



Session 5:

The Transcendental and Ontological Arguments

for God's existence

Emergence Summer Sessions, 2026
The Existence of God



The Transcendental Argument



Presuppositional Apologetics



Presuppositional Apologetics

approaches unbelief by examining competing worldviews and the fundamental assumptions that human beings inevitably make about the nature of reality, knowledge, morality, and rationality.



The Transcendental Argument



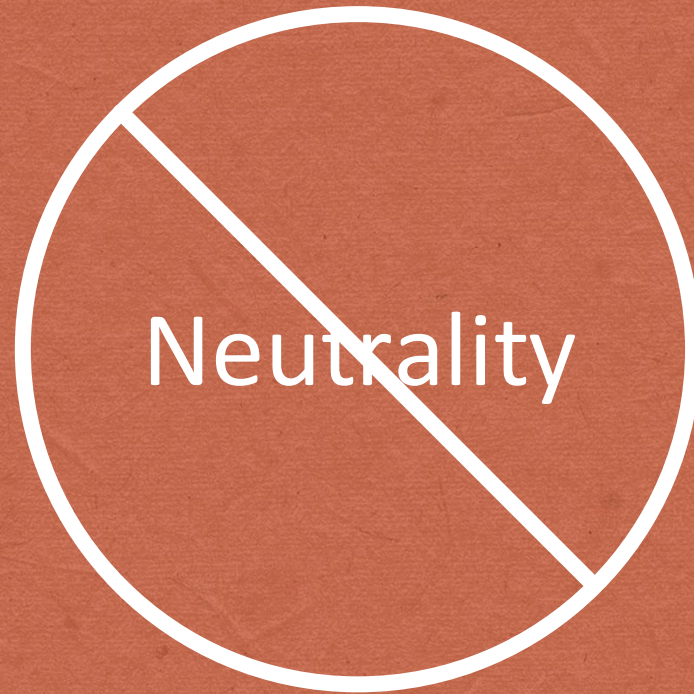
The Transcendental Argument

God is the necessary precondition that makes logic, morality, and rationality possible.



Neutrality





¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Romans 1:18–23



The Noetic Effects of Sin

sin's corrupting influence on the mind, intellect, judgment, perception, and our ability to recognize and respond appropriately to truth.



The Transcendental Argument

- God is a rational being and is the source of all rationality.
- God created us with the ability to understand the universe and to know him.
- Therefore, the only way to truly account for rationality is to presuppose that God exists and created us.



Presupposing God's Existence?



Presupposing God's Existence?

- Allows the Christian to be internally consistent within their own worldview.



Presupposing God's Existence?

- Allows the Christian to be internally consistent within their own worldview.
- Forces the unbeliever to examine the unexamined assumptions inherent in their secular worldview.



Systemic/Virtuous Circularity
vs.
Vicious Circularity



The Transcendental Argument



The Transcendental Argument

“The impossibility of the contrary”



“If God is the transcendental ground of intelligibility, causality cannot be meaningfully affirmed or denied unless God exists. So Van Til argued that even atheism presupposes theism; even the denial of God presupposes God.”

John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief*, 2d ed.; ed. Joseph E. Torres (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2015), 75.



Positives



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- There is more going on than simply weighing arguments.



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- Holistic approach to apologetics.



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- Holistic approach to apologetics.
- Emphasis on the gospel and the work of the Spirit.



Critique

- Is not more biblical than other approaches.
- The Transcendental Argument does not prove the “impossibility of the contrary.”
- The Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism does a better job at showing the irrationality of atheism.



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Questions



Ontological Arguments



Ontological Arguments

attempt to demonstrate God's existence through reason alone, typically arguing that the very concept of God, rightly understood, implies his existence.



Ontology

the study of being and existence.





St. Anselm of Canterbury
The Proslogion, 1077



Argument from chapter two:

- God is the being than which nothing greater can be conceived.



Argument from chapter two:

- God is the being than which nothing greater can be conceived.
- A being that exists only in your mind is not as great as a being that exists in reality.



Argument from chapter two:

- God is the being than which nothing greater can be conceived.
- A being that exists only in your mind is not as great as a being that exists in reality.
- Therefore, the being than which nothing greater can be conceived must exist, and this is the being we call God.



“Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.”

Anselm, Proslogium 2, in Internet Medieval Sourcebook,
www.Fordham.edu/Halsall/basis/Anselm-proslogium.html#CHAPTER%2011.



Joe: What are you thinking about?

Sue: I'm thinking about God.

Joe: Really? What do you mean by God?

Sue: He's the greatest being that anyone can possibly think of. But I don't think he really exists.

Joe: Then I guess you're not thinking about God.



Argument from chapter three:

NB: A thing possesses necessary existence if it has to exist and it exists by virtue of its own nature.



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- If the greatest conceivable being could be conceived not to exist, then it would not be the greatest conceivable being.



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NB: A thing possesses necessary existence if it has to exist and it exists by virtue of its own nature.

- A being that cannot be conceived not to exist is greater than a being that can be conceived not to exist.
- If the greatest conceivable being could be conceived not to exist, then it would not be the greatest conceivable being.
- Therefore, the greatest conceivable being cannot be conceived not to exist.



Objection 1: Gaunilo's Parody



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- Things that make islands or pizzas great are not the kinds of things that have maximums beyond which nothing greater can be conceived.



“The idea of an island than which it’s not possible that there be a greater is like the idea of a natural number than which it’s not possible that there be a greater, or the idea of a line than which none more crooked is possible. There neither is nor could be a greatest possible number. And the same goes for islands....The qualities that make for greatness in islands—number of palm trees, amount and quality of coconuts, for example—most of these qualities have no intrinsic maximum. That is, there is no degree of productivity or number of palm trees (or of dancing girls) such that it is impossible that an island display more of that quality. ”



Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Michigan, 1974), 90–91.

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Objection 1: Gaunilo's Parody

- Things that make islands or pizzas great are not the kinds of things that have maximums beyond which nothing greater can be conceived.
- Islands and pizzas are not the sorts of things that can possess necessary existence.



Objection 1: Kant's "existence is not a predicate"



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- Kant is right.



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- Kant is right...about existence.
- Kant is wrong about necessary existence.



The Modal Ontological Argument



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- It is possible that a maximally great being exists.



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- If a maximally great being exists, it exists necessarily.



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- It is possible that a maximally great being exists.
- If a maximally great being exists, it exists necessarily.
- If a necessary being exists in one possible world, it must exist in all possible worlds.



The Modal Ontological Argument

- It is possible that a maximally great being exists.
- If a maximally great being exists, it exists necessarily.
- If a necessary being exists in one possible world, it must exist in all possible worlds.
- Therefore, God exists in the real world.



“Ontological arguments are captivating. They convince some people but not others. Our purpose here was not to convince but simply to show that some ontological arguments are sound, do not beg the question, and are insulated from extant parodies. Yet good logic does convince sometimes. Other times, something else is needed.”

Robert E. Maydole, “The Ontological Argument,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 586.

