

Chapter 3 – The Arguments of God’s Existence

In this chapter, Dawkins attempts to go through all the arguments for God’s existence and dismiss them. Curiously, he actually leaves aside the resurrection of Jesus, which is the most compelling reason! Here is a summary of the most significant arguments and how he attempts to deal with them.

He begins with Thomas Aquinas’ 5 “proofs” for the existence of God. As McGrath points out though, these were never intended to be “proofs” rather they were intended to show the internal coherence of belief in God.¹ They assume that God exists, and then demonstrate that this is a coherent belief.

Here we will just consider Dawkins’ approach to some of the key arguments.

1. The Cosmological Argument

This basically says that all physical things have to begin to exist so something must have started them.

Dawkins claims that this makes “the entirely unwarranted assumption that God himself is immune to regress”² (in other words, it assumes that God himself cannot be reduced to something simpler and that God needs no explanation of his existence. Indeed he argues that it is “more parsimonious to conjure up a ‘big bang singularity’”³

But this is not so. Invoking a singularity explains nothing. What is it and where did it come from? Furthermore, the fact of a beginning actually does tell us something about the cause of the beginning. The following argument is borrowed from the American philosopher and apologist William Lane Craig.

The fact that the universe came into existence at some point shows that it is not *necessary*, that is it does not have to be there.

So what must the “thing” that caused the beginning be like? So what must that first cause have been like?

It must have been *necessary*. It must have been always there.

It would also have to be *timeless and unchangeable* as it existed outside of time before time came into being.

The first cause would have to be *incredibly powerful* to have brought a whole universe into existence.

¹ McGrath, *Dawkins Delusion*, p8

² Dawkins, *Delusion*, p77

³ Dawkins, *Delusion*, p78

As well as being timeless and powerful it must have been able at a certain point to make something happen when it wasn't happening. That implies that it *chose* to cause something to happen. In other words, it must have had a will. What sort of things have a will and are also timeless and unchanging? Abstract entities such as the number 7 might be timeless and unchanging but they cannot cause anything and don't have a will. So for the First Cause to choose to do something or not implies it has a mind, and therefore is *personal*.

The First Cause would have to be *immaterial* – in other words not made of matter – because it existed outside of time and space. So we could say the first cause would have to be *spirit*.

So what do we infer from the fact the universe had a beginning?

The first cause must be a being that is:

- Necessary
- Timeless
- Unchanging
- Powerful
- Personal
- A spirit

This sounds pretty much like a description of a god in many of the world's religions! The fact we have a universe points us to a god of some description.

2. The Argument from Scripture

In this section he basically argues that the gospels are accounts of Jesus life written long after he lived so they are basically just legends and myths. As evidence he cites:

- i. The alleged differences in the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke
- ii. The different genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke
- iii. The example of one biblical scholar (the only one he quotes!) who changed from an evangelical to a sceptic over the years. (Which he tells as the story of someone becoming "enlightened" in his typical rhetorical technique of equating his beliefs with superior intelligence and believing the bible with rank stupidity and the dark ages.)
- iv. And finally, "The four gospels that made it into the official cannon were chosen more or less arbitrarily, out of a larger sample of at least a dozen including the gospels of Thomas,

Peter, Nicodemus, Philip, Bartholomew and Mary Magdalene.”⁴

In response to points (i) and (ii), any decent commentary by a good biblical scholar addresses those issues. See for example I. Howard Marshall on Luke or Don Carson on Matthew. These are non-arguments.

For point (iii), there are many more biblical scholars who do actually believe in the inerrancy of scripture and have evidence to support that position. See for example books like Craig Blomberg “Historical Reliability of the Gospels” or at a more popular level, Lee Strobel’s “The Case for Christ.” The basic argument for the historical reliability of the gospels runs like this.

- Archaeological and other historical evidence matches up with the gospels
- They were written soon enough after Jesus’ death (within 30 years) that if they were fabrications enough people were around who could have spotted it
- The content of the gospels are compelling.
 - They cannot be called myths as myths take centuries to develop, not just 20 or 30 years.
 - If they were fabrications, then why do they contain so many stories that would undermine the credentials of the early leaders of Christianity? For example, why would they contain stories about the disciples being slow to understand or even unfaithful to Jesus? Those sort of stories would hardly commend the disciples as leaders of a new religion! Why put them in if they were not true? In a similar vein, all the gospels tell us that women were the first eye-witnesses of the resurrection. Women had no value as witnesses in a court of law in those days, so why would the gospel writers have made them the key witnesses to the key event in the gospels? The best explanation is that the gospel accounts are accurate and true.
- That all gives us confidence that what was written was true. Added to that, the sheer number of ancient manuscripts we have, and the age of the manuscripts points us to the fact that they are reliable transmissions of what was written down. See the table below for further details.⁵

⁴ Dawkins, *Delusion*, p95

⁵ Tice, *Christianity Explored Study Guide*, p4

	Date of original document	Date of oldest surviving copy	Approximate time between original and earliest surviving copy	Number of ancient copies in existence today
Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War	c.431-400BC	AD 900 plus a few late 1 st Century fragments	1300 years	73
Caesar's Gallic War	c.58-50BC	AD 825	875 years	10
Tacitus' Histories and Annals	c. 98-108	c. AD 850	750 years	2
The New Testament	AD40-100 (Mark AD60-65)	Ad 350 (Mark 3 rd century – with fragments going back to early 2 nd century)	310 years	5000 in Greek

As for point (iv), the argument that the 4 canonical gospels were chosen at random, that is just plain wrong! They were recognised as authoritative immediately, hence we can read the early church fathers from 100 AD onwards quoting them. There are a number of occasions in the New Testament letters where the stories or words of Jesus are quoted (e.g 1 Corinthians 11:24ff), and these letters were all written *before* the gospels. This illustrates the consistency of the gospel stories.

The rejected gospels were written much later by 2nd century Gnostic teachers. They don't even pretend to be historical, and they certainly don't read as if they are historical!

So, Dawkins really does very little to disprove God in all this. The fact he avoids dealing with the evidence for the resurrection speaks eloquently of his presuppositions and his lack of arguments to deal with this compelling evidence.