

Chapter 1: THERE IS A GOD

Let's conduct a little experiment. Take a moment, close your eyes, and imagine absolutely nothing. No matter of any type. No solids, liquids, gases or plasmas. No particles, no matter how small. No energy. No spirit or soul or mind of any kind. Imagine absolutely nothing—as Francis Schaeffer called it “nothing-nothing”. Defining “nothing”, Aristotle said that, “nothing is what rocks dream about”. (Or, if you're like me, “nothing” is what your high school crush got you for your birthday!)

Now, imagine all the sorts of things that nothing-nothing can produce. Think: “If we started with absolutely nothing, then we could end up with _____.” It doesn't require a Ph.D. in philosophy to realize that when we begin with absolutely nothing, we will get absolutely nothing. Out of nothing comes nothing. Start with nothing, end with nothing. Nothing can never produce anything. It's absurd to think otherwise.

This obvious truth has serious implications for philosophy. Theistic philosophers like Soren Kierkegaard emphatically agree with atheistic philosophers like Martin Heidegger. The most basic question of philosophy is the question of “existents”—why should *anything* whatsoever exist? In other words, all rational people must at some point confront the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing?”

Since things now exist, then “something” must always have existed. (I'm using “something” in the broadest possible sense of the word.) More specifically, all things that *began* to exist must ultimately trace their source—their reason for being—to that which has always existed. While it strains our imaginations to envision something that has always existed, logic and reason insist that an ultimate “first cause” must exist. A first cause that is itself uncaused, must of logical necessity be the ultimate cause of everything else. That much is settled. There is no other possibility.

The first five words of the Bible answer this “first question” of philosophy in the most emphatic way possible. “In the beginning, God created” In other words, when the cosmos was being formed, God was already there. God and God alone was responsible for creating it. The eternal, unchangeable God, without beginning or end, at some finite point in the past, brought this finite universe into existence.

The universe has not always existed, but God has. The universe is dependent on God, but God is not dependent on anything other than Himself. Theologians use the word “aseity” (uh-SEE-uh-tee) to describe God’s unique attribute of self-existence. The aseity of God is an attribute that God alone possesses. There is no outside source for God’s existence. So, God does have a reason for His existence, but that reason is internal rather than external. No other being or thing possesses the attribute of aseity. Aseity is unique to God.

Scripture resoundingly affirms the aseity of God. God is the One who Scripture declares “was, and is, and is to come” (Revelation 1:8, 4:8). He is the One who “has life in Himself” (John 5:26). The psalmist declares, “From everlasting to everlasting, you are God” (Psalm 90:2). In fact, even the Hebrew covenant name of God, Yahweh (Latinized into “Jehovah”), is a direct reference to God’s self-existence.

God first reveals His covenant name to Moses in Exodus chapter 3 when He instructs Moses to tell the Israelites that “I AM WHO I AM” sent Moses to them. God wasn’t being snappish and dismissive of Moses’ question. Quite to the contrary, He was revealing this beautiful insight into His divine nature. God’s name is not “God”. “God” is His office, His title, His role.

Throughout Scripture, we see that names are very important to God. The names God gives to people signify something fundamental about that person; the name God gives reveals a core truth about them. In the name God gives for Himself—“I AM WHO I AM”—we reach the pinnacle of a name capturing an attribute. Yahweh, God’s very name for Himself, means that He is the One who simply *IS*. Yahweh is the ground and source of all being. Without Yahweh, nothing would ever have existed, nothing would exist now, and nothing could ever come into existence. Yahweh is the source of all reality, all being, all truth, all life, all existence! This is why atheism is the absurdity of all absurdities!

Question to Consider:

What is the aseity of God and why is it so important to understanding existence?

The Logical Necessity of an Uncaused First Cause

All of this is to say that God is the reason that all things exist that exist. God is the reason for God, and God is the reason for everything God created. God is the reason for both the created and the uncreated.

A type of classical argument for God is known as the “cosmological” argument. Cosmological arguments focus on the need for an adequate cause for existence of the cosmos (hence, “cosmological”). Although there was a time when a mainstream view in cosmology (not to be confused with cosmetology!) was that the physical universe has always existed, that view is virtually non-existent today.

The eternal-universe idea rapidly fell out of fashion about a century ago with the rise of what became popularly known as the “Big Bang Theory”. While I’m not advocating popular notions of the Big Bang, the theory does align with Scripture in terms of its description of a finite universe. In other words, it is now widely accepted by both professionals and laypersons that the universe is not eternal. It had a beginning. At some definite point in time in the past, the universe came into existence. It *began* to exist.

A particular formulation of the cosmological argument, known as the Kalam (kuh-LAHM) Cosmological Argument, can be stated as very simply and succinctly as follows: (1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause; (2) The universe began to exist; (3) Therefore, the universe has a cause. In other words, the existence of a universe that came into existence points necessarily to the existence of a causal force external to and transcendent to the universe.

For that reason, I like to elaborate on this just a bit at (1) and (3) when I teach the Kalam Argument. This gives us: (1) Everything that begins to exist has a cause *outside of itself*; and (3) Therefore, the universe has a cause *outside of itself*. In other words, the universe is not self-caused. (For the record, God isn’t self-caused, either, as God is not caused. Self-existing and self-caused are not the same thing.)

Some Objections to the Cosmological Argument

At this point, you might be anticipating the most common objection to the Kalam Cosmological Argument: “If everything requires a cause, then what caused God?” Here, we simply point out that we are not making the claim that *everything* requires a cause. The claim is that everything that begins to exist—*everything that*

comes into existence—has a cause. God did not come into existence. There was never a time or state in which God did not exist.

The second most common objection amounts to an appeal to some type of “oscillating universe” model. The idea here is that, while it’s true that the universe we inhabit came into existence at some finite point in the past, it was spawned somehow from the preexisting “stuff” of a prior universe. (Another variation holds that our universe was born in a black hole in another universe.) There’s a number of problems with the oscillating universe models. Let’s briefly discuss two. First, there exists absolutely zero scientific evidence that the claims of oscillating universe models are correct. The idea that our universe was somehow born from another universe that preexisted it is purely conjectural. Second, the oscillating models only back up the problem of origins. Even if it turned out that our universe did come from a preexisting universe (which, again, there is absolutely no evidence for), at some point, the impossible had to happen—the first universe had to come into existence and could not have been self-created.

One way around appeals to these hypothetical previously-existing universes would be to alter our cosmological argument slightly, giving us: (1) All physical things began to exist; (2) The universe is a physical thing; (3) Therefore, the universe began to exist. Here, “physical” does not necessarily mean made up of the protons, neutrons, electrons, et cetera that are the building blocks for physical objects in the universe we observe. Rather, “physical things” can represent any kind of “stuff”. (In philosophical jargon, “physical thing” could refer to anything that is “extended”, either in this universe or in any hypothetical prior universe.)

A third (and related) line of objection is for the atheist/materialist to maintain that the universe did indeed come “from nothing”. In fact, theoretical physicist Dr. Lawrence Krauss (who is an outspoken atheist) published a book several years ago with that very title—*A Universe from Nothing*. Krauss argues that the inherent instability within a “quantum vacuum” (“nothing”) can give rise to events like the Big Bang that ostensibly formed our universe.

Could this be a viable way around the Kalam Cosmological Argument? Well, no. It entirely misses the point for the reasons noted above. Briefly, Krauss’s “nothing” is not “nothing-nothing”; it is “something-nothing”. A quantum vacuum has

properties. It is something-nothing. By contrast, nothing-nothing has no properties. In order to get “nothing-nothing” from a quantum vacuum, one would need to subtract all properties of quantum vacuums from the quantum vacuum. What Krauss is arguing for is a universe from no preexisting physical matter, but that is not at all the same thing as arguing for a universe from nothing-nothing.

Let me share an anecdote about the time I “met” Dr. Krauss. I was working with a Truth on Display campus ministry team on the campus of Arizona State University one blazing hot afternoon in late April. Knowing that Dr. Krauss was a faculty member at Arizona State, and having recently read his book, I set up our double-sided dry erase easel board beside a walkway near the physical sciences buildings. The board featured the question, “How did the universe get started?” with response options including “Transcendent Creator”, “black hole”, “preexisting matter”, and “nothing”.

I was interacting with a small crowd of about 15 or 20 students, when I was alerted to Dr. Krauss’s presence. With hostility evident in his voice, Krauss shouted at me, “Leave these kids alone! They’re just trying to get to class!” I invited Dr. Krauss to join our conversation, even telling him that I recently read his book and enjoyed it. No dice. He stomped forward unenticed. An hour or so later, he passed by again, walking in the opposite direction. I didn’t notice him this time, by one of my teammates, R.J., reported that as Krauss walked past, he was muttering to himself about God under his breath. So much for tolerance for opposing ideas and supporting the free exchange of those ideas on public campuses!

Let’s address one final rebuttal that we commonly encounter when using Kalam and other cosmological arguments for God. The skeptic points out that cosmological arguments do not establish the existence of the “Christian God”. This is correct; however, we are not using the cosmological argument to establish the existence of the God of the Bible. Other arguments will be required to get us there. What the cosmological argument does establish is the need for a transcendent, eternal Creator. As such, this category of argument is best used in dialogue with a person who is a “materialist”—that is, a person who believes only in the physical and rejects the idea that nonphysical things exist (e.g., souls, spirits, disembodied minds, et cetera). The majority of self-describing “atheists” in

the Western world are materialists. Sometimes they prefer to use the term “scientific naturalist” as it helps them appropriate (wrongfully) the term “scientific”.

Before we end this section, I want to point out that cosmological arguments can get us at least to a transcendent, eternal, and *personal* Creator. How? Well, implicit in the conclusion that an eternal, nonphysical, transcendent creative Force was responsible for bringing all physical things into existence is the inseparable notion of volition—of *choice*. After all, the transcendent creative Agent could have decided not to bring anything else into existence. Yet, here we are with a universe filled with existents! Why does our universe exist rather than nothing? Because the eternal, transcendent, nonphysical Creator *chose* to create it! “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1).

Questions to Consider:

Why does it make sense that something must be eternal? Why must that “something” be Someone (i.e., God) who is spirit and not made of matter?

The Logical Necessity for a Designer

Quick! Within the next five seconds, give me evidence for computer hardware manufacturers. Well, that’s easy! You can simply point to your laptop computer or to your smartphone and there it is: undeniable evidence for highly intelligent designers and manufacturers of these amazing devices. Round 2: Within five seconds, provide evidence for architects. Again, simple! The building you are sitting in (or those around you if you happen to be reading this outside) are incontrovertible evidence for architects (as well as for builders).

In both cases, it is extraordinarily rare that you actually met the computer manufacturer or the architect. You did not watch people design these things. You simply see the result. And based on the clear evidence of what has been created, you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that highly intelligent minds are always behind such things.

Let’s try another thought experiment. You are walking with a friend down a lonely beach one evening, and you point out some parallel wavy lines in the sand. You

ask your friend how those lines came into existence. “Oh, that’s easy!” your friend says. “As the tide goes out, the repeated action of waves forms lines like those.” You are completely satisfied with this answer.

Walking a little further down the shoreline, you see etched in sand what appears to be large letters. As you get closer, you are able to discern a message: “Rich loves Mary” imbedded in a huge heart shape. Again, you ask your friend, “How do you think that got here?” And, again, your friend responds, “Simple! As the tide went out, some small sticks were carried along, scratched the surface of the sand in a certain way, and this is what was left behind.” Your response is very different this time. “Are you out of your mind? You can’t be serious! A very specific message was left in the sand, and messages like that only come from intelligent minds!”

One final example. This one dates back some two-hundred years to an Englishman named William Paley—a creationist whose book *Natural Theology* was a standard for undergraduate education at Christ’s College in Oxford, England, where he lived and taught. Paley asks us to imagine walking down a shoreline (okay, I borrowed a bit from him above) and stepping on a hard object. You reach down, pick it up, and you find a smooth rock shaped roughly like a boot. The physical erosion force of water smoothing and shaping the rock over many years provide a satisfactory explanation for the rock. It’s rough resemblance to a boot can be reasonably chalked up to coincidence.

Further down the shoreline, you again step on a hard object. You look down, expecting to find another smooth rock. You lift the object from the sand and you find a pocket watch. You inspect the watch, finding intricately connected gears on the inside, three indicator arms on the watch face, along with Roman numerals marking the hours, and a protruding knob by which the watch can be wound up. Even if you had never seen or even heard of pocket watches before, you would immediately recognize that the existence of the watch proves the existence of a watchmaker. It would be the height of absurdity to think that blind physical forces over time could have produced such an elaborate and purposeful instrument.

Question to Consider:

Look around you in your immediate environment. What are some evidences for intelligent design that are plainly revealed through things that have been made?

Ideas and Consequences – The Rise of Evolutionary Theory

A generation after William Paley wrote *Natural Theology*, a young student at Christ's College at Oxford reported his enthusiastic support for the work and its account for the robust evidences for the Creator God throughout the natural world. Like most people in his day, this student believed in special creation. Several years later, the student was appointed to travel around the world on a giant ship as a "naturalist". He came across a copy of geologist Charles Lyell's book *Principles of Geology*, and he became convinced of a theory known as "uniformitarianism", which holds that, in surveying the natural world around us, the past is the key to understanding the present.

Lyell rejected the "young" age for the earth that results from a straightforward reading of Genesis. Specifically, Lyell rejected the Genesis account of a worldwide cataclysmic flood. Instead, he argued that the earth is many millions of years in age, and the geological features of the earth are best explained by gradual processes playing out over eons. The young naturalist aboard this British vessel that was sailing around the globe embraced Lyell's teaching.

What's more, in his observations of the natural world he was discovering, the young naturalist found himself appalled by the apparent cruelty that is evident in nature. If you've ever witnessed a hawk attacking and killing a squirrel or some similar event, perhaps you experienced a similar repulsion. It just didn't seem fair. Why would a Creator who loves and cares for His creation create a world of such seemingly gratuitous pain and suffering?

The naturalist returned home to England after several years, got married, and started a family. He had a special affection for his second child and eldest daughter, Anne. At eight years of age, Anne fell sick with scarlet fever. After a long battle with the scarlet fever that led to tuberculosis, Anne Darwin died at age ten. Her father, Charles, was devastated. Eight years later (in 1859), Charles Darwin would publish the work that, more than any other, would lead masses of people to question their belief in a loving Creator God in favor of a world best described as "nature red in tooth and claw". That book, of course, was *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. (Often, this title is shortened to simply *Origin*.)

Few people realize that Darwin never actually provides any scientific support for his theory of universal common ancestry in *Origin*. He merely assumes that all living forms originated from a common ancestor. Much of the case for “Darwinism” focuses on natural selection and not common ancestry. Natural selection is *not* evolution; these are two fundamentally different concepts. Darwinism attempts to connect the two, but there is no connection between the two ideas that is necessitated by the evidence.

We should note here that the Biblical position of origins—“special creation”—is entirely compatible with natural selection. Biblical creationists believe that an all-knowing (omniscient), all-powerful (omnipotent) God created all the various “kinds” of life that have ever lived. That being the case, we believe that God certainly would have built within the genomes of each kind of animal He created a capacity to adapt to environmental changes. It would hardly attest to an all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful God if minor changes in the environment (which He knew would come) caused most species to go extinct! On the contrary, species are able to adapt to changing environments and thereby continue to be obedient to God’s command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1:22; Genesis 8:17).

It’s important to note here that the word in the original Biblical Hebrew that is translated into the English word “kind” (*mîn*) is not as narrowly-defined as the English word “species”. Certainly, given the worldwide flood described in Genesis 6, and the subsequent repopulation of the earth by two of each representative “kind” of animal, significant “speciation” events must have occurred (and occurred very quickly) following the flood. For example, there were two—a male and a female—to represent the “kind” of animal that we would now refer to in English as a “cat”. Of course, cats come in many varieties. Today, there are house cats, mountain lions, cheetahs, tiger, lions, bobcats, ocelots, and so on. Clearly, there was two of each of these species on the ark. Rather, whatever the two ancestral cats were like, they possessed within their genome the information to give rise to all of the species of cats that today populate the earth. This being the case, a Biblically-minded Christian can meaningfully speak of limited common ancestry but certainly *not* of universal common ancestry.

Certainly, there are many people who accept human ideas of biological evolution (including universal common ancestry) who also believe in a Creator God. This position is increasingly common today, even among professing Christians. We need to be clear here: Belief in special creation does not save a person. Salvation is by God's grace alone through faith alone in the finished work of Jesus Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8-9).

There are people who accept special creation *a la* Genesis who have never truly trusted Jesus Christ and are lost. On the other hand, there are those who have genuinely trusted Jesus Christ in their hearts (i.e., their innermost being) who, being led astray by the teachings of fallible humans, believe in some type of Neo-Darwinian evolution. A person can be completely wrong about certain facts pertaining to the natural world and still be saved. To further illustrate this point, I'm convinced that some sincere but sincerely mistaken proponents of the "flat-earth" model will still be saved because they have truly trusted in Jesus. They are saved, even though the flat-earth model is patently absurd!

Does this mean that it's not important to believe true things about the natural world? Of course not. This is especially true because God's Word teaches about the natural creation very plainly. No one would ever read the Genesis account of creation without any outside knowledge of macroevolution and come to the conclusion that life forms arose gradually over the course of hundreds of millions of years. Many people, having been indoctrinated in macroevolutionary theory, attempt to go back and read evolution into the Genesis account. That's called *eisegesis* and represents irresponsible Bible scholarship. Eisegesis is contrasted with responsible exegesis, in which the text is explicated in its proper context and is allowed to "speak for itself". The question of exegesis is not "What do I think this text teaches?" or "What do I want this text to teach?" but "What did the original author intend when he wrote this text and how would his original readers have understood it?"

We see that it is always a serious error to exchange the doctrines and theories of fallible humans for the perfect Word of God. Just because such errors do not *necessarily* mean that one will lose his or her eternal soul, there tends to be close association between a willingness to place the opinions of fallible humans over Scripture and a lack of saving faith. We have met hundreds of college students

who have told us that they “used to believe the Bible” until they got to college and studied humanistic ideas like Darwin’s theory of evolution. Now they’re not so sure. They are skeptical about parts of the Bible or even the entire Bible. Ideas have consequences, and the consequences of embracing a Darwinian worldview tends towards devastation of one’s faith in an all-wise, all-powerful Creator God. Let’s never forget those chilling words of the Apostle Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit: “Claiming to be wise, they instead became utter fools. And instead of worshipping the glorious, ever-living God, they worshipped idols made to look like mere people and birds and animals and reptiles” (Romans 1:22-23, NLT).

Question to Consider:

Why do you think Darwinian evolution is such an attractive alternative to special creation to so many people? Which requires more faith—to believe that God created all life on earth, including humans, or to believe that lifeless physical elements can arrange themselves into functional living cells capable of reproduction which, over billions of years, developed into plants, trees, butterflies, fish, humming birds, bald eagles, cows, elephants, giraffes, and—of course—me and you? Is the proper conversation “faith versus science” or “faith in God versus faith in stardust and time and chance”?

On Purpose or by Accident?

The fancy philosophical term for the argument from design is the Teleological Argument for God. That strange name is derived from the Greek word *telos* meaning “end”, “purpose”, or “goal”. The case for an Intelligent Designer could not be more straightforward. We look around us and encounter a world that looks very designed. Mindboggling complexity is seen when we look through the telescope, under the microscope, or in the mirror (i.e., at the human body). The design argument simply maintains that the commonsense explanation for such obvious design is that an enormously intelligent Designer/Creator exists.

Tremendous work has been done documenting the details of design in nature and how that design points univocally and unequivocally to the personal Creator God. The goal of this chapter is merely to acquaint you with such resources so that you

can have confidence that Biblical creationists need never back down from the challenges presented by naturalistic evolutionists. I strongly encourage you to spend some time reading and learning from sources such as the following: The Institute for Creation Research (www.icr.org), Answers In Genesis (www.answersingenesis.org), Evolution News & Science Today (www.evolutionnews.org), Reasons to Believe (www.reasons.org), and Creation Ministries International (www.creation.com). For the sake of brevity, let's consider just a small sampling of the robust evidences for a Creator God as experienced "through the telescope, under the microscope, and in the mirror".

The universe we inhabit is the only universe for which there is any scientific evidence. (As we reviewed in the previous section, ideas like "multiverse" theory are purely speculative and usually appealed to in a desperate attempt to explain away the existence of the Creator.) The evidence provided by the one and only universe we have access to is clear in pointing to the need for an enormously intelligent Designer and Creator. Let's consider the example of the fine-tuning of the earth and of the entirety of the space-time continuum.

Earth is home to an estimated 9 million species of plants and animals. Amazingly, fewer than one-fourth of those have been identified and studied as of 2021! As those of you who have attempted to keep weeds out of your garden or bugs out of your house can attest, the spread of biological life on earth is hard to stop! Life thrives here, in virtually all conditions, even in the boiling hot waters surrounding deep ocean vents. What makes Earth so commensurately well-suited for biological life to thrive?

Dozens of factors have been described by apologists, but let's consider just four that former atheist, police detective and apologist J. Warner Wallace describes in *God's Crime Scene*. According to Wallace, the local conditions of Earth depend on: (1) the right relationship with the Sun (i.e., the right distance and right tilt); (2) the optimal atmospheric conditions that prevent excess ammonia and methane from forming while optimizing the water vapor content of our atmosphere; (3) ideal thickness of Earth's crust which is thin enough to allow for sufficient oxygen accumulation but thick enough to prevent excessive volcanic activity; and (4) the right relationship with the Moon, which is large enough to stabilize Earth's rotation and orbit yet small enough to prevent large tidal swells.

To Wallace's first and last points—about the Earth's relationship to the Sun and Moon—I would like to submit the following observation as a challenge to anyone who would deny the Creator. On August 21, 2017, a total solar eclipse appeared over much of the United States. As I made my way for a special gospel outreach event that day at the University of Georgia, it dawned on my former-atheist brain how fascinating a total solar eclipse is. It turns out that the Moon is 400 times smaller than the Sun, but it also “just so happens” that the Sun is 400 times the size of the Moon. Consequently, the visual angle from Earth's surface allows for the Moon to perfectly obscure the Sun during a total solar eclipse, leaving only an outer “corona” (literally, “crown”) at the height of the eclipse.

According to atheistic naturalism, it must be purely coincidental that the visual size of the Moon and Sun from the surface of the Earth are *exactly the same!* There's no reason why, on naturalism, the Moon should be the exact distance from Earth and size that it is. It was infinitely more likely, from the standpoint of probability theory, that the relative size of the Moon and Sun in the sky would be different. After all, we're talking about objects that are vastly different in size! Note that, if the Moon were larger or closer, it would more than cover the Sun and no corona would be witnessed. If the Moon were smaller or further away, enough of the Sun would still be visible in the sky that we would not be able to look at it and probably wouldn't even notice that an eclipse was occurring. I submit to you that the most plausible and commonsense explanation for the fact that the Moon perfectly obscures the Sun during a total solar eclipse is that it was perfectly designed to do that!

If the suitability for Earth is fascinating, then the fine-tuning of the entire cosmos is truly astounding! This fine-tuning argument describes the “razor's edge” precision of numerous (and independent) physical properties that characterize matter and energy in the universe. On atheistic naturalism, there was absolutely a priori constraints on these properties of physics. They could have taken on any of an enormous range of values. Were any of them different by the infinitesimally small value, then a universe supporting biological life like we observe filling Earth would have been impossible (yet alone the ostensible evolution of minds like ours that are capable of looking back into the universe and posing these questions about existence). Let's briefly examine just a few of these “cosmic fine-tuning”

parameters, as summarized by Ted Wright at Cross Examined (www.crossexamined.org).

Before we do that, we need to clarify an important point. References to events like the so-called Big Bang (e.g., the “singularity”, et cetera) should not be taken to mean that Bible-believing apologists are endorsing naturalistic models of the birth of the universe. Rather, the argument turns on the insufficiency of naturalistic accounts to explain for the universe as we now observe it. This line of reasoning is essentially a *reductio ad absurdum* against so-called “scientific” naturalism. In other words, if it can be demonstrated that natural explanations alone utterly fail in accounting for the observed universe, it follows that supernatural forces were implicated.

As Wright reports, according to the Big Bang model, the expansion rate of the universe is calibrated to one part in 10 to the 55th power. (That’s a 10 with 55 zeroes after it!) Under the Big Bang model of cosmological evolution, had the rate been faster, no stars or planets could ever have formed. Had it been slower, the universe would have collapsed back in on itself before stars could have formed. Moreover, the “mass density” is fine-tuned to one part in 10 to the 59th power. Had the universe been slightly more massive, stars would have burned out far too quickly to allow for the rise of complex life on neighboring planets. Had it been any less massive, not enough helium could have formed, resulting in a dearth of the heavier elements (and, consequently, life would not be possible). A third example is the ratio of electrons to protons. This value must be calibrated to one part 10 to the 37th power. Were the value any different, gravity would be overwhelmed by electromagnetism, preventing the formation of stars and planets.

The examples above account for just three of a (growing) list of dozens of parameters that must be dialed in to within infinitesimal “tolerances” in order to a universe to develop naturally that could support the evolution of complex life forms. (I want to state again, for the sake of clarity, apologists appealing to the cosmic fine-tuning argument are not conceding that this is, in fact, how the universe formed.) What’s more, these parameters appear to exist independently. That is, the value of one seems to have absolutely no relationship to the value of the others being what they are. As such, the “multiplication rule” of probability

would be used to calculate the overall odds of a universe that supports the natural development of complex life forming according to the presuppositions of naturalism/materialism. While each of the individual probabilities are vanishingly small, imagine the product of multiplying all of those probabilities together! (To take the example of the three probabilities described above, the resulting overall probability is one in 10 to the 120,065th power! By comparison, it is estimated that “only” about 10 to the 97th power elementary particles—that is, protons, neutrons, and electrons—exist in the entire visible universe!)

Questions to Consider:

The evidence is clear that the universe we inhabit requires extraordinary and incomprehensible fine-tuning. How does this evidence align with the belief that the universe just so happened, by chance, to have these properties? Why do you think atheist like to appeal to completely hypothetical ideas like the “multiverse”?

Practice:

With a partner or small group (no more than 4 people), take turns playing the “5-second game” at the top of this section. Challenge the “skeptic” to give evidence for authors or architects or smart phone designers (et cetera). Use a prompt like the following: “Quick! In five seconds or less, give me evidence for smart phone designers”. If someone holds up her smart phone, ask how she recognizes that this is evidence of a designer and also what we can infer about the designer (i.e., that the designer must be highly intelligent).

Created In the Image of God

Is there evidence for God “in the mirror”? By “in the mirror”, I am referring to the phenomenal uniqueness of human beings. God’s Word states that, unlike the rest of the creatures that the LORD formed and placed on Earth, human beings alone were fashioned in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). While the evidence for a magnificent and transcendent Creator is revealed in the marvelous designs of every animal, the handiwork of God is especially evident in humans! Let’s briefly consider some attributes of humans that are unique among the approximately 9 million species that inhabit the planet.

Relational and self-expressive language is unique to humans. While it is true that many species (perhaps *most* species) signal in one way or another, human language vastly exceeds those displays, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Recently, I was listening to a songbird and was impressed by its “vocabulary”. This tiny bird had a repertoire of dozens of very distinct sounds that it was repeating again and again. Many of the sounds of nature (e.g., the songs of birds, the chirping of crickets, et cetera) serve the purpose of attracting and courting mates. These are ways that animals carry out the LORD’s command to all animals following the flood of Noah to “spread over the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth” (Genesis 8:17, CSB).

Every time we find ourselves enjoying these “sounds of nature”, we should be reminded of this decree of God and how the natural order obeys His commands. We should also reflect on the enormous extent to which human language transcends the reproductive function. Following the (false) assumptions of common ancestry, animal scientists known as primatologists (primate specialists) have invested enormous energies in attempts to teach chimpanzees human language. The guiding assumption of their work is that chimpanzees (*pan troglodytes* and *pan paniscus*) are the closest living relatives to human beings and should therefore show a considerable aptitude for learning human language. Some of their most impressive results were found with the chimps known as “Washoe” and “Kanzi”. Washoe reportedly learned 350 American Sign Language (ASL) signs and even combined “water” and “bird” to identify a swan. Kanzi reportedly was trained to “understand” spoken English and to use several hundred symbols.

As interesting as these studies are, they fall enormously short of demonstrating evolutionary connectedness to human beings. For example, the chimpanzees always used language symbols in a stimulus-response type scenario, entrained by animal scientists using classical techniques like operant conditioning. For example, a food reward (e.g., grape or M&M) might be given for a certain response during training. It comes as no surprise that animals can learn amazing sequences of behaviors through such procedures. This is certainly not unique to chimpanzees; it is widely demonstrated in dogs, birds, horses, squirrels, and so on. As such, these chimps would use their much-celebrated “language” abilities to say things like, “Me want banana” or “Go outside play”. In other words, they

performed these signals to get things they wanted in their immediate environment.

In contrast, humans almost always use language to *relate*. Human language is primarily *relational*. Before the advent of smart phones, if you put two strangers in a waiting room, they would promptly begin chatting with one another. “Hi. I’m Joe Smith. What’s your name?” “Where are you from?” “What kind of work do you do?” “What do you think about this crazy weather we’ve been having?” “Where do your kids go to school?” “Do you think the Falcons will make the playoffs this year?” If you think about it, the very reason that few strangers have these types of conversations in person today is that most people are busy communicating and relating (usually very poorly) on their electronic devices. In that sense, the ubiquity of texting, Twitter, Facebook discussion threads, Instagram posts, and so on proves even more how human communication is all about relating to one another.

Animals use “language” to signal and to acquire desired items. Humans almost exclusively use language to relate to other humans. Modern evolutionary theory does a very poor job of accounting for this feature of human language. By contrast, God’s Word gives a wonderful explanation: Human beings are created in the image of God. And God is, above all, a relational God! In fact, from eternity past, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have been relating, communicating with, and perfectly loving one another! By creating you as one who communicates to relate like He does, God has provided undeniable evidence for your creation “in His image” “in the mirror”!

Humans are also unique among God’s earthly creation as expressive creators. Our Creator made us to be creators! It is through our expressive creation abilities that we attempt to transcend this 3-dimensional world and “touch eternity” if you will. Biblically, this makes sense. Scripture teaches that, “God has set eternity in our hearts” (Ecclesiastes 3:11). The souls of men and women yearn to venture “above and beyond” into the eternal. Sometimes this is pursued through deep and substantive conversations with other people, as we explored above. Often it’s those times of just sitting around talking and relating that we reminisce yearnfully after a loved one passes away. We also use expressive language to write poetry, to compose song lyrics, to author novels and treatises on anything from

astronomy to ethics. Consider how much writing on any and every topic is available through blogs and articles online.

Human creative expression even transcends the spoken. Think of the brilliance of classical music composers like Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. Without words, there is enormous expression and communication! The same can be said of the performing arts like dance and theatre, the visual arts such as drawing, painting, sculpting, photography, videography, architecture, landscape design, and so on. Nothing of the kind is witnessed among the animals. As intelligent as many of them prove to be, humans are entirely set apart as expressive creators. Every time you look in the mirror, you will see an expressive creator!

Among the creatures of the earth, humans are unique in our experience of awe and majesty. Earlier in this chapter, we appealed to the solar eclipse of 2017 to make a point about evidence for design in the heavenly bodies. People from all across the eclipse zone gathered by the thousands in eager anticipation of the main event in the skies that day. I joined an event that began hours before the eclipse began on campus at the University of Georgia where students, faculty, staff and visitors gathered inside Sanford Stadium. As the time approached, the environment grew more and more electric. Humans, but not animals, are naturally fascinated by these types of rare natural displays. We will even pull our cars over to the side of the road to take in a glorious sunset. Ask a primatologist when the last time they documented a chimpanzee, a bonobo, a gorilla, or an orangutan climbing a hill or a tree just to behold the glorious displays in the skies above or on the earth below. There is no evidence of such a sense of natural aesthetics or awe and wonder among the mere animals of the earth. Mere beasts will prefer a yummy snack or a mating opportunity over the most magnificent of natural displays any day. In the mirror, you will see a special creation of God designed to experience awe and wonder!

Let's consider one final point before we draw this section to a close. Human alone worship. Worship is evident in every culture and society that has ever been studied. It is defined as "the expression of reverence and adoration for a deity". While all humans worship, many worship in error. Many people worship false gods, and it might rightfully be said that many people worship other people or even themselves! Explaining true worship, Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the

well that, “true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23-24). When we worship the One true living God, we do something ETERNAL! There’s even an internal sense of this. Kind of makes you want to spend more time worshipping, doesn’t it?

Worship is universal among humans, and it is particular to humans. In other words, animals do not worship. Worship is found everywhere among humans and nowhere among mere animals. Studying the nature and expressions of worship reveals something entirely unique about human beings. Our hearts were designed to express adoration for something higher, something beyond, Someone greater! Think about it. There is absolutely no reason why worship should be a universal human experience if naturalistic evolution was true. C.S. Lewis stated this idea brilliantly as follows: “If I find in myself desires, which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world.” Worship is that desire, and you’ll find it in the heart of that special creation of God you see in the mirror, precisely because you were made by God and for God, to live forever with Him in another world beyond this one!

Question to Consider:

Describe some ways in which it is obvious that human beings are special creations, made in the image of God, and—as such—are phenomenally unique.

Practice:

In pairs or small groups, take turns playing the “skeptic” who states that he/she believes that humans are not that different from many of the other highly-intelligent animal species like chimpanzees, dolphins, elephants, African gray parrots, et cetera. How do you respond?

How Old Is the Earth?

Before closing this section, I should note that, for the purposes of this primer, I am sidestepping the young-earth vs. old-earth debate among creationists. It’s not that I don’t think this is an important issue. Rather, I realized that tracing out the

history of these disagreements among Biblically-minded Christians is well beyond the scope of this short book. Devout believers with the highest view of Scripture possible—that the original texts of the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament constitute nothing short of the perfect, infallible, inerrant, authoritative, all-sufficient Word of God—have come down on both sides of this conversation. I do not pretend to have resolved all (or even most) of the issues that entice some brothers and sisters in Christ into one position or the other.

I have ultimately landed in the young-earth camp, although I came to believe in Christ as a theistic evolutionist and then moved rather quickly into the old-earth camp during the first few years of reengaging the Christian faith . (I grew up as a Biblical creationist before becoming a professing atheist in graduate school and as a neuroscience professor.) Briefly, I am convinced that young-earth creationism comports with the most straightforward and commonsense reading of Genesis. It explains how, why, and when physical death entered the paradise that God originally created. It also presents the flood of Noah as a worldwide cataclysmic event which accounts for the features of the world we see today. For these reasons, I embrace the young-world view, although I acknowledge that my old-earth brothers and sisters in Christ make some strong arguments for their position.

While I think it's wise to not be dogmatic with respect to the age of cosmos, I do draw a line when it comes to Biblical anthropology—the Bible's teachings about the nature of human beings. I am convinced that it is imperative that Christians believe in a literal Adam and Eve and a literal "Fall" that took place when humankind believed the lie of the serpent and disobeyed God. While there can be legitimate disagreement on whether the days in Genesis 1 are to be understood as literal 24-hour periods, I am convinced that the historical reality of the Garden of Eden and the Fall of humanity is non-negotiable. The theistic evolutionists (or "evolutionary creationists" as they sometimes refer to themselves) typically maintain that the story of Adam and Eve is just that—only a story. They believe that the narrative in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 was composed as a fable to describe the evolution of moral reasoning and accountability that arose in ancestral humans as they became cognitively distinct from other species.

According to this theory, Adam and Eve are merely symbols. They symbolize the moral dilemmas and quandaries that all humans find themselves in at times and how we all sometimes make the wrong decisions and incur negative consequences. They dismiss the idea that “sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin” (Romans 5:12), maintaining instead that death had been around for many millions, even billions, of years before humans evolved. While some professing Christians who hold to theistic evolution will say they confine those beliefs to just the first eleven chapters or so of Genesis, a coherent understanding of Scripture does not allow for this kind of separation.

The New Testament authors (including the Apostle Paul above) are clear in teaching a literal view of Adam and Eve and original sin. Ask yourself, if we allow that Paul is endorsing a myth in referring to Adam in Romans 5, isn't it also permissible that he's merely endorsing a myth in his teaching about the redemptive work of Jesus Christ a few verses later? Moreover, the Apostle Peter explicitly appeals to the literal, historical, worldwide flood of Noah (1 Peter 3:20, 2 Peter 2:5). Thus, it is untenable that Christians should accept a merely symbolic understanding of the creation, Fall, and worldwide flood narratives in Genesis. This is not a compromise that any Scripture-honoring Christian should ever be willing to make.

Question to Consider:

While I consider myself to be in the young-earth camp, I do not “push” the issue of the age of the earth. However, I do insist upon a literal understanding of creation, the historical existence of Adam and Eve and their literal fall into sin in the Garden of Eden, and so forth. What about you? Where do you draw the line(s) and why?

Discuss:

Read Romans 5:12-21 and discuss whether or not Paul's exposition of the nature of sin, death, and redemption in Christ depends on a literal understanding of these events? Would it make sense to make a parallel between a fable and the literal death of Jesus?

The Logical Necessity for a Moral Lawgiver

If atheism were true, “should” should not exist. (I know that sounded weird, so read that last sentence again.) In other words, unless God exists, there ought not to be any “oughts”. What do I mean by this? I’m talking about morality—about right and wrong.

We humans are inveterate moralists. We moralize about seemingly anything and everything. The next time you get a chance (and it won’t be obvious that you’re being weird about it), eavesdrop on a conversation between strangers in public. Most of the time, people are talking about other people. And most of the time, the content of their conversations about other people are distinctly moral in tone. “He shouldn’t have done that!” “She should have said this!” “Can you believe she posted that picture?” “He knows she’s lying to him.” “That girl is so full of herself—what a narc!” “You can’t trust him; he’s a womanizer!” How long of a list we could come up with for the things people moralize about!

The social landscape for humans is replete with moral decisions and moral evaluations. The essence of the moral argument is that if there are objective moral truth—if there are moral facts—then there must also exist a transcendent moral Lawgiver (i.e., God). Moral facts cannot exist without God.

Here’s one way the moral argument for God can be stated “syllogistically”—that is, as a formal logical proof: (1) If God does not exist, then moral facts do not exist; (2) Moral facts do exist; (3) Therefore, God exists. This argument is structured according to a valid format known as “denying the consequence” (or *modus tollens*). As such, if (1) and (2) are true, then (3) follows necessary and absolutely.

Before we go any further, notice what the moral argument is *not* claiming. It’s not saying that *every* issue of how people do things differently is a matter of objective moral fact. There are many areas of the human experience that involve “shades of grey”. We’re all aware, for example, that different societies and cultures can have very different expectations for behavior and that these norms can vary greatly (even within the same culture) depending on factors like time and place.

Consider the issue of modest dress. What does it mean to dress modestly? Well, the answer to that question is going to vary greatly depending on the culture one is in. Even within the same culture—say, contemporary American culture—modesty will vary greatly between attire that is appropriate for a job interview, a

funeral, and a day at the beach. An outfit that is entirely appropriate in one context might very well be completely out of the question in another. Thus, there is no objective standard of comparison when it comes to the modesty of one's apparel. However, moralizing about how other people dress themselves is not uncommon. What's going on here?

This is where we need to distinguish between "soft moralizing" and "hard moralizing". An example of "soft moralizing" might be the statement, "She shouldn't have worn that outfit to the church meeting on Sunday". By contrast, an example of "hard moralizing" is the statement, "It's wrong to torture infants for entertainment". (Yes, the second example is extreme, but extreme examples like that one best illustrate the point of the moral argument.)

In the first example, it is not implied that there exists some objective standard of appropriate dress for attending a Sunday church meeting. Rather, there exist many examples of what would constitute appropriate dress, of what would constitute inappropriate dress, and of what would land somewhere in the middle. The outfit under consideration is being assigned a location somewhere along this continuum of appropriateness and has been determined to fall on the "inappropriate" end of that continuum. However, in the second example—"It's wrong to torture infants for entertainment", there exists a sharp dichotomy between right and wrong behavior. Sane people will not argue that while it might be acceptable to inflict a more minor degree of pain on an infant just for fun, the more extreme forms of torture should be avoided. There is no continuum. Rather, if a person engages in torturing an infant for fun, that person is violating an objective moral standard that prohibits such behavior.

What are some obvious examples of moral facts? Here are a few I thought of off the top of my head: "Racism is wrong"; "Rape is wrong"; "Murder is wrong"; "Slandering people is wrong"; "If you promised to do something, you should do it"; "Don't betray the trust of people who have been good to you"; "Treat other people the way you would want to be treated if you were in their position". The point here is this: If even one of those statements constitutes a moral fact (and not merely a popular opinion), then the moral argument for God succeeds!

Again, the moral argument does not require that everything we moralize about involves an absolute standard of truth. Rather, the moral argument depends only

on there being at least some objective moral truth—at least one *moral fact*. Stated the other way, if atheism was true, then all morality is ultimately subjective. If there is no God, then there are no moral facts. After all, stardust rearranged by purely physical processes over billions of years does not produce moral truths (or even cognition/awareness at all, for that matter). While the atheist may affirm moral relativism, it's significant that no sane person lives this way, including the atheist! We all live as if some things really are right and other things truly are wrong.

Can you imagine a livable human society in which people lived out “moral relativism”? While it might seem easy to speculate about that “on paper”, as soon as your personal property is stolen or a family member or close friend is abused, raped, or murdered, you are going to feel as if you were truly violated—objectively, and not merely as a matter of opinion. The moral outrage you experience and your desire for the perpetrator to face justice will attest to the reality of objective moral truth. We could add here that, if there are no moral facts, then justice is an illusory concept and feelings of moral indignation are subjective; they are mere opinions.

My former ministry leader, Tom Short, often challenges college students to conduct the following thought experiment. Imagine you're about to go to dinner with a friend. Your friend asks what type of food you're hungry for—Italian or Mexican. You respond, “Mexican food, because Mexican food is *right* and Italian food is *wrong!*” Your friend gives you a puzzled look. What in the world could you mean? It would make sense to say, “Mexican, because I like Mexican food but not Italian food”. This is clearly a statement of preference or opinion. But instead of stating your opinion about food, you *moralized* about it!

Tom typically follows up with a couple more examples. “Imagine I was to say to you, ‘Green shirts are *right*, and blue shirts are *wrong!*’ or ‘Strawberry ice cream is *wrong*, and mint chocolate chip ice cream is *right!*’ We encounter the same issue. Everyone understands that preferences like these are just a matter of personal tastes. They are matters of opinion. It makes no sense whatsoever to make moral claims about them (unless we're just joking, in which case the fact that we're joking proves the point about the subjective nature of our personal preferences).

By contrast, imagine you were to ask a friend about their views on the epidemic of sexual assault on college and university campuses. Your friend responds, "Well, in my *opinion* rape is wrong. That's not really my thing, but if someone else thinks it's okay to rape, that's a valid opinion, too." Or suppose you're having a discussion about the plight of African slaves in the infamous Middle Passage or during chattel slavery in the old American South. "Oh," your friend responds, "I personally don't think that owning and abusing other human beings is a good idea, but that's just my *opinion*. I'm sure plenty of people back then were of the opinion that enslaving humans was a good idea." "What?!", you respond furiously, "Are you kidding me? These are not matters of opinion! Rape and slavery are objectively wrong, and they're awful. And, if you disagree with me about that, then you don't just have an unusual opinion; you're absolutely wrong!" These are matters of moral fact, not personal opinion.

The point couldn't be more clear, could it? We all recognize that moral facts exist. Just because some despicable people in our society might disagree about the injunctions against sexual assault or racism or murder does not make these matters of mere opinion. They are *wrong*, and those of us who find ourselves squarely on the side of moral sanity on these issues are *right*! These things are not up for discussion or debate. Moral facts exist, period. Denying them is just as absurd as denying gravity. Gravity doesn't care about your opinions. Neither do moral facts.

In my experience, the only retreat of the person who attempts to deny the existence of transcendent moral truth (and therefore a transcendent moral Lawgiver) is to appeal to the instinctual nature of human moral sentiments. The argument typically goes something like this: "As the ancestors to humans evolved, certain types of behavioral patterns were more conducive to group survival and reproduction. Because of this, emotional states that correspond to what we now call 'good' and 'bad' behaviors arose to help insure general conformity throughout the species. This explains why most people feel certain about certain things we might accurately refer to as 'moral truths' today." Does this explanation work?

In his acclaimed classic apologetic work *Mere Christianity*, atheist-turned-Christian C.S. Lewis anticipates and ingeniously responds to this claim. Here is an extended excerpt:

...Some people wrote to me saying, "Isn't what you call the Moral Law simply our herd instinct and hasn't it been developed just like all our other instincts?" Now I do not deny that we may have a herd instinct: but that is not what I mean by the Moral Law. We all know what it feels like to be prompted by instinct—by mother love, or sexual instinct, or the instinct for food. It means that you feel a strong want or desire to act in a certain way. And, of course, we sometimes do feel just that sort of desire to help another person: and no doubt that desire is due to the herd instinct. But feeling a desire to help is quite different from feeling that you ought to help whether you want to or not. Supposing you hear a cry for help from a man in danger.

You will probably feel two desires—one a desire to give help (due to your herd instinct), the other a desire to keep out of danger (due to the instinct for self-preservation). But you will find inside you, in addition to these two impulses, a third thing which tells you that you ought to follow the impulse to help, and suppress the impulse to run away. Now this thing that judges between two instincts, that decides which should be encouraged, cannot itself be either of them. You might as well say that the sheet of music which tells you, at a given moment, to play one note on the piano and not another, is itself one of the notes on the keyboard. The Moral Law tells us the tune we have to play: our instincts are merely the keys.

So, the “Moral Law” or moral facts or moral truths (whatever you want to call them) cannot simply be chalked up to evolved human instincts. The only rational explanation is that moral law comes from a transcendent, personal moral Lawgiver. Moral facts exist; therefore, God exists.

In my experiences, this “Moral Argument for God” is the best go-to for discussion with atheists. If at no other point, we tend to find some common ground with them around certain moral absolutes (like those mentioned above). Establishing

common ground is good for building rapport and moving the discussion forward. Borrowing a metaphor from apologist Greg Koukl (from the book *Tactics: A Game Plan for Discussing Your Christian Convictions*, which I highly recommend), it's often the case that the best we can hope for in a conversation with an unbeliever is to "plant a pebble in their shoe".

What does Koukl mean by this? If you've ever got a pebble in your shoe while hiking, you know how annoying it can be. It might not cause pain, but sooner or later, you're going to stop to address it. It's aggravating. You can't get it off your mind. Koukl compares certain "sticking points" (like the fact that moral truths exist and find their only adequate explanation in a moral Lawgiver) with those irritating pebbles. Once that pebble is implanted into their mind, it will aggravate them (in a good way) and should cause them to want to search deeper for a sufficient explanation. As we pray and trust the Holy Spirit, God often gives us more opportunities to continue the discussion!

Question to Consider:

Identify a moral fact (i.e., a non-negotiable moral absolute) not mentioned above. Explain how you might appeal to this moral fact in a conversation with an atheist friend in order to illustrate the need for a moral Lawgiver (God).