

Metaphysical Reasoning and the Belief in God

Metaphysical reasoning has long been used to explore fundamental questions about why anything exists and what the ultimate reality is. One recurring conclusion of such reasoning in the Abrahamic traditions is belief in God – a transcendent, necessary being. Philosophers and theologians across Christian, Muslim, and Jewish thought have crafted rigorous arguments that move from metaphysical principles to the existence of God. These include **cosmological arguments** (from the existence or origin of the universe), **ontological arguments** (from the idea or definition of God), **teleological arguments** (from the order or design in nature), and **contingency arguments** (from the existence of contingent beings requiring a necessary being). Each of these approaches uses reason to bridge from observable reality or logical principles to the conclusion that God exists. In what follows, we examine each major argument theme, explaining the core reasoning, highlighting quotations from prominent theist metaphysicians (e.g. Brian Leftow, Thomas Aquinas, al-Ghazālī), referencing scriptures from the Bible and Qur'an that resonate with the argument, and noting contributions of classical philosophers of the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish traditions.

Cosmological Arguments: The First Cause of Existence

Cosmological arguments reason from the existence or beginning of the cosmos to the existence of an ultimate **First Cause** or **Prime Mover** identified with God. The basic intuition is that the universe – and all events within it – cannot be the cause of its own existence. In **Christian philosophy**, St. **Thomas Aquinas** articulated this in his *Second Way* (causation) among the *Five Ways*. He argued that everything observed in the world has an efficient cause, and that causal chains cannot regress infinitely. Therefore, a first uncaused cause must exist: “if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate... cause... Therefore it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God” ¹ ². Aquinas, drawing on Aristotle’s notion of a Prime Mover, held that this First Cause is not itself caused by anything else – it just exists on its own and initiates all other existence.

In **Islamic theology**, a famous cosmological argument is the **kalām cosmological argument**, powerfully formulated by the theologian **Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī** (11th–12th century). Al-Ghazālī was concerned with refuting philosophers who taught an eternal universe with no beginning. He insisted the universe began to exist, and thus must have a cause. He wrote: “Every being which begins has a cause for its beginning. Now the world is a being which begins. Therefore, it possesses a cause for its beginning.” ³. This simple syllogism – that whatever begins to exist must have a cause, and since the universe began it must have a transcendent cause – leads to a creator beyond the universe ³. Al-Ghazālī’s argument is echoed in the Qur’an’s own rhetoric: “Or were they created by nothing, or are they their own creators?” ⁴. This verse (Qur’an 52:35) challenges the listener to recognize that it is implausible for the world to pop into being uncaused or to cause itself. The **Qur’an** frequently calls people to reflect on creation as evidence of God: “Have they not thought about their own selves? God did not create the heavens and earth and everything between them without a serious purpose...” ⁵ ⁶. Likewise, the **Bible** opens with the bold assertion of a divine Creator: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1) ⁷. New Testament writers argued that from the world’s creation we can infer God’s power: “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” ⁸.

Thus, both scripture and classical philosophers resonate with the cosmological insight that the existence of a world demands an external **First Cause** – an uncaused cause identified as God.

Thinkers from all three Abrahamic faiths developed cosmological arguments. In Jewish philosophy, **Moses Maimonides** (12th century) offered several proofs for God's existence, all of which were versions of the cosmological argument ⁹. For example, Maimonides argued that the continuous motion of heavenly bodies cannot be explained by any finite source of power, so an **infinite, incorporeal mover** must exist to sustain their motion ¹⁰ ¹¹. He concluded that an eternal, non-physical being is required – essentially the God of the Hebrew Bible. Medieval Muslim philosophers like **Avicenna** (Ibn Sīnā) went further, pioneering a cosmological argument from **contingency** (discussed below) that deeply influenced later Christian thinkers including Aquinas ¹² ¹³. Across these traditions, the cosmological reasoning consistently leads to a necessary first principle. The Christian philosopher **Brian Leftow** summarizes the intuition: if something exists necessarily, "it exists simply because it is its nature to exist" – and in the traditional view, *God exists because it is His nature to exist*, as a self-sufficient reality ¹⁴. In other words, God is conceived as the ultimate ground of being, the one cause that itself has no cause. Cosmological arguments, in their various forms, use metaphysics to point to such a being as the logical termination of the search for causal explanations.

Ontological Arguments: God as a Necessary Idea

Ontological arguments take a different route: rather than starting from empirical features of the world, they begin with the *idea of God* and attempt to show that God must exist by the very nature of this idea. The classical formulation was given by **St. Anselm of Canterbury** in the 11th century. Anselm defined God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." He then reasoned that existing in reality is greater than existing merely in the mind, so if the greatest conceivable being exists in the mind, it must also exist in reality (otherwise it would not truly be the greatest). In Anselm's words: "*Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and reality.*" ¹⁵. This ingenious argument attempts to show that denial of God's existence is self-contradictory, since the very concept of God entails actual existence. Anselm's approach was echoed later by **Descartes** and, in a modern modal form, by **Alvin Plantinga**, who argued that if it is possible that a maximally great being (one possessing all perfections) exists, then such a being must exist in some possible world, and hence in the actual world. The contemporary Christian philosopher **Brian Leftow** has also engaged with the ontological argument, suggesting that even our experiences and intuitions of a "maximally great being" can serve as evidence for the possibility premise of the argument ¹⁶ ¹⁷. Not all philosophers have been convinced – indeed, ontological arguments have been debated for centuries – but they remain a key example of purely metaphysical reasoning leading to God.

Ontological reasoning finds resonance in scripture indirectly, through the emphasis on God's supreme perfection and necessary being. For instance, the Bible describes God as the ultimate being in passages like "*I AM WHO I AM*" (Exodus 3:14) ¹⁸, a name which has been interpreted to mean that God is self-subsistent being itself – **Being that must be**. Likewise, Isaiah 46:9 declares, "*I am God, and there is none like Me,*" underscoring the unsurpassable greatness of God. The Qur'an too stresses God's maximal greatness and uniqueness, as in *Surah Ikhlāṣ* (112:1-4): "*He is God, the One. God, the Absolute. He begets not, nor was He begotten. And there is none comparable to Him.*" ¹⁹. Such scriptural themes align with the ontological idea that God is, by definition, the greatest and most necessary of all beings – one whose non-existence is impossible. Philosophers in the Jewish and Islamic traditions did not formulate ontological arguments in Anselm's exact form, but they often discussed God as a necessary being in terms very similar to ontological

necessity. The notion of God as *wājib al-wujūd* (Necessary Existence) in Avicenna's writings, for example, borders on an ontological concept: Avicenna held that God's essence *is* existence itself, such that God cannot not exist ²⁰ ²¹. In summary, ontological arguments use **a priori** metaphysics – reasoning about the idea of a most perfect being – to conclude that God must exist in reality, dovetailing with the scriptural portrayal of God as the one supreme, self-existent reality.

Teleological Arguments: Design and Purpose in the World

Teleological arguments (from *telos*, meaning “end” or “purpose”) reason from the observed order, complexity, and purpose in the universe to the existence of an intelligent **Designer**. They are also known as **design arguments**. The classic teleological reasoning is that natural objects and laws seem finely tuned to achieve valuable ends (order, life, consciousness), and such purposeful order is best explained by an intelligent cause. This line of thought appears across the Abrahamic traditions. In the **Bible**, for instance, the psalmist exclaims: “*The heavens declare the glory of God; the sky above proclaims His handiwork.*” (Psalm 19:1) ²². Likewise, St. Paul writes that God's providence is evident in nature's order: “*he [God] upholds the universe by the word of his power*” (Hebrews 1:3) ²³. Such verses suggest that the natural world's beauty and regularity are signs pointing to a Creator. The **Qur'an** explicitly invites this inference: “*Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding*” (Qur'an 3:190) ²⁴. Over and over, the Qur'an refers to phenomena of nature – the sun, moon, stars, rain, the growth of plants, the harmony of the seasons – as **āyāt** (signs) of God's wisdom and power ²⁵ ²⁶. This reflects a teleological perspective deeply embedded in Islamic thought: the world's order is not a random accident but a deliberate design by the Creator.

Classical philosophers gave the teleological argument rigorous form. **Thomas Aquinas** included it as his *Fifth Way* of proving God. He observed that unintelligent things in nature regularly act so as to achieve the best outcomes (as if following a purpose), which implies they are directed by some intelligence. In Aquinas's words: “*We see that things which lack intelligence, such as natural bodies, act for an end... not fortuitously, but designedly, do they achieve their end. Now whatever lacks intelligence cannot move towards an end, unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence; as the arrow is shot to its mark by the archer. Therefore, some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.*” ²⁷ ²⁸. Here Aquinas uses the regularity of natural laws to infer a divine governance – God as the supreme intelligence guiding natural processes.

In **Jewish thought**, an example of teleological reasoning is found in a rabbinic Midrash that **Maimonides** cites. It tells of Abraham observing the world's order and asking: “Is it conceivable that the world is without a guide?” ²⁹. Just as a building implies an architect, Abraham concluded that the cosmos must have a cosmic architect – a single God. Maimonides notes that the Bible itself hints at design: the prophet Isaiah urges, “*Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things*” (Isaiah 40:26) ³⁰. The obvious order in the stars and heavens should lead one to “behold” their Creator. Similarly, early Islamic scholars used homely analogies to make the point: **Abū Ḥanīfa** (8th century) is said to have refuted skeptics by asking if a loaded ship could sail itself or a water-mill run on its own – commonsense says they cannot, so how could the vast world operate without a divine pilot? ³¹ ³². These intuitive stories convey the same metaphysical intuition: **order and purpose** in the effects imply **intention** in the cause.

The teleological argument was revitalized in early modern times by thinkers like **William Paley**, who famously compared the world to a watch that implies a watchmaker. Even great scientists like **Isaac Newton** found the design argument compelling; Newton wrote that the elegant motions of the planets

could not have arisen “*without the design and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being.*” ³³ ³⁴ . Critics like David Hume later challenged the argument, and modern evolutionary theory explained biological complexity without direct intervention. However, teleological reasoning has persisted by evolving – for example, in the form of the **fine-tuning argument** in contemporary cosmology, which points out that the fundamental constants of physics are precisely set in a way that allows life, suggesting a cosmic Designer.

In all its forms, the teleological argument uses metaphysical inference from the world's apparent purposefulness to a purposive Creator. It complements cosmological arguments by focusing not on *that* the universe exists, but *how* it exists (in an ordered, law-governed way). As the Qur'an puts it, “[God] *has created everything and determined it with [precision] measure*” (Qur'an 25:2), and as the Bible declares, “*Worthy are You, Lord... for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created*” (Revelation 4:11) ³⁵ . The underlying conviction is that mindless matter alone cannot fully account for the intricate coordination of the cosmos – only a supreme Mind (God) can.

Contingency Arguments: From Dependent Beings to a Necessary Being

Contingency-based arguments are a refined species of cosmological reasoning. They begin with the observation that the things we encounter in the world are **contingent** – they depend on conditions outside themselves and could have been otherwise or not existed at all. Such contingent beings (which include all physical objects and even abstract things like events or propositions) cry out for an explanation beyond themselves. The argument then posits that there must exist a being that is **non-contingent** or **necessary** – one that must exist by its very nature and thus provides the ultimate explanation for everything else. This necessary being is identified with God.

The clearest expositions of the contingency argument come from the medieval **Islamic philosopher Avicenna** and the later **Leibnizian** tradition in Europe. Avicenna's so-called “Proof of the Truthful” begins by distinguishing between a thing that *needs* an external cause to exist (a contingent thing) and a thing that *exists by its own nature* (a necessary thing). Avicenna argued that the totality of contingent things in the universe cannot be wholly contingent; if you consider the entire collection of contingent entities, that collection would itself need an external cause (since each member does). That external cause could not itself be contingent (for then it's part of the collection). Thus, “*there must be a 'necessary existent' (Arabic: wājib al-wujūd), an entity that cannot not exist*” to ground the existence of the contingent world ²⁰ ³⁶ . Avicenna further deduced that this Necessary Existent must have the attributes of the God of classical theism (unity, simplicity, immateriality, intellect, power, and so on) ³⁷ ³⁸ . In essence, Avicenna transformed Aristotelian metaphysics into a rigorous argument that a single, uncaused, absolutely necessary being is the ultimate explanation of why there is something rather than nothing.

In **Christian philosophy**, Aquinas presented a similar idea in his *Third Way*, the argument from possibility and necessity ³⁹ ⁴⁰ . Aquinas noted that things in nature come into being and pass away (they are possible to be and not to be). If everything were contingent in this way, then – he argues – there could have been a time when nothing existed. But if “at one time nothing was in existence” then nothing could ever begin to exist (since nothing cannot cause something) ⁴⁰ . Therefore, Aquinas concludes, there must exist at least one being that is not contingent but *necessary*, “having of itself its own necessity” – and this, all call God (Summa Theologica I.2.3). In the early modern period, **Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz** generalized the contingency argument via the **Principle of Sufficient Reason**. Leibniz argued that for every true fact, there

must be a sufficient explanation why it is so and not otherwise. Applying this to the existence of the world, he asked why there is a world at all, when it could have been otherwise (or nothing). Leibniz answered that the sufficient reason cannot be found within the world of contingent things, but only in a metaphysically necessary being that contains the reason for its own existence. In Leibniz's words (as paraphrased by Brian Leftow summarizing Leibniz's *Monadology*): *"if there is a reality in essences or possibilities, or indeed in eternal truths, this reality must be founded on something existent and actual, and consequently on the existence of the necessary being in whom essence involves existence... without God there would be nothing... possible."* ⁴¹ . Here, even the truths of logic and mathematics ("eternal truths") ultimately point to a self-existent Mind that grounds them. The **Jewish thinker Maimonides** likewise held that an absolutely simple, necessary Being is the ultimate source of all composite and finite beings, insisting that God has no parts or external causes precisely to avoid an infinite regress of explanations ⁴² ⁴³ . If God were not absolutely one and necessary, something more fundamental would be needed to explain God – which is impossible, so God must be the **ultimate reality** ⁴³ ⁴⁴ .

Scriptural traditions also affirm the idea of God as a necessary, self-subsistent being. In the Bible, God's eternity and self-existence are often emphasized: *"Before the mountains were brought forth... from everlasting to everlasting you are God"* (Psalm 90:2) ⁴⁵ . The New Testament declares Christ as the divine *logos* "through whom all things were made," such that "without him was not anything made that was made" (John 1:3) ⁴⁶ ⁴⁷ . And *"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together"* (Colossians 1:17) ⁴⁸ . These verses convey that all contingent reality depends at every moment on the sustaining power of God, the necessary being. The Qur'an presents Allah as **al-Ṣamad**, often translated "the Eternal Refuge" or "the Self-Sufficient, Absolute" (Qur'an 112:2) ¹⁹ – meaning everything leans on Him while He leans on nothing. Another Qur'anic verse states, *"Allah is the First and the Last"* (57:3), implying that God's existence does not derive from anything prior (the First) and has no cessation (the Last). Such descriptions align perfectly with the contingency argument's conclusion: God alone exists by necessity, whereas all other beings exist by dependence on God.

In summary, contingency arguments use a fundamental metaphysical principle – that dependent beings require an independent ground – to conclude that a **Necessary Being** (God) exists. This line of reasoning was highly developed by medieval Islamic philosophers, adopted and modified by Christian thinkers, and is consistent with the portrayal of God in all three Abrahamic scriptures as the ultimate, self-existent foundation of reality. As the **contemporary philosopher Brian Leftow** explains, traditional theism holds that God is the creator of everything distinct from Himself, with all else depending on Him ⁴⁹ . Metaphysical reflection on contingency and necessity makes explicit why this must be so: without a necessary God, nothing could exist – not even possibility itself ⁴¹ . Thus, metaphysical reasoning about the nature of existence strongly leads to affirmation of a God who is the **uncaused cause**, the **unmoved mover**, the **designer**, and the **necessary being** underlying all that is.

Conclusion

Metaphysical arguments for God – cosmological, ontological, teleological, and contingency-based – each approach the divine from a different angle, yet they converge on the idea of a singular, ultimate foundation of reality. Thinkers like Aquinas, Anselm, al-Ghazālī, Avicenna, and Maimonides, despite coming from different religious backgrounds, found that careful reasoning about existence, causality, design, and necessity all point to a transcendent **God**. These arguments have been bolstered by scriptural affirmations in the **Bible** and **Qur'an** that the world's existence and order are deliberate and meaningful, not brute facts. While no metaphysical argument can compel belief with absolute certainty (and each has been debated by

critics), together they provide a cumulative, cross-cultural rationale for faith in God using the light of human reason. As a well-known theist metaphysician wrote, “Reason will serve God if given the chance; philosophy can be a work of [divine] service” ⁵⁰ . Throughout history, metaphysical reasoning has indeed served to deepen the intellectual case for God, complementing religious experience and revelation with the imprimatur of logic and philosophy. The enduring legacy of these arguments is a testament to the human mind’s desire to find an ultimate explanation – a desire that, many argue, finds its answer in the reality of God.

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