually circumscribe God*, that is, fully and completely describe everything there is to know about God.

#### **Proposed Definitions**

##### The ***Westminster Shorter Catechism*** states, “God is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”

##### **A. H. Strong** gives a shorter definition with a slightly different emphasis. He says, “God is the infinite and perfect Spirit in Whom all things have their source, support, and end.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

### The Names of God

#### **The Importance of Names**

##### The contemporary use of names is little more than assigning ***labels or nicknames.***

###### Many English names have little or no meaning except to those who have studied the etymology of the name.

###### In the Bible, however, names often have great significance. In Jewish thought, the name by which a person is called indicated the *character* or *nature*of the person insofar as it is revealed and known.

###### This is always true of the names of God. Much may be learned of the nature and attributes of God from the names by which He has revealed Himself.

##### The revelation of God by His names is often made in connection with some particular ***need*** of His people and points to a particular attribute of God.

#### **The Significance of Biblical Names**

##### The biblical name often ***reveals*** something about the person.

###### This is especially true when ***God*** gives the name.

Gen. 17:5 – God changed the name “Abram” (exalted father) to “Abraham” (father of a multitude).

Is. 7:14, cf. Mt. 1:23 -In a prophecy of Jesus Christ, the name “***Immanuel”*** (“God with us”) is given.

##### The name ***represents*** the person.

###### Acts 2:21 - “Everyone who calls upon the *name* of the Lord shall be saved.”

###### Ex. 20:7 – This verse informs us of the importance of taking God’s name in vain. The name is a ***description*** of God Himself.

##### The names of God tell us something about His attributes, character, and essence.

#### **Old Testament Names of God (Note: The Greek and Hebrew fonts for Windows can be downloaded at my website at** [**www.theolaw.org**](http://www.theolaw.org)**. )**

Each of these divine names is also a description of the nature or character of God.

##### ***El* and Related Terms**

###### ***El*** (la@) (Occurs *circa* 230 times)

This is usually translated “God.” It is the most ***simple*** name by which God is designated in the Old Testament. It is used to designate both the true God and false gods (Gen. 31:30; Ex. 12:12).

It is possibly derived from a term which means to be first, to be lord, or to be ***strong*** and ***mighty***. This term attributes strength and power to God.

###### ***Elyon* (**/oyl=u\**) (**Occurs *circa* **50 times)**

This name is derived from a verb meaning “to go up” or “to be elevated,” and designates God as the ***high and exalted One*** (cf. Gen. 14:19, 20; Num. 24:16; Is. 14:14).

This name is especially used in ***Hebrew poetry*** and is found most frequently in Genesis and Psalms.

###### ***Elohim* (**<yh!Oa$**) (**Occurs *circa* **2,570 times)**

This name is derived from a verb meaning “to be smitten with fear.” It also points to God as the strong and mighty One and adds the dimension of God being the ***object of fear.***

It is a masculine plural noun which seldom occurs in the singular.

###### **Compounds with *El***

*El Olam* (Gen. 21:33) - “Everlasting or Eternal *El* (God)”

*El Shaddai*  (Gen. 17:1) - “*El* (God) Almighty”

*El Elyon* (Gen. 14:18) - “*El* (God) Most High”

##### ***Shaddai* (yD~v~) (**Occurs *circa* **48 times)**

###### From the verb “to deal violently” or “to be powerful.” It points to God as possessing all ***power*** in heaven and on earth.

###### It differs from *Elohim* in that it contemplates God as ***subjecting*** all the powers of nature and making them subservient to the work of divine grace.

##### ***Adonai* (**yn`**d)a&) (**Occurs *circa* **450 times)**

###### This is the term that the Jews frequently employ when discussing deity. The Jews pronounced the word *Adonai* in place of ***YHWH*** when reading the Hebrew Bible.

###### Adonai is usually translated as “master,” “sir,” “lord,” or “Lord” and is used both of humans and of God. When it has the article it usually refers to God Himself.

##### ***Yahweh* (**hw\h=y~**)(**Occurs *circa* **6,000 times;** it is usually rendered as LORD [all caps] in English translations.)

###### This name is derived from the imperfect form of the verb “***to be***” (*hayah*). The name Yahweh speaks of God eternally existing.

###### The name Yahweh has always been regarded as the most ***sacred*** and ***personal*** name of God.

The Jews avoided using this name because of texts such as ***Leviticus 24:16***, “The one who blasphemes the name of Yahweh shall surely be put to death.”

As such, the Jews began to substitute the name *Adonai* when reading the name *Yahweh* in the Hebrew Bible.

###### This name is indicative of God’s ***immutability and eternality***. (cf. Ex. 3:14, 15; John 8:58). He is the eternally existing One.

#### **The Origin of the Name “Jehovah”**

##### ***Kethibh* & *Qere* *in the Hebrew Bible***

###### *Definition*

*Kethibh –* The Hebrew word “kethibh” means “it is written.” This is the written text of the Hebrew Bible.

*Qere –* The Hebrew word “qere” means “to be read,” that is, that which should be spoken in place of the written text.

###### *Usage*

Most often the *Qere* was written as a marginal note or as a footnote.

 Out of reverence for the text of the Hebrew Scriptures, Jewish scribes would not change the Hebrew biblical text for any reasons

###### *Reasons for the use of Kethibh & Qere* [[2]](#footnote-2)

Correction of a known textual error, such as the incorrect form of the pronoun “we” in Jeremiah 42:6.

Updated pronunciations of words

Changing offensive or indelicate language to more euphemistic terms for public reading. For example, modern readers of the KJV would update language found in Numbers 22:22-41.

Reverence for the Divine Name. The Jews made a perpetual *Kethibh-Qere* change in order that the Divine Name written in the text would never be spoken.

##### ***The Name Yahweh as a Perpetual Qere (Qere Perpetuum)***

###### The Jewish leaders and scribes who copied the Hebrew Bible believed that the divine Name, Yahweh, was too sacred to be pronounced, that is, read aloud.

###### Instead, the reader of the text was expected in speech to substitute the *Qere* (the word “Adonai”) for the *Kethibh* (the word “Yahweh”), without having his or her attention drawn to it each time it occurs.[[3]](#footnote-3)

###### The problem is that the divine name occurs so often in the Bible (*circa* 6,000 times), a person could miss a footnote to a *Qere* for Yahweh and accidentally blaspheme the name of Yahweh. Thus, in the printed editions of the Hebrew Bible—especially after the Masoretes—the *Qere* for YHWH is not located in the margin or as a footnote, but it is located in the text (*Kethibh*) itself.

###### This is accomplished by placing the vowels (i.e., vowel points) from the Hebrew word “*Adonai*” (yn`d)a&) (*Qere*) on the consonants of the text, “*YHWH*” (hwhy) (*Kethibh*). Thus, the vowels from the name “Yahweh” are removed and the vowels from the name “Adonai” are placed on the consonants. The vowels from *Adonai* are as follows: “a,” which becomes short “e” when used with the Hebrew consonant *yodh* or “y”, “o,” and “a.”

###### Thus, when the vowels of the *Qere* (Adonai)—e, o, and a— were combined with the consonants of the *Kethibh* (*YHWH*), the word was written in the text as *YeHoWaH* (ho`hy+), that is, they placed the vowels from “Adonai*”* (yn`d)a&) on the consonants of the word “Yahweh” (hw\h=y~) and the result is the hybrid “Yehowah” (ho`hy+).

“Adonai*”* (yn`d)a&)

“Yahweh” (hw\h=y~)

“Yehowah” (ho`hy+).

##### ***From Yahweh to YeHoWaH to Jehovah***

###### The transliterated YeHoWaH became the English “Jehovah” when the German pronunciation of the consonants became the accepted English pronunciation. The changes from Hebrew to the Germanic pronunciation entailed changing the Y to J and W to V. As such, the transliterated “Yehowah” became “Jehovah.”

###### In sum, there are only two issues with the name “Jehovah” as the “true” pronunciation of the name of God: (1) the consonants and (2) the vowels.

###### Groups such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses have made an elementary error on the name of God. Yet this item is one of their essential issues on which they rest their distinctiveness. As such, the student should memorize this section and have a nice chat with JWs about this topic!

##### **Compounds with *Yahweh***

###### ***Yahweh Tsebhaoth* (I Sam. 4:4) - “*Yahweh* of Hosts” (**Occurs *circa* **230 times)**

This speaks of God as the ***King of Glory***, who is surrounded by an angelic hosts, who rules heaven and earth in the interest of His people, and who receives glory from all His people.

It also speaks of God as the divine ***commander*** of Israel’s army on earth (Josh. 5:14-15), but especially of the heavenly bodies (Is. 51:15; Jer. 31:35) and of ***angels*** in heaven (Neh. 9:6; Ps. 103:20-21).

This is God’s mightiest name, the most ***comprehensive*** expression of His worldwide power and the most ***exalted royal*** name of God in the Old Testament.

###### ***Yahweh Elohim* (Gen. 2:4) - “Yahweh God”**

*Elohim* is the exalted God above all creation; *Yahweh* is the one who is among His people and testifies of Himself.

This name indicates both God’s ***immanence*** and ***transcendence***.

###### ***Adonai Yahweh* (Gen. 15:2) - “LORD GOD” (large caps)**

###### **Compounds using epithets with *Yahweh***

*Yahweh-yireh* (Gen. 22:14) - “Yahweh will provide”

*Yahweh-nissi* (Ex. 17:15) - “Yahweh is my Banner”

*Yahweh-raah* (Ps. 23:1) - “Yahweh is my Shepherd”

*Yahweh-ropheka* ((Ex. 15:26) - “Yahweh your Healer”

*Yahweh-shalom* (Judg. 6:24) - “Yahweh is Peace”

*Yahweh-shammah* (Ez. 48:35) - “Yahweh is Here”

*Yahweh-Zidkenu* (Jer. 23:6) - “Yahweh our Righteousness”

#### **New Testament Names for God**

##### ***Theos* (qeov")**

###### This is the most*common* name for God in the New Testament.

###### It is similar to *El* and *Elohim* that it may be used to indicate the true God or false gods. However, the term, strictly speaking, is used to express *essential deity*.

##### ***Kurios* (Kuvrio")**

###### This name is derived from *kuros*, “power” and is generally translated “Lord.”

###### *Kurios* designates God as the mighty One and the Ruler who has legal authority and power. It is used to refer both to the Father and Christ.

##### ***Pater* (Pathvr)**

###### This is translated “Father” and refers to God’s personal, individual relationships with His children.

##### ***Abba* ( jAbbav)**

###### The name is Aramaic in origin and was employed both by young children and adult children.

###### It is used as a “warm” and “familiar” term and should be understood as “dear father.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

##### ***Ego Eimi* ( jEgwV Eijmiv)**

###### This is the title “I Am” found in John 8:58.

###### *Ego Eimi* is an emphatic construction in Greek. The common way to say “I am” would simply be “*eimi*.”

###### In Exodus 3:14 (LXX) Yahweh refers to Himself as *Ego Eimi.*

###### Other Old Testament passages in the LXX such as Deut. 32:39; Isa. 41:4; 43:10 and 46:4 employ *Ego Eimi* as a title or name for deity. As such, usage of *Ego Eimi* is consistent with speaking in the style of deity.[[5]](#footnote-5)

##### ***Others?***

#####

### Names & The Name of Jesus Christ[[6]](#footnote-6)

#### **Additional Issues Regarding Names & Character**

##### As aforementioned, a name was virtually equivalent to whoever or whatever bore it (e.g., I Sam 25:25)

###### **1 Sam. 25:25** May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name is Fool, and folly goes with him...

###### The use of nicknames today is similar to the biblical usage.

##### **“Name” Refers to People (Rev 3:4)**

###### **Rev. 3:4** Yet you have a few *people* (Grk. “names”) in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

##### **“Name” Refers to Reputation (Mk 6:14)**

###### **Mark 6:14** King Herod heard about this, for *Jesus’ name* had become well known. Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

##### **“Name” Refers to Authority/Power (Matt 7:22; Acts 4:7)**

###### **Matt. 7:22** Many will say to me on that day, `Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy *in your name*, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'

###### **Acts 4:7** They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "*By what power or what name* did you do this?"

##### **“Name” Used as Identity**The Name and Being of God are often used in parallel fashion, stressing the essential identity.

###### **Isaiah 25:1**

O LORD, you are my God; *I will exalt you and praise your name*, for in perfect faithfulness you have done marvelous things, things planned long ago.

###### **Malachi 3:16**

Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those *who feared the LORD and honored his name*.

#### ***In the Name of Jesus Christ***

##### **Belief in Jesus’ Name is the same as believing in Jesus Himself.**

###### **John 3:18**

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

##### **Praying in the Name of Jesus (John 15:16)**

###### His name is above all other names (**Phil 2:9)**

Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name…

###### Praying according to Jesus’ character, mind, and purpose

His Purpose

**I Thes. 4:3, 7**-Sanctification

**John 13:34-35**-Love one another

**II Peter 3:9**-Repentance

Why Prayer is not answered?

**I John 5:13-15**

**James 4:2-3**

##### **Baptizing in the Name of Jesus**

###### Baptize by the authority of Jesus Himself.

**Acts 2:38:** Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, *in the name of Jesus Christ* for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 10:42-48**

##

## Non-Christian Views[[7]](#footnote-7) of God

### Introduction

#### All of the non-Christian views of God are either false or defective in some sense.

#### The errors are either:

##### False statements about God, such as “God is limited in His Being; or

##### Deficient statements about God, such as, “God is only one Person.”

#### Below I have listed the most prominent false views of God.

### Pantheism

#### From the Greek *pan* (“all”) + *theos* (“God”).

#### Definition: God *is* everything. All substance, phenomena, and all else that exists, is God.

##### Pantheism over-emphasizes God’s immanence, that is, His identity with and activity in the world.

##### Pantheism rejects God’s transcendence, that is, the idea that God is separate from the world or creation in any way.

##### Pantheism is a form of Monism. Monism affirms that **only one substance exists.**

#### ***Types of Pantheism***

##### **Absolute Pantheism**

###### God is one, spiritual, impersonal Being.

##### **Materialistic (Physicalistic) Pantheism**

###### God is the physical-material universe.

##### **Modal Pantheism**

###### Finite or personal things are modes of God.

##### **Idealism**

###### All is divine mind.

##### **Emanational Pantheism**

###### God is unfolding like a flower.

#### ***The Conceptual Problems with Pantheism***

##### **Introduction**

###### Ultimately all critiques proffered here relate back to Absolute Pantheism.

###### The other types of pantheism listed are attempts to mitigate the inherent problems.

##### **Pantheism cannot be affirmed because no individual exists.**

###### *A Pantheist must say, if consistent, “God exists, but I do not.”*

However, one must exist to affirm one’s non-existence.

###### *There is no individual personality in the Pantheism.*

The problem is that our individual consciousness does not recognize this. If individuals are only self-conscious modes of God, how is it that we do not recognize it?

Where and when did the metaphysical amnesia begin? Why did “God” forget?

###### *There are no “I-Thou” or Subject-Object relationships.*

Only God exists in Pantheism.

Fellowship and worship are impossible in this view since there is only one thing that exists, the divine substance. There is only subject, no object.

###### *Pantheism creates a system with no individual freedom or responsibility.*

##### **If God is everything, there is no solution for the problem of evil.**

###### *According to pantheists, evil is an illusion (The Doctrine of Maya in Hinduism)*

This is no solution to the problem of evil.

It is counterintuitive that suffering and evil are mere illusions.

The primary counterpoint for this assertion is: What is the source of the illusion? And if only one thing exists, does the illusion exist?

If this true, then now two things exist: God and the illusion.

*Alternately, if God is neither Good nor Evil, there is no Absolute Good.*

This idea places God beyond the distinction of good and evil; God is neither.

Tantric Hinduism and the Left-Handed Path

##### **God is unknowable if “It” is an “it” and not a Personal Being.**

###### According to some pantheists, personality is a “lower level” of God.

###### Here, God cannot be the archetype for personhood since God is not a person.

##### **If God is unknowable, Cognitive Statements about God are meaningless or self defeating**

###### If God is unknowable, why talk or write books about God?

###### Here statements about God are self defeating. One is making a statement about God, which says no one can make statements about God.

##### **Pantheistic Creation (*Ex Deo*)**

###### Pantheists hold to creation *ex Deo* (out of God).

###### The biblical view of creation is creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing).

###### *Ex Deo* creation requires that god use preexisting materials for the creation.

###### In *ex Deo* Creation, the universe is God.

###### *If Ex Deo creation is true, God is self-destructing according to the 2nd law of thermodynamics.*

#### ***Contemporary Examples of Pantheism***

##### Hinduism & Other Eastern Religions

##### Christian Science (and other Mind Sciences)

##### New Age Movement

##### Reincarnation:

###### Is incompatible with the Christian worldview

###### See John 11:24-26; I Cor. 15; Heb. 9:27; Rev. 20:4-6

###### The Burden of Proof rests on the Reincarnationist.

### Panentheism

#### From the Greek *pan* (“all”) + *en* (“in”) + *theos* (“God”).

#### Definition: All is *in* God. In Panentheism God is to the world what a soul is to the body. God is in everything that exists.

##### Panentheism attempts to mediate between the extreme immanence of pantheism and the extreme transcendence of some theistic models, such as Deism.

##### Some have designated Panentheism as *finite-godism* because its adherents hold that God is not infinite in nature and power, but finite and limited.

##### Here God is growing and evolving with His creation.

#### ***Problems with Panentheism***

##### The basic presupposition of panentheism is incorrect. God is not to the world what a soul is to the body. This is another example of man making God in his image.

##### It is unscriptural. God transcends the creation (I Kings 8:27).

##### How can a finite, growing god guarantee that he can triumph over evil?

##### How can a panentheistic god achieve a better world through human cooperation when most people are completely unaware of such a god or his purposes?

##### It is dangerous to have a god who can learn something.

### Polytheism

#### From the Greek *pollus* (“many”) + *theos* (“God”).

#### Definition: The belief in the existence and/or the worship of more than one God.

#### In polytheism, the gods are limited beings.

#### The Bible often identifies the false “gods” as demons or Satan himself.

##### I Cor. 8:4-6

##### I Cor. 10:20

##### Gal. 4:8

#### **Problems with Polytheism**

##### See Panentheism

##### Which of the gods do you worship since there are many gods and they conflict in their commands to humanity?

##### Which god’s ethic do you follow?

##### Multiple final authorities result in the fragmentation of a culture.

##### What is the origin of these finite gods?

#### **Contemporary Examples**

##### Mormonism

##### Neo-Paganism: e.g., Druid, Egyptian, Greek, Norse, African

##### Some Witchcraft Groups: e.g., wicca and other forms of goddess worship

### Henotheism

#### From the Greek *hen* (“one”) + *theos* (“God”).

#### Definition: Henotheism is the view that there are many gods, but a henotheist only worships one of the many gods or the belief that there are many finite gods with one supreme god among them (e.g., Zeus as the head of the Greek gods of Olympus).

#### **Problems with Henotheism**

##### See Panentheism.

##### See Polytheism.

##### This view usually results in a perpetual battle of the “gods.”

##### What if an evil god assumes control of the universe?

#### **Contemporary Examples**

##### Mormonism (i.e., the LDS church claims there is only one god for them, even though there are a myriad of gods that exist.

### Dualism

#### From the Latin *duo* (“two”).

#### Definition: The idea that reality has two fundamental parts or principles that are irreducible and eternal. These parts are often viewed as opposing factions, such as matter and spirit, good and evil, God and Satan, etc.

#### **Forms of Dualism**

##### Zoroastrians - Persian religion from the 6th century BC

##### Gnosticism - Greek thought with dualism behind it. Material is evil, spirit is good

#### **Problems with Dualism**

##### There is no answer to the problem of evil.

##### It functionally raises Satan to God’s level.

#### **Contemporary Examples**

##### Yin-Yang in Taoism

### Deism

#### From the Latin *Deus* (“God”)

#### Definition: The belief in a personal God who created the world out of nothing, but is now uninvolved with the world or its events.

##### God governs His creation through unchangeable, eternal laws, and is in no way immanent in creation. The deistic God is completely transcendent. There is no room in the deistic worldview for special revelation or miracles.

##### Religion only comes to man through natural law or natural revelation.

##### In this view God is the great Watchmaker.

#### **Problems with Deism**

##### It is inconsistent to hold to the miracle of *ex nihilo* creation and then deny “lesser” miracles such as the Virgin Birth.

##### A God concerned about humanity in the beginning would never abandon them.

##### Their position that the Bible is untrustworthy is false.

#### **Contemporary Examples**

##### World Union of Deists ([www.deism.com](http://www.deism.com))

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## The Existence of God

### Christian Theology & The Existence of God

#### Christian theism affirms the existence of one personal God who is both immanent and transcendent and subsists as three distinct Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

#### There are two major categories of evidence that have been used to prove the existence of God. The first category of evidence involves the use of general revelation arguments, which seek to prove the existence of God on the basis of human reason in conjunction with evidence available to man apart from special revelation. The second category of evidence comes from Scripture (special revelation) which both assumes and affirms the existence of God.

### Types of Arguments for God’s Existence

#### ***A Priori***

##### Definition: Prior to and independent of sense experience

##### E.g., The Ontological Argument

#### ***A Posteriori***

##### Definition: After or coming from sense experience

##### E.g., The Cosmological Argument

### Types of Atheists

#### ***Traditional (Dogmatic) Atheism***

##### Denies the existence of God

##### Positively affirms that there never has been, is not now, and never will be a God.

##### Problems with Traditional Atheism

###### This assertion cannot be proven or verified.

It would require a perfect knowledge of all things (omniscience)

It would require access to all parts of the universe and beyond (omnipresence).

###### Thus, the claim is self defeating. Man would have to be God to verify dogmatic atheism’s assertion of this universal negative.

#### ***Defensive Atheism***

##### Some atheists realize the logical and philosophical problems with dogmatic atheism (i.e., traditional “offensive” atheism).

###### While some may admit that God’s existence cannot be logically or epistemically *disproven*, they say it *remains unproven.*

###### *Atheism* is redefined as “absence of belief in God.”

###### In this type of atheism, God is like unicorns, elves, vampires, leprechauns.

##### Their unbelief is grounded in two things:

###### Rejection of traditional arguments for God’s existence

###### Belief that the Christian concept of God either lacks coherency as formulated by contemporary Christianity or lacks evidential support

##### Christian Response to Defensive Atheism:

###### They are using a non-standard (stipulative) definition of atheism. (cf. Paul Edwards, ed. *Encyclopedia of Philosophy)*

###### There is no meaningful distinction between defensive atheism and agnosticism or skepticism.

#### ***Practical Atheism***

##### One professes to believe in God, but lives as if God does not exist.

#### ***The New Atheism***

##### A “new” approach to atheism championed by Ricard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens

### The Burden of Proof & Persuasion for the existence of God

#### **Burden of Proof Issues**

##### The entire burden of proof for the existence of God does not rest on the Christian.

###### Attempt to formulate the issue as a question such as “Does God exist?”

###### Do not formulate the issue as a single proposition, “God does exist.”

###### When formulated as “Does God exist?” each side must give reasons for his or her position.

###### Thus, Christians must demand evidence, argument, and “proof” for the atheist’s assertion that God does not exist.

#### In the law of evidence one must offer evidence and argument to prove disputed facts. This duty is usually divided into the burden of production and burden of persuasion.

##### *Burden of Production or Going Forward with Evidence*

###### This is the duty of a party to produce evidence for all elements of the case.

###### If there is no offer of evidence for each element, the party with the burden risks a directed verdict against him. This burden may shift between parties during a trial.

##### *Burden of Persuasion*

###### This is the duty of the party with the burden to persuade the trier of fact of all elements of the case.

###### This duty, generally, does not shift between parties.

### Quantity or Level of Persuasion

#### ***Certainty & Doubt***

#### ***Quantity or Level of Proof***This category relates to the quantity or level of proof required to prove the existence or non-existence of the fact in issue. The levels are as follows.

##### *Absolute Certainty*

###### This means the proposition is *impossible* to doubt.

###### Example: A triangle has 3 sides.

###### This is also known as Tautological Certainty or Axiomatic Certainty.

###### The items that belong in this category are true by definition.

##### *Psychological Certainty*

###### This means the individual holding the view has no personal doubt about some state of affairs.

###### Example: The sun will rise tomorrow.

##### *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*

###### This means the trier of fact is fully satisfied, entirely convinced, or satisfied to a moral certainty that the fact is true.

###### This is the standard for criminal cases.

###### Practically, this standard represents a high level of conviction in an individual that causes him to act in accordance therewith.

##### *Clear and Convincing*

###### The trier of fact is convinced the truth of the fact asserted is highly probable.

###### This standard requires more than the preponderance standard, but less than the reasonable doubt standard.

##### *Preponderance of the Evidence*

###### The trier of fact is convinced the truth of the fact asserted is more likely true than not.

###### This is the standard for most civil cases.

##### *Probable Cause*

###### **In criminal law, probable cause is where known facts and circumstances, of a reasonably trustworthy nature, are sufficient to justify a man of reasonable caution or prudence in the belief that a crime has been or is being committed.**

###### **This level of certainty is required for an arrest.**

##### *Reasonable Suspicion*

###### This is defined as the common-sense conclusions upon which people are entitled to rely.

###### This requires facts or circumstances that give rise to more than a bare, imaginary, or purely conjectural suspicion.

#### ***Application of the Burden Rules to Inspiration***

###### Christians carry the burden of proof to demonstrate the existence of God.

###### If one asserts that God does not exist, he carries the burden of proving the case.

###### Christians should not assume the burden of proof for the opponent.

###### Christians should not begin to refute or rebut the claim until the opponent has actually made a credible argument.

### The Duty of Intellectual Inquiry

#### When do we have a duty to investigate a claim?

#### The PG=B Formula: Probability x Gravity = Burden (Level of Duty of Inquiry)

#### PG=B Applied to the Doctrine of God’s existence

### Scripture and God’s Existence (Special Revelation)

#### The Bible assumes and affirms the existence of God (Gen. 1:1).

#### Although Scripture does not *formally argue* for the existence of God, it does contain *implied arguments* for the existence of God.

##### ***Cosmological Argument*** (Ps. 19:1 ff.; Is. 40:26; Rom. 1:19-20; Heb. 3:4)

##### ***Teleological Argument*** (Ps. 19:1 ff.; 94:9; Is. 40:26; Rom. 1:19-20; Heb. 3:4)

##### ***Anthropological Argument* (**Gen. 1:26-27; Ps. 94:9; Acts 17:29)

##### ***Moral Argument*** (Rom. 1:19, 32, 2:14-15)

### Arguments from General Revelation[[8]](#footnote-8)

#### **The *Ontological* Argument (*a priori*)**

##### The name is derived from the present participle (*on*) of the Greek verb (*eimi*) “to be” or “to exist.”

##### This argument was first presented by *Anselm* (AD 1033-1109) and later modified by Rene Descartes (AD 1596-1650).

##### **Anselm’s Version (found in his work *Proslogion*)**

###### “God is the greatest of all conceivable beings. Now a being which does not exist cannot be the greatest of all conceivable beings (for the nonexistent being of our conceptions would be greater if it had the attribute of existence). Therefore, by definition, God must exist.”

###### In short:

God is that Being than whom none greater can be conceived.

If this greatest Being exists only in the mind, it cannot be the greatest.

Therefore, the Being than whom none greater can be conceived (i.e., God) necessarily has existence.

##### **Rene Descartes’ Version**

###### “Whatever is necessary to the essence of a thing cannot be absent from that thing. For example, a triangle must have three sides. Devoid of three sides it would not be a triangle. Now existence or being is necessary to the nature of a necessary Being. Without existence it would not be by nature existent. It follows then that a necessary Being must necessarily exist. For if it did not exist, it would not be by nature a necessary Being. Therefore, God’s existence is logically necessary to affirm.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

###### In short

Existence is necessary for a necessary Being.

God is a necessary Being.

Therefore, God necessarily exists.

##### **Evaluation of the Ontological Argument**

#### **The *Moral* Argument (Conscience) (*a priori*) Rom. 1:19, 32; 2:14-15**

##### All men have a sense of ***moral obligation***. Man inherently knows the difference between good and evil and knows that he ought to do good and refrain from evil.

##### Immanual Kant recognized the concept of a “Universal Ought” among men.

###### When man fails to comply with this moral obligation he feels *guilty* and liable to punishment.

###### This evidence implies the existence of a *Lawgiver* and *Judge*.

##### C. S. Lewis used the example of Hitler being universally hated. This implies a moral standard in man. The conscience says “thou shalt” or “thou shalt not.” Where does this come from? Lewis concluded that this universal concept of moral right and wrong was the greatest natural argument for the existence of God.

##### **Evaluation of the Moral argument**

#### **The *Anthropological* Argument**

##### Scriptural References: Gen. 1:26-27; Ps. 94:9; Acts 17:29

##### The name of this argument is derived from the Greek noun *anthropos* “man.”

##### Man has a *unique* intellectual, social, moral and religious nature (i.e., in comparison to other created beings upon the earth). This evidence points to a *Maker* of equal or even greater characteristics, namely God.

##### This argument implies not only the great power and intelligence of the Maker, but also His *personality* and *morality*.

##### **Evaluation of the Anthropological argument**

#### **The *Teleological* Argument (Design & Purpose)**

##### From the Greek *telos* “end,” “goal” or “purpose.”

##### Although this argument has been around since the time of Plato, the most popular form of the argument as it exists today was set forth by William Paley (AD 1743-1805).

##### Paley’s argument (deductive form) is as follows:

###### If one found a watch in an empty field he would naturally and correctly conclude that it had a watchmaker. Likewise, if someone studies the more complex design found in the natural world, he cannot but conclude that there is a world Designer behind it. The watch itself indicates that it was constructed for an intelligent purpose (viz., to keep time) by a watchmaker and in like manner the natural world with its great complexities requires the existence of a great Designer.

##### **John Stuart Mill** (AD 1806-1873) set forth and inductive form of the argument. He said, in effect, that there is an amazing concurrence of diverse elements in the human eye which produce sight. It is highly improbable that these elements came together as a result of chance or random selection. This inductive method of agreement would point to some common cause of the elements of the eye in a Purposing Designer.

###### In short:

Order and useful arrangement in a system imply intelligence and purpose in the originating cause.

The universe is characterized by order and useful arrangement.

Therefore the universe has an intelligent and purposeful Designer.

###### The highly complex order of the universe points to an extremely ***intelligent*** Designer.

##### **Evaluation of the Teleological argument**

#### **The *Cosmological* Argument**

##### From the Greek *kosmos* (“world”)

##### This argument is based on the premise that every *effect* has a *cause*.

##### The universe is an observable effect which requires an infinite regress of causes or a *sufficient uncaused cause*.

##### Since an *infinite regression* of causes is insufficient to explain the existence of the universe, there must be an uncaused sufficient cause, i.e., God.

##### In short:

###### Every effect must have an adequate cause.

###### The universe is an effect.

###### Therefore, the universe must have and adequate cause for its existence.

##### This argument is the basis for all of the other arguments (except the ontological argument) and, like the Bible, has stood the test of time and the attack of the critics.[[10]](#footnote-10)

#### **The Kalam Cosmological Argument**

##### **Three Dilemmas**

###### The universe had or did not have a beginning. If it did have a beginning…

###### The beginning was caused or uncaused. If the beginning was caused…

###### The cause was personal or impersonal

###### Illustration:

 ***The Universe***

 **Beginning No Beginning**

 **Caused Not Caused**

 **Personal Not Personal**

##### **Arguments in Support of the Three Premises**

###### **The Universe Had a Beginning.**

**The Non-Existence of an Actual infinite**

**Absolute Infinity**

**Potential Infinity**

**Actual Infinity**

**The Impossibility of Traversing an Actual Infinite**

The Second Law of Thermodynamics

Big Bang Cosmology

###### **The Beginning was Caused**

###### **The Cause was Personal**

**State-State Causation**

**Agent Causation**

### Agnosticism & Skepticism

#### From the Greek *a* (“no”) + *gnosis* (“knowledge”).

#### Definition: The belief that we cannot *or* do not know whether or not there is a God.

#### Types of Agnosticism

##### Limited Agnosticism: God and reality can be known in a limited sense. Man is limited by his finitude and is unable to understand infinitude completely.

###### This form of agnosticism is both possible and desirable. In fact, it is (in a limited sense) biblical. Paul wrote, “For now we see in a mirror dimly. . . . Now I know in part” (I Cor. 13:12).

###### This position is consistent because it says, “I know enough about reality to know that there are some things about reality I cannot know.”

##### Unlimited Agnosticism: All reality is completely unknowable. Since God is the ultimate reality, He *cannot* be known.

###### This form of agnosticism is self-defeating because it makes the self-destructive assertion that “one knows enough about reality to affirm that nothing can be known about reality.”

###### If one knows nothing about reality, one has no basis for making a statement about reality.

##### **Skepticism**

###### Global

###### Local

1. A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. J. Weingreen, *A Practical Grammar for Classical Hebrew* (New York: Oxford, 1959), 22-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Ibid.,* 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Colin Brown, Ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology.* Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 614-615 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Leon Morris, *The Gospel of John,* New International Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 473-474. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Names” in Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 750. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *See* Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. For a discussion of general revelation arguments for the existence of God, see William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994); Norman Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976); J.P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987); Kenneth R. Samples, *Without a Doubt* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For a detailed exposition of Descartes’ argument see Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, pp. 30-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For a complete discussion of the cosmological argument see Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, pp. 237-250; see also Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City*, pp. 15-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)