Arguments for the Existence of God

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Introduction

Arguments for the existence of God play an important role in the systematic philosophies of the 17th century. Many thinkers from this period seek to show both that their philosophical systems harmonize with the new science of mechanism and that this new science is consistent with the existence of the Judeo-Christian God. In the thought of Philosophers such as Descartes, Locke, and Leibniz, God features as the designer, conservator, and ruler of the mechanistic world that we see and of the moral ideals towards which we must strive.

Although a number of novel arguments for God's existence were introduced in this period, many of the arguments have precursors in medieval (and even ancient) sources. But even when reformulating traditional arguments, thinkers from this period introduce significant innovations. These innovations are, generally speaking, dictated by the particular philosopher's metaphysics and his or her assumptions about the nature of the physical world. In some cases, such presuppositions can be constraining, making it impossible for a philosopher to accept a traditional doctrine or argument. In other cases, these same presuppositions can be liberating and allow a philosopher to strengthen traditional forms of reasoning using clarifications, distinctions, and insights made possible by his or her own system. For this reason, each argument is best understood in terms of its place in its author's overarching philosophical system. That said, there

is much to be gained by examining these arguments on their own terms, which is the aim of this piece.

Arguments for the existence of God generally fall into one of four categories: ontological, cosmological, teleological (or design), or moral. Ontological arguments attempt to show that God exists by using *a priori* reasoning concerning the concept of a perfect being. Cosmological arguments (sometimes called "first cause" arguments) begin with *a posteriori* claims about some existent in the world and argue via a causal principle to the initial source of all existence. Teleological arguments claim that certain features of the universe evince a design or purpose and from this we can, inductively, infer that there must be an intelligent being who created it. Finally, moral arguments attempt to show that morality and justice require a lawgiver or a judge, or that the large degree of agreement regarding morality requires a singular source. In the 17th century, I believe it is fair to say that the ontological and cosmological arguments reign. However, we do see several interesting examples of design and moral arguments. Perhaps most interesting in this time period is the development of arguments that attempt to show the existence of God is required as the ground of knowledge or truth. Examples of this type of argument are Leibniz's argument from the eternal truths, Malebranche's argument from mere sight, and Cudworth's argument based on knowledge of universals. All of these arguments will be discussed in more detail in what follows.

In this chapter, I begin by reconstructing the arguments of several of the most influential philosophers of the 17th century. After discussing the canonical figures, I turn to the discussion of philosophers whose work – though less well known than the work of Descartes and Locke – merits our philosophical interest and attention. It is my hope that the inclusion of so-called

"minor" figures will open the door to further study of their views. I begin the discussion of the canonical figures with Descartes.

Rene Descartes (1596-1650)

Descartes' arguments for the existence of God are perhaps the best known and most influential from the early modern period. Some commentators consider many of the later arguments for God's existence in this period as refinements of Descartes' arguments. Descartes employs two types of arguments for God's existence – one *a priori* and one *a posteriori*. Kant dubbed the *a priori* argument "the ontological argument." The *a posteriori* argument is a version of the cosmological argument. The arguments are given in their most detailed form in the *Meditations*.[1] However, variations on these arguments are also presented in both the *Discourse on Method* and the *Principles of Philosophy*.[2]

The a posteriori argument

There is some debate amongst scholars as to whether there are actually two *a posteriori* arguments or only one.[3] Here, two arguments are provided and it is left to the reader to determine whether the second is merely a retelling or an expansion of the first.

Descartes' first argument relies crucially on a principle concerning the cause of our ideas and on a distinction between formal and objective reality. I begin with formal and objective reality. Descartes is committed to the great chain of being. That is, he held that some entities are more real than others, or that they have more being than others. The more perfect and independent an entity is the more reality or being it has. God, considered as an infinitely perfect and independent being, would be at the top of the scale. At the bottom of the scale we might find

[1] For the *a posteriori* argument see the Third Meditation. For the *a priori* argument, see the Fifth Meditation, AT VII 64-68/CSM II 45-47.
[2] AT VI 33-36/CSM I 127-9 and AT VIII 10-13/CSM I 197-200.
[3] See Beyssade (1992) and Nelson and Nolan (2006).

things like modes, or properties, which are dependent upon other entities for their being. The formal reality of an entity is equal to its position within the chain of being. Objective reality, however, only applies to ideas. Ideas, considered as mere ideas, have rather low formal reality. But the objective reality of an idea varies with respect to the object of the idea. An idea of a finite substance, such as a human being, will have more objective reality than an idea of a mode or property.[4]

Descartes tells us in the Third Meditation that it is "manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much <reality> in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause."[5] Let us call this causal principle the "containment principle." According to Descartes, two other causal principles follow deductively from the containment principle: first, that *nothing comes from nothing*; and second, that *the less perfect cannot cause the more perfect*.[6] Descartes maintains that these principles apply not only to objects with formal reality, but also to ideas, or to objective reality. Thus, he holds the following causal principle with respect to ideas: "For a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea."[7]

Descartes proceeds to examine his idea of God, which he tells us he understands as "a substance that is infinite, <eternal, immutable,> independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else (if anything else there be) that exists."[8] Since Descartes has an idea of God, and ideas cannot come from nothing, he must seek the cause of his idea. Descartes writes, "If I have an idea whose objective reality is so great that I

[4] AT VII 40/CSM II 27-8.
[5] AT VII 40/CSM II 28.
[6] AT VII 40-41/CSM II 28.
[7] AT VII 41/CSM II 28-9.
[8] AT VII 45/CSM II 31.

am sure that the same reality does not exist in me, either formally or eminently, then I can know that other things exist."[9] Since Descartes is not the cause of his own idea of God - for he lacks some of the perfections contained in the idea – and his idea is of a being with infinite perfection and independence (that is, a being with infinite formal reality), Descartes concludes that his idea can only be caused by God himself. Therefore, God exists.

The second proof is sometimes called the "continuous creation" proof. Descartes writes that one might wonder why the *idea* of a being more perfect than oneself must necessarily be caused by a being that *really is* more perfect than oneself. He then considers whether his own existence would be possible without such a being. Descartes is concerned with not only how he began to exist, but also how he is preserved in being. He holds that preservation in being, or conservation, is a sort of continuous creation. He believes that if we consider the fact that we must be continually created, it will be much easier to see that God must be the total and efficient cause of our existence.

According to Descartes, there are only four possible options for the cause of his existence: (1) himself, (2) his parents, (3) a being less perfect than God, and (4) God.[10] Descartes proceeds to argue by elimination. He argues that he cannot be the cause of his own existence, for if he were the cause, he would have given himself all the perfections contained in his idea of God – perfections which he knows he lacks. Moreover, he observes in himself no power that would enable him to preserve himself in existence.[11] He next considers whether a being less powerful than God might have created him. He answers that since he knows that he is a thinking thing,

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[9] AT VII 42/CSM II 29. In order to have a property formally, a substance must have it in virtue of its intrinsic nature. To have a property eminently, a substance must be powerful enough to cause the property in other things while not itself exemplifying the property.
[10] AT VII 48/CSM II 33.
[11] AT VII 49/CSM II 33-34. Here Descartes commits himself to the transparency of the mind.

and that he has in him the idea of a being with all the perfections, the cause of his existence (and his idea) must also be a thinking thing and it must contain all the perfections he attributes to God. Thus, the being that creates him (it must be a single being, since the perfections of unity and simplicity are contained in his idea of a perfect being) cannot be anything less than a being with all the perfections. If this being with all the perfections derives its existence from itself, then it must be God. If it does not derive its existence from itself, but from something else, then we can ask the same question again about the being that is its cause until we arrive finally at the total and efficient cause, which is God. Finally, Descartes considers his parents as the cause of his existence, and he concludes that in addition to what he has just said, it is incorrect to think that his parents generated him *qua* thinking thing or that they can preserve him in being.

The a priori argument

The *a priori* argument is quite simple in form. Descartes tells us in the Fifth Meditation, "the mere fact that I can produce from my thoughts the idea of something entails that everything which I clearly and distinctly perceive to belong to that thing really does belong to it."[12] Here, Descartes uses his "truth rule." The rule states that whatever is clearly and distinctly perceived is indubitably true. Descartes then claims he has a clear and distinct idea of God as a supremely perfect being.[13] Since existence is a perfection, he concludes that God exists.

Objections and replies

[12] AT VII 65/CSM II 45.

[13] For an interesting discussion of how we perceive infinite substance, see Alice Sowaal's "Descartes Reply To Gassendi: How We Can Know All Of God, All At Once, But Still Have More To Learn About Him," in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19(3) 2011: 419-449.

Descartes answers several objections to his arguments in the Objections and Replies to the Meditations.[14] Many objections to the *a posteriori* argument claim that the causal principle, which requires there to be at least as much reality in the cause as there is in the effect, is false.[15] Here, two objections to the *a priori* argument will be briefly considered, along with Descartes' replies.

In defending the ontological argument, Descartes notes that there are some ideas which provide us with necessary truths about their objects, whether there be any such objects in reality or not. For instance, even if there were no actual triangles, it would still be necessary that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles. To say that it is possible that there be a triangle that lacks this property is nonsensical. However, these truths tell us nothing about whether any triangle actually exists. However, Descartes argues that the case a perfect being is importantly different from the case of the triangle. The idea of a perfect being, according to Descartes, contains within it the idea of existence. So just as it is nonsensical to imagine a triangle without the property of having its three angles being equal to two right angles, it is nonsensical to think of a perfect being without the property of existence. It is necessary that a perfect being contain the property of existence.[16]

Pierre Gassendi argues in the Fifth Set of Objections that, although it makes sense to say that God is a supremely perfect being, it does not follow from this that there is anything in reality that

[14] See the First and Fifth Set of Objections.
[15] Recently, Alan Nelson and Lawrence Nolan have argued that the third meditation argument is actually based on the more acceptable causal principle that nothing comes from nothing, rather than the stronger containment principle used in my rendition of the argument. See "Proofs for the Existence of God," in *A Guide to Descartes' Meditations*, ed. by Gaukroger (London: Routledge, 2005).
[16] AT VII 66-68/CSM II 46-47.

answers to this description.[17] Gassendi argues that although it is true that a triangle necessarily has the property of having its three angles being equal to two right angles, this is only known by demonstration. Likewise, in order to know that God has the property of existence, it must be shown through demonstration.[18] Gassendi's claim is that Descartes merely asserts that existence is a perfection, and that, therefore, God exists.

The second objection t is one made famous by Leibniz. Leibniz notes that the *a priori* argument, as given by Descartes, only shows that if a being with all the perfections is possible, then such a being exits. However, Leibniz claims that Descartes has not shown that such a being is possible. How can we be certain that a being with all the perfections exists, especially given Descartes' claim that we cannot grasp the infinite nature of God?

Descartes anticipates this objection in the Replies to the First Set of Objections.[19] He writes, "It must be noted that possible existence is contained in the concept or idea of everything we clearly and distinctly understand."[20] While Descartes is famous for claiming that we cannot grasp the nature of an infinite being, he makes a distinction between grasping and understanding. Grasping is more robust than understanding. We, as finite beings, do not grasp God's nature, but we can have an understanding of God's perfections. This understanding is sufficient for having a clear and distinct idea of God as an infinitely perfect being. Thus, Descartes holds that anything that we can clearly and distinctly perceive is possible. Since Descartes holds that he clearly and

[17] This objection is similar to that Aquinas makes to Anselm's version of the argument, see *Summa Theologica* I.q2.a3. In addition, Caterus attempts to provide this objection in the First Set of Objections (AT VII 96-99/CSM II 70-2). However, Caterus confuses Aquinas' view and Anselm's view making the objection unclear.
[18] AT VII 325/CSM II 226.
[19] AT VII 116-177, 119/CSM II 83, 85.
[20] AT VII 116/CSM II 83.

distinctly perceives a being with all the perfections, it must be the case that such a being is possible. And since existence is a perfection, that being must really exist.[21]

John Locke (1632 – 1704)

Locke provides a cosmological proof for the existence of God in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Locke's argument has been widely criticized, both by his contemporaries and by historians. Lockean replies to some of these objections will be provided by using materials from the *Essay* and from "Deus," a short piece where Locke criticizes Descartes' ontological proof and provides a rationale for Locke's own methodology.[22]

In IV.x of the *Essay,* titled "Of our Knowledge of the Existence of God," Locke gives his cosmological argument. He writes that, with "thought and attention" and "the application of a regular deduction from some part of our intuitive knowledge," he can demonstrate the existence of God from the "undoubted knowledge we have of our own existence."[23] Locke starts from his awareness of his own thought, reasoning, and feelings, and concludes from this that he exists. This reasoning is, of course, similar to Descartes' famous Cogito: I think; I exist. Locke writes, "I think it is beyond Question, that *Man has a clear Perception of his own Being*; he knows certainly, that he exists, and that he is something…"

Locke then continues:

> In the next place, Man knows by an intuitive Certainty, that bare nothing can no more produce any real Being, than it can be equal to two right Angles. If a man knows not that Non-entity, or the Absence of all Being cannot be equal to two right Angles, it is impossible that he know any demonstration in Euclid. If

[21] Of course, Kant famously criticized the proof on the grounds that existence is not a predicate.
[22] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). "Deus" in *The Life and Letters of John Locke*, edited by Peter King (London: George Bell & Sons, York Street, Covent Garden, 1884), 306-316. All references to the *Essay* are given by book, chapter, and section with page references to this edition. "Deus" is cited by page number.
[23] *Essay* IV.x.1, 619.

> therefore we know there is some real Being, and that Non-entity cannot produce any real Being, it is an evident demonstration, that from Eternity there has been something; Since what was not from Eternity, had a Beginning; and what had a Beginning, must be produced by something else (Locke, Essay, IV.x.3).

The first part of Locke's cosmological argument might be rendered as follows:

1. I exist.
2. Therefore, there exists some real being.
3. Nothing, or Non-entity, cannot produce real being (*Ex Nihilo, Nihil fit*)[24]
4. Therefore, at all times from eternity, there must have existed something. (2, 3)

Then Locke continues:

> Next, it is evident, that what had its Being and Beginning from another, must also have all that which is in, and belongs to its Being from another too. All the Powers it has, must be owing to, and received from the same Source. This eternal Source of all being must also be the Source and Original of all Power; and so this eternal Being must also be the most powerful.[25]

The final two premises of the argument are as follows:

5. Whatever is caused to exist by another gets all its being and power from that cause.
6. Therefore, the eternal being is the cause of all real being and is also all powerful.

Locke has been accused of making three mistakes in his proof: (1) using 'Nothing' as the name of something, (2) making the fallacious logical move from "at every past time something existed" to "there is something which existed at every past time," and (3) making the fallacious move from there being one eternal thing that exits to there being one eternal thing that is the cause of everything else.[26]

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[24] Locke's causal principle, *Ex Nihilo, Nihil fit* (from nothing, nothing comes) is often seen as a corollary of every effect must have a cause.
[25] *Essay* IV.x.4, 620.
[26] Jonathan Bennett, "God and Matter in Locke: An Exposition of Essay 4.10." In *Early Modern Philosophy: Mind, Matter, and Metaphysics*, edited by Christia Mercer and Eileen O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162. For further contemporary criticisms of Locke's proof see Nicolas Wolterstorf, "Locke's Philosophy of Religion" in the *Cambridge Companion to Locke*, edited by Vere Chappell (Cambridge, 1994), 189, and Michael Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology & Ontology* (London: Routledge, 1991), 182.

Let us take each of these criticisms in order. The first criticism is that in claiming that nothing comes from nothing, Locke is not merely saying that nothing happens without a cause, but that it is logically impossible that something happen without a cause. However, so the objection goes, although it might be true that all actual events are caused, it does not seem contradictory that they might not have been.[27] So, Locke's claim that nothing can come from nothing is too strong. Moreover, it is claimed that Locke's mistake is the result of treating *nothing* as a substantive. However, there are two reasons for thinking that this is not Locke's intention. First, Locke is generally careful in the text to say "nothing, non-entity," which would seem to indicate that he is aware of the fact that "nothing" sounds as if it were the name of an entity and that he seeks to dispel this confusion. Second, Locke's acceptance of *Ex Nihilo, nihil fit* is not unqualified. In the cosmological argument, Locke is talking about a special type of existent, viz., things that *begin* to exist. Locke holds that for anything that begins to exist, there is a cause for that thing's beginning to exist. This still leaves room for something that always existed having no cause of its existence. An eternal being might exist uncaused. Nevertheless, according to Locke, our ideas concerning causation are such that for any effect we assume that there must have been a cause – even if we cannot discover this cause.[28] This is so because our notions of cause and effect are derived entirely from our ideas received from sensation and reflection. Locke writes, "For to have the Idea of Cause and Effect, it suffices to consider any simple Idea, or Substance, as beginning to exist, by the Operation of some other, without knowing the manner of that Operation."[29] As we can see from this passage, Locke's maxim is that *for every effect, which begins to exist, there is a cause*. Of course, the cause may not be

[27] Of course, Leibniz holds that it is *impossible* that something happen without a sufficient reason or cause.
[28] *Essay* II.xvii.20, 221.
[29] *Essay* II.xxvi.2, 325.

discernible or knowable to us. Nonetheless, Locke holds that this maxim is intuitively certain because it is a relation between our ideas.

The second criticism of Locke's argument is that the move from premise 4 to premise 6 is fallacious. Locke appears to reason that since nothing can come from nothing, and something exists, there must have existed something always. However, from this, it does not follow there is *one* thing which has existed always, as the conclusion at premise 6 seems to indicate. We can only validly conclude that, at all times, there is something such that it exists. We cannot say that there is one thing, or two things, or infinitely many things. We cannot validly conclude from the proposition that *something exists at every time*, that *there is some particular thing that exists at every time*, just as we cannot conclude from the proposition that *everybody loves somebody*, that *there exists some one person whom everyone loves*. Thus, it seems Locke's argument for the existence of an eternal being is invalid. Here, it is useful to turn to Locke's essay "Deus" for a better understanding of Locke's thinking on this point.

In "Deus," Locke tells us that the primary problem with Descartes' ontological argument is that the addition of the idea of necessary existence to our complex idea of God does not prove that there is any real being which answers to that description. Moreover, Locke points out that Descartes' move is equally available to the atheist materialist who wants to prove that mere "senseless matter" is the eternal cause of all that exists. Locke claims that *neither* the theist nor the atheist deny that something has been in existence from all eternity, rather the dispute is over the nature of the eternal thing – the theist claims that it is knowing, immaterial substance and the atheist claims that it is senseless, material matter. Locke's aim in his cosmological proof is to give reasons for thinking that the eternal thing is a knowing immaterial substance, or God, rather than senseless matter. Locke seems to have taken this context for granted in the *Essay*, assuming

that his interlocutors would agree that some one thing – either God or the universe of senseless material substances – has always existed. He writes,

> The fallacy of his pretended great proof of a Deity appears to me thus:—The question between the Theists and Atheists I take to be this, viz. not whether there has been nothing from eternity, but whether the eternal Being that made, and still keeps all things in that order, beauty, and method, in which we see them, be a knowing immaterial substance, or a senseless material substance; for that something, either senseless matter, or a knowing spirit, has been from eternity, I think nobody doubts.[30]

Thus, if we understand Locke's argument in the context of the dispute between the theist and the materialist atheist, we can see that the crux of the argument is not whether something exists from eternity or not, but what the nature of the existing thing is. Of course, the problem of the number of immaterial knowing things remains an issue, but it was not Locke's primary concern in the rendering of the argument. This leads us to the third criticism.

The third criticism is given by Leibniz in the *New Essays on Human Understanding*. Here, Leibniz notes that Locke's conclusion, that there is only *one* eternal being that is the cause of all other real being, is contentious. Leibniz writes,

> Furthermore, there are those who, if they do admit eternal beings (as the Epicureans do with their atoms), will not regard themselves as committed to granting that there is an eternal being which is the sole source of all the others. For though they would acknowledge that whatever confers existence also confers the thing's other qualities and powers, they will deny that a single thing gives existence to the others, and will even say that for each thing the joint action of several others is required. Thus, we shan't be brought by that argument, unaided, to one source of all powers.[31]

Leibniz is objecting to Locke's formulation of the causal principle. Leibniz claims that even if we accept that the eternal thing is immaterial and knowing, there is no argument given for the claim that all the powers in the world must come from one single source. It is perfectly

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[30] "Deus," 306.
[31] Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, edited and translated by Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), IV.x.6, 436.

consistent with Locke's principle, *ex nihilo, nihil fit*, that there be multiple causes of all the power and being that exists. However, he seems to move to a stronger causal principle according to which there must be a single cause for all the power and being in the world. Locke writes, "…And whatsoever is first of all Things, must necessarily contain in it, and actually have, at least, all the Perfections that can ever exist; nor can it ever give to another any perfection that it hath not, either actually in itself, or at least in a higher degree."[32] Locke's stronger causal principle, which might be stated as: *whatever begins to exist is caused to exist by another, and gets all its being and power from that same cause*, is not obviously derivable from the *ex nihilo* principle or the principle that everything which begins to exist must have a cause for its existence. However, Locke does not provide any supplemental argumentation for this stronger causal principle.

Benedict de Spinoza (1632 – 1677)

Spinoza's proofs for the existence of God are found in *Ethics*, Part I, Proposition 11. The definitions and axioms needed for understanding these proofs are provided in the preceding sections of the *Ethics*. Here, the proofs are given, along with some supporting arguments and criticisms.

Proposition 11 is titled "*God*, or *a substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses an eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists*."[33] Here, Spinoza provides four demonstrations for the existence of God. All the demonstrations are grounded in Spinoza's definitions and axioms concerning substances and causation, as will be shown in what follows. The first two demonstrations are variations on the same idea and depend on the causation of

[32] *Essay* IV.x.10, 624.
[33] References to the *Ethics* (E) will be by part (I-V), proposition (p), definition (d), scholium (s), and corollary (c).

substances. The second two demonstrations are *a posteriori* and *a priori* versions of a proof based on the concept of power. Before we look at the proofs, we must first understand Spinoza's view of substance and causation.

Spinoza defines substance as "what is in itself and is conceived though itself, that is, that whose concept does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed."[34] His account of substance resembles those given by the Scholastics and Descartes. However, Spinoza, unlike Descartes, is not a substance dualist. He believes that when we consider the identity conditions and causal relations of substances, we must conclude that there is – and can only be - one substance. This is so because substances must be distinguished from one another by either their attributes (or essences) or by their affections (or *modes* in Descartes' usage). Since affections are posterior to the existence of substances, they cannot be used to distinguish substances from each other. Therefore, substances must be distinguished by their attributes (or essences). However, this implies that for every substance, there must be a unique attribute or collection of attributes. Once Spinoza has argued that no two substances can share an attribute, he seeks to provide proofs for the existence of a substance with infinite attributes. In doing so, he secures his monism – there can be no substances other than God because he has all the possible attributes.

Spinoza argues that substances cannot be the cause of other substances; rather, every substance is self-caused. Here, is the crucial E 1p7 reasoning for the conclusion that a substance cannot be produced by anything external to itself: In nature there are only substances, attributes, and affections. Affections are posterior to substances, and so they cannot be the cause of substances. If attributes are used to differentiate substances, then there must be a unique attribute

[34] E 1d3

for every substance.[35] Substances cannot cause one another because no two substances have attributes in common (E 1p5)[36], and therefore they cannot affect each other (E 1a4 and E 1a5).[37] Thus, a substance cannot be caused by anything external to itself. Therefore, a substance must cause itself, that is, its essences must involve existence.

The first demonstration of an infinite substance is a version of the ontological argument. Spinoza's argument rests on two claims: (1) no two substances can share an attribute, and (2) existence is included in the essence of a substance. Spinoza reasons: If God, who is a substance consisting of an infinite number of attributes, does not exist, then his essence does not involve existence. But it pertains to the nature of substance to exist (I p7). If it is part of a substance's nature to exist, it must necessarily exist. Therefore, God, an infinite substance, necessarily exists.

The second proof is based on the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). Spinoza states the principle as follows: "for each thing there must be assigned a cause, or reason, both for its existence and for its nonexistence."[38] If it were possible that there be a reason or cause for God's nonexistence, then he would not exist. The only possible reasons for God's non-existence, would be either that God's nature is contradictory (like a square circle) or that some other substance prevents God's existence. God's nature is not contradictory. There can be no other substance preventing God's existence, because if another substance existed it would have a nature different from God's nature (otherwise the substance with God's nature would exist and so he would

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[35] For a defense of Spinoza's reasoning, see Daniel Whiting's "Spinoza, The No Shared Attribute Thesis, And The Principle Of Sufficient Reason," in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19 (3) 2011: 543-548.

[36] E 1p5: If there were two or more distinct substances, they would have to be distinguished either by their attributes or by their affections.

[37] E 1a4: the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of its cause. E 1a5: Things that have nothing in common with one another also cannot be understood through one another, or the concept of the one does not involve the concept of the other.

[38] E 1p7s2

exist). However, a substance with a nature different from God's nature would have nothing in common with God and could not cause his existence or non-existence (see previous argument). Therefore, there is nothing preventing God's existence. Therefore, God necessarily exists.

In response to the first two proofs, one might challenge the definition of God as a substance with infinite attributes. This objection seeks to show that the first proof is question begging, and that the term "infinite being" in the second proof should be understood as infinite *in kind* rather than absolutely infinite. According to Spinoza, each of the attributes of a substance must be conceived through itself (E 1p10), and the more being or reality a thing has the more attributes it will have (E 1p9). However, the claim that an infinite being must be absolutely infinite, that is, must have an infinite number of attributes rather than just a single attribute to an infinite degree (which he calls infinite *in kind*), is not convincing. It is true that given Spinoza's system, if a being with infinite attributes exists, then there is only one substance, but Spinoza has not shown that there must be such a substance. Moreover, it is consistent with his claims that an infinite number of attributes exist, but that each of the attributes belongs to separate substances. If this situation obtained, then there would be infinitely many separate substances, each of which is infinite in kind and exists through itself.

The last two proofs for the existence of God rely on the notion of power. It is important to note that Spinoza is not speaking here of the power of substances, but the power of being in general (given that he has already shown in E 1p8 that all substances are infinite). Spinoza calls the first version of the second proof "a posteriori," and claims that such a demonstration is more easily perceived than *a priori* proofs. The *a posteriori* proof based on the idea of power runs as follows: To be able not to exist is to lack power, and to be able to exist is to have power. Finite beings exist. If there were only finite beings in existence, then finite beings would have more

power than infinite beings. Finite beings do not have more power than infinite beings. Therefore, an absolutely infinite being necessarily exists.

Spinoza also gives what he calls an *a priori* version of this proof. The proof runs as follows: Being able to exist is a power. Therefore, the more reality a thing has, the more power it has to exist. An infinite being has in its nature an absolutely infinite power of existing. Therefore, an infinite being necessarily exists. Here, the argument seems to be that infinite power is one of the attributes of infinite being, and since being able to exist is a power, it follows that an infinite being exists.

Spinoza's proofs were seen as controversial in at least three respects. First, if Spinoza's argument are sound, then God is the only substance. All other beings, including human beings, are attributes or affections of God; human beings are not real entities in themselves. Second, Spinoza's arguments are sometimes criticized as having naturalized God. Spinoza often uses the phrase, *deus sive natura*, which translates as "God or nature," as if the two terms were interchangeable. Spinoza may be equating the will and intellect of God with the laws of nature, or he may be denying that God has any personal attributes at all. God is not the creator of the world, because all things that exist are part of God, who is the immanent cause of his own being. Finally, Spinoza's arguments are controversial because they entail necessitarianism. Since God is the necessarily existing substance and all things are part of that substance, all things that exist, exist necessarily.

Nicolas Malebranche (1638 – 1715)

Malebranche gives two related arguments for the existence of God. The first argument is a version of Descartes' ontological argument, which Malebranche claims is the simplest and best argument for the existence of God. In *The Search after Truth*, he gives a detailed account of

Descartes' argument and responds to some objections to it. Although his ontological argument is not unique, his conception of God is. In addition, Malebranche supplements the Cartesian argument for God's existence with a second argument based on "mere sight." Malebranche claims that this argument has its roots in Thomas Aquinas' notion that God's knowledge is really knowledge of his own being or essence, so that all things must somehow be *in* God. In what follows, Malebranche's claim that God is "being is general" will be discussed first, followed by a discussion of the argument from mere sight.

Malebranche's ontological argument begins with his statement of Descartes' Truth Rule. "Here is the first principle: one should attribute to a thing what one clearly conceives to be included in the idea that represents it."[39] Malebranche refers to the truth rule as "the general principle of all the sciences."[40] He then goes on to say that we clearly conceive that necessary existence is included in the idea of an infinitely perfect being. Therefore, we know that God, or an infinitely perfect being, exists.

What is interestingly different about Malebranche's ontological argument is that he takes God to be "being in general." Most theologians and philosophers, Descartes included, took God to be the being with the greatest reality or the most being. Malebranche's view is decidedly more radical and provides a response to problems with the ontological argument. One objection to Descartes' argument was that similar reasoning could be used to define just about anything into existence. Malebranche responds by claiming that the reasoning only applies to God because he is essentially different from all other beings. All other beings are particular beings, or as Malebranche puts it, "such beings," but God is being in general. He writes,

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[39] Malebranche, N. 1997b. *The Search after Truth*, trans. T. M. Lennon and P. J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) (original copyright: Ohio State University Press, 1980), 4:11. Hereafter cited as *Search*, Book, Part, and Chapter, or Elucidation.
[40] *Search*, 4:11

> But the idea of God or of being in general, of being without limit, of infinite being, is not a fiction of the mind. It is not a complex idea that includes some contradiction; there is nothing simpler, although it includes necessary existence; for it is evident that being (I do not say a *such being*) has its existence in itself, and that being cannot actually (or really) not be, since it is impossible and contradictory that true being be without existence. It could be that there were no bodies, because bodies are *such beings* that participate in being and are dependent upon it. But being without restriction is necessary; it is independent; it derives what it is from nothing but itself; everything that is comes from it. If there is anything, it is, since everything that is comes from it; but if there were nothing in particular, it would be, because it is in itself and because it cannot be clearly conceived as nonexistent, unless it is represented as a being in particular or as a *such being*, that is, unless it is considered as a completely different idea than its own. For those who do not see that God is [exists] usually do not consider being, but a *such being* and consequently a being that can be or not be.[41]

Necessary existence is contained within the concept of God because he is being in general. We cannot claim of any particular (*such*) being that it exists, but being in general cannot fail to exist. Whether or not there were any particular beings at all, it would still be true that the general notion of being would exist. Since God is being in general, he necessarily exists.

Malebranche supplements the ontological argument with the argument that all ideas exist in, and come to us from, God. He argues that in order for us to have certain knowledge ideas must be necessary and immutable. Finite beings cannot have direct access to such ideas from perception because perception only provides sensations of mutable particular finite things. Malebranche claims that when we ascertain knowledge it is by grasping clear and distinct ideas. Of course, we often believe false things, but we do not clearly and distinctly perceive false things. Malebranche writes,

> It is impossible to perceive a falsehood, a relation of equality, for example, between two and two, and five; for this or any like relation that does not exist can be believed, but certainly cannot be perceived because nothingness is not perceptible. Properly speaking, this is the first principle of all our knowledge… For the principle generally accepted by the Cartesians, that whatever is clearly conceived to be contained in the idea representing a thing can be asserted of that

[41] *Search*, 4:11

> thing, depends on it; and this principle is true only if we assume that ideas are immutable, necessary, and divine.

Perception, as opposed to belief, is always veridical. But these ideas must be grounded in something necessary and immutable. The notion that all ideas are contained in God and that it is only through God's affecting our minds that we can have the idea of anything at all, is the basis for the argument that our *mere sight* shows God's existence. Malebranche writes,

> It is certain, and everyone knows this from experience, that when we want to think about some particular thing, we first glance over all beings and then apply ourselves to the consideration of the object we wish to think about. Now, it is indubitable that we could desire to see a particular object only if we had already seen it, though in a general and confused fashion. As a result of this, given that we can desire to see all beings, now one, now another, it is certain that all beings are present to our mind; and it seems that all beings can be present to our mind only because God; i.e., He who includes all things in the simplicity of his being, is present to it.[42]

Here, Malebranche argues that in order to see, or perceive, things - both particular things and general things - we must have contact with something that can affect our minds or souls. Since only something "higher" than the mind can affect it, material objects cannot affect the mind. Only God can affect the mind and he knows all things - general and particular - since he includes all things eminently. Thus, God must exist as the source of all knowledge. Malebranche further notes that we could not have the idea of general or universal things by perception, for we only perceive particular things - not general things. "The mind would be incapable of representing universal ideas of genus, species, and so on, to itself had it not seen all beings contained in one."[43]

Malebranche's claim that God is being in general allows him to ground all ideas in a necessary and immutable nature. However, the view does have some serious theological

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[42] *Search* 3:2:6
[43] *Search*, 3:2:6

consequences. Most importantly, if God is being in general rather than a particular being, it seems that God is an abstract object. This, of course, is in direct conflict with the theological doctrine that God is a person.

Finally, although Malebranche claims that Aquinas held a view similar to his own, Aquinas did not think that God was being in general. Aquinas thought that the source of God's knowledge is his essence, that is, that God has ideas of all possible things contained in his essence. But this is so only because God knows his own will. According to Aquinas, God knows both what he wills and what he does not will. This is sufficient for giving him knowledge of all possible things, without resorting to the claim that God is being in general.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646 – 1716)

Leibniz has four arguments for the existence of God. He offers an "improved" version of the ontological argument that is meant to address his criticism of Descartes' version of the argument. He also presents a cosmological argument, an argument based on the existence of the eternal truths, and an argument based on pre-established harmony.

The Ontological Argument

Leibniz's criticisms of Descartes' ontological argument are found in a number of his works.[44] Leibniz argues that Descartes' proof only shows that if a being with all the perfections is possible, then he exists. However, Leibniz maintains that Descartes failed to show that a being with all the perfections is, in fact, possible. Here is a version of the criticism from "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and ideas."[45]

> An argument for the existence of God, celebrated among the Scholastics long ago and revived by Descartes, once led me to consider this point more distinctly. The argument

[44] See, for example, *Philosophical Papers and Essays*, 165f., 168, 211, 231, 292f, 386 and *New Essays on Human Understanding* 437f.
[45] *Philosophical Essays,* 23-7.

> goes: whatever follows from the idea or definition of anything can be predicated of that thing. Since the most perfect being includes all perfections, among which is existence, existence follows from the idea of God (or the idea of a most perfect being, or the idea of that than which nothing greater can be thought). Therefore existence can be predicated of God. But one must realize that from this argument we can conclude only that, if God is possible, then it follows that he exists. For we cannot safely use definitions for drawing conclusions unless we know first that they are real definitions, that is, that they include no contradictions, because we can draw contradictory conclusions from notions that include contradictions, which is absurd.[46]

Leibniz maintains that there are two ways of resolving the problem. One is to presume God's existence. This is not sufficient for proof of God's existence, but he tells us that it will suffice in practical matters. Leibniz writes,

> For there is always a presumption on the side of possibility, that is, everything is held to be possible unless it is proven to be impossible. There is, therefore, a presumption that God is possible, that is, that he exists, since in him existence follows from possibility. This is sufficient for practical matters in life, but it is not sufficient for demonstration.[47]

The second way is to demonstrate God's existence by showing that a being with all the perfections is possible. Leibniz thinks that he succeeds in doing this. First, he defines "perfection" as "every simple quality which is positive and absolute and which expresses whatever it expresses without any limits."[48] A simple quality, Leibniz tells us, is one that is "unanalyzable or indefinable, for otherwise either it will not be one simple quality but an aggregate of many … which is contrary to hypothesis, since it is assumed to be purely positive."[49] Next, he goes on to argue that no two such simple positive qualities can be contradictory. The argument is reminiscent of an argument in Plato's *Theaetetus* to the effect

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[46] *Philosophical Essays,* 25
[47] Letter to Elizabeth (1678?), *Philosophical Essays,* 235-40.
[48] *Philosophical Papers and Letters,* 167; *De Summa Rerum: Metaphysical Papers 1675-1676*, 101-103.
[49] *Philosophical Papers and Letters,* 167; *De Summa Rerum: Metaphysical Papers 1675-1676*, 101-103.

that, because simples are unanalyzable, they are also unknowable.[50] In the *Theaetetus*, this claim is taken as a problem for any combinatorial theory of language, but here, Leibniz uses it to show that no two simple properties can be incompatible. In his notes from a discussion with Spinoza, "That a Most Perfect Being Exists," Leibniz writes,

> For let us assume that there is a proposition of this kind: A and B are incompatible, understanding by A and B two simple forms or perfections of this kind. It makes no difference if more than two are assumed simultaneously. It is clear that this proposition cannot be demonstrated without an analysis of the terms A and B, either or both, for otherwise their nature would not enter into the reasoning, and incompatibility could be demonstrated equally well about any other things as about themselves. And by hypothesis they are unanalyzable. Therefore this proposition cannot be demonstrated about them. But it is certainly demonstrated about them if it were true, since this proposition is not true by itself. For all propositions which are necessarily true are either demonstrable or known *per se*. Therefore this proposition is not necessarily true, or it is not necessary that A and B should not be in the same subject. Therefore they can be in the same subject. And since this reasoning is the same for any other assumed qualities of this kind whatsoever, it follows that all perfections are compatible.
> Therefore there is, or can be conceived, a subject of all perfections or a most perfect being. Hence it is clear that this being exists, since existence is contained in the number of perfections.[51]

Here, Leibniz argues via reduction. Suppose that any two unanalyzable simples or perfections are incompatible. In order to demonstrate their incompatibility, it must be shown that they are contradictory in nature. But, in order to show two things to be contradictory in nature, we must be able to analyze their nature. However, by definition, the nature of simples or perfections is unanalyzable. Therefore, it cannot be demonstrated that any two unanalyzable perfections are incompatible. We cannot know *per se* that any two unanalyzable perfections are incompatible because we cannot know their terms. Therefore, it is not necessarily true that any two

[50] Plato, *Theaetetus*, translated by John McDowell (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1963), 94-109.
[51] *Philosophical Papers and Letters,* 167; *De Summa Rerum: Metaphysical Papers 1675-1676*, 101-103.

unanalyzable perfections are incompatible. Therefore, it is possible that any two unanalyzable perfections are compatible. Therefore, it is possible that a being with all the perfections exists.

Leibniz thought that this proof of the compossibility of the perfections was sufficient to render the ontological argument sound, for he has shown that a being with all the perfections is possible. However, it seems unlikely that the traditional perfections of God – e.g., omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and omniscience – are unanalyzable. In fact, a great deal of philosophical ink has been spent analyzing these concepts, and trying to avoid the apparent incompatibilities between them.

The Cosmological Argument

The clearest formulation of Leibniz's cosmological argument is given in his essay "On the Ultimate Origination of Things."[52] Leibniz begins the argument as follows:

> Beyond the world, that is, beyond the collection of finite things, there is some One Being who rules, not only as the soul is the ruler in me, or, better, as the self is the ruler in my body, but also in a much higher sense. For the One Being who rules the universe not only rules the world, but also fashions or creates it; he is above the world, and, so to speak, extramundane, and therefore he is the ultimate reason for things. For we cannot find in any of the individual things, or even in the entire collection and series of things, a sufficient reason for why they exist.[53]

Leibniz's argument makes use of the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR). He claims that since everything that exists must have a sufficient reason or cause for why it exists as it does and not some other way, we must be able to give a reason for the existence of the world. Given that the world is a collection of contingent things, the sufficient reason for the whole world cannot be in the collection. Leibniz tries to support this claim with the following reasoning:

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[52] Versions of the argument can also be found in *Monadology* §36-39; see *Philosophical Essays,* 217-8, and *Theodicy* §7, Huggard, 127-8.
[53] *Philosophical Essays*, 149.

> Let us suppose that a book on the elements of geometry has always existed, one copy always made from another. It is obvious that although we can explain a present copy of the book from the previous book from which it was copied, this will never lead us to a complete explanation, no matter how many books back we go, since we can always wonder why there have always been such books, why these books were written, and why they were written the way they were. What is true of these books is also true of the different states of the world, for the state which follows is, in a sense, copied from the preceding state, though in accordance with certain laws of change. And so, however far back we might go into previous states, we will never find in those states a complete explanation for why, indeed there is any world at all, and why it is the way that it is.[54]

This portion of Leibniz's argument can be stated formally as follows:

1. A sufficient reason for the existence of the world will tell us why it exists and why it is the way that it is.
2. For every state of the world, we can give a reason for why that state exists and why it is the way that it is, if we know the previous state of the world and the laws.
3. The world is the collection of all of its states.[55]
4. But there is no state of the world that can provide a sufficient reason for why *all* the states of the world exist and why they are the way that they are.
5. Therefore, no state of the world can be a sufficient reason for the existence of the world.

The most common objection to the Leibnizian cosmological argument is that the Principle of Sufficient Reason is false. The objector claims that there is no reason to believe that for everything that exists, there is a reason or cause for its existence. Contemporary commentators often look to physics, and in particular quantum mechanics, for exceptions to the rule. Since there is wide-spread disagreement concerning the principle and a robust literature which discusses it, it will not be discussed here.[56] Instead, let us consider Leibniz's claim that a sufficient reason cannot be had from the world itself. The most famous criticism of this claim comes from Bertrand Russell.[57] Russell argued that to demand an explanation for the entire

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[54] *Philosophical Essays,* 149.
[55] *Philosophical Essays,* 149.
[56] See the further readings for more on PSR.
[57] William Rowe discusses Russell's objection in his important article "Two Criticisms of the Cosmological Argument," in *The Monist*, vol. 54, no. 3 (1970). Note that Hume makes this argument in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Section IX.

world is to commit a fallacy. It is similar to saying, *every man has a mother, therefore; all of humanity must have a mother*. Since there is no entity "humanity" over and above all the actual human beings, there is nothing more to explain once one has explained the mother of every individual human being. However, Leibniz thinks that other worlds are possible. That is, he thought that there are infinitely many worlds that might have obtained. Given that existence might have been quite different from the way that it is, one might think it is fair to ask why it is the way that it is. Thus, when Leibniz asks why this collection of contingent beings exists, he is asking a question, the answer to which requires a comparison between the existing collection and some other possible collection. "Why this one, or these, rather than some other one, or those?"[58]

The Argument from the Eternal Truths

Leibniz's argument for the existence of God based on the eternal truths can be seen most easily in Sections 43 through 45 of the *Monadology*.[59] There, he writes,

> It is also true that God is not only the source of existences, but also that of essences insofar as they are real, that is, or the source of that which is real in possibility. This is because God's understanding is the realm of eternal truths or that of the ideas on which they depend; without him there would be nothing real in possibles, and not only would nothing exist, but also nothing would be possible.
> For if there is reality in essences or possibles, or indeed in eternal truths, this reality must be grounded in something existent and actual, and consequently, it must be grounded in the existence of the necessary being, in whom essence involves existence, that is, in whom possible being is sufficient for actual being.[60]

[58] Perhaps it will be objected here that premise (4) still does make a mistake because the world is all that there is, so there is nothing to compare it with. In other words, it cannot be that the question Leibniz is asking is "Why does this world exist rather than some other?" because there are no other worlds. However, Leibniz holds that this world is one of infinitely many possible worlds that could have been actualized. Thus, we can ask the question, "Why this world rather than some other world that could have existed instead?"
[59] Leibniz also refers his readers to sections 20, 184, 189, and 335 of the *Theodicy*.
[60] *Monadology* 43-44; see *Philosophical Essays,* 218.

Leibniz's commitment to the principle of sufficient reason comes through here as well. If the PSR is necessarily true, as it seems Leibniz thought, then every possibility must be grounded in an entity that could make it actual. Leibniz holds that the only thing that could be the cause of all essences and possibilities is a necessarily existing being who has the power to make any essence or possibility actual. He believes that the possible worlds and the ideas of the essences of things are contained in the understanding of God. Thus, it is God that is the ground for all essences and possibilities. It should be noted that Leibniz did not believe that the eternal truths were subject to God's will. Leibniz did not think that God controls what is eternally true, he merely understands what is so and could not be otherwise.

The Argument from Pre-Established Harmony

The argument from pre-established harmony begins with Leibniz's assertion that created substances cannot affect one another, and that these substances are continually produced by the power of God. Thus, Leibniz holds that God creates souls, or monads, in such a way that everything in them arises from their own nature. The monad is created, as he says, "with a perfect spontaneity as regards itself, and yet with a perfect conformity to things outside of it."[61] Thus, monads are completely independent of one another, yet they are in perfect correspondence with each other with respect to their perceptions of each other and the universe around them. The proof that is based on this thesis is that, were there no one source of the many substances that have no communication with one another, there would not be such a perfect and harmonious

[61] Leibniz, "New System of the Nature of Substances and their Communication, and of the Union which Exists between the Soul and the Body" reprinted in *G. W. Leibniz: Philosophical Texts*, edited by Woolhouse and Franks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 150. (NS §14)

agreement between the perceptions of beings. Thus, since we have harmonious perceptions, we can know that God exists.

George Berkeley (1685-1753)

The argument for the existence of God in the *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* is found in §§25 - 33 and in §§145 - 7 (with elaborations and replies to objections continuing to §156), and in the second dialogue of the *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*. The arguments in both texts are similar. The argument discussed here is from the *Principles*.

In the first 33 sections of the *Principles,* Berkeley formulates an argument for idealism. After showing that no corporeal or material entities exist, he elucidates the cause of our ideas. We know from experience that we have ideas, and if there are no material things outside us causing them, then they must have a different source. The argument for the existence of God is a causal argument that seeks to show that all of our ideas of sense come from God. First, Berkeley argues that all our ideas are inactive, or incapable of causing other ideas. He writes,

> All our ideas, sensations, or the things which we perceive, by whatsoever names they may be distinguished, are visibly inactive, there is nothing of power or agency included in them. So that one idea or object of thought cannot produce, or make any alteration in another. …For since they [ideas] and every part of them exist only in the mind, it follows that there is nothing in them but what is perceived. But whoever shall attend to his ideas, whether of sense or reflexion, will not perceive in them any power or activity; there is therefore no such thing contained in them.[62]

Here, we see that our ideas cannot be the cause of themselves or of other ideas. Berkeley next divides our ideas into two types: ideas of imagination - which are subject to the will of the mind that has them - and ideas of sense - which are not subject to the will of the mind that has them.

[62] *Principles*, §25.

The cause of our ideas of imagination is evident – it is ourself. However, the cause of our ideas of sense is not evident. He writes,

> The ideas of sense are more strong, lively, and distinct than those of the imagination; they have likewise a steadiness, order, and coherence, and are not excited at random, as those which are the effects of human wills often are, but in a regular train or series, the admirable connexion whereof sufficiently testifies the wisdom and benevolence of its Author.[63]

Berkeley rules out the possibility of our ideas of sense being caused by other men, and argues that the harmony of our ideas indicates that there is one powerful source. He writes,

> Yet it is evident to every one, that those things which are called the works of Nature, that is, the far greater part of the ideas or sensations perceived by us, are not produced by, or dependent on the wills of men. There is therefore some other spirit that causes them, since it is repugnant that they should subsist by themselves. …but if we attentively consider the constant regularity, order and concatenation of natural things, the surprising magnificence, beauty, and perfection of the larger, and the exquisite contrivance of the smaller parts of the creation, together with the exact harmony and correspondence of the whole, but above all, the never enough admired laws of pain and pleasure, and the instincts or natural inclinations, appetites, and passions of animals; I say if we consider all these things, and at the same time attend to the meaning and import of the attributes, one, eternal, infinitely wise, good, and perfect, we shall clearly perceive that they belong to the aforesaid spirit, *who works all in all*, and *by whom all things consist*.[64]

The argument is as follows: Our ideas of sense might be caused by us, by other ideas, by other human minds, or by non-human minds. Berkeley then proceeds to eliminate ourselves, our ideas, and human minds as possible causes for the aforementioned reasons and concludes that our ideas of sense must be caused by non-human minds. He then claims that since our sensations are regular, orderly, and coherent, they must be caused by something powerful, wise, and good. Thus, our ideas of sense are caused by a powerful, wise, and good non-human mind, which is God.

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[63] *Principles*, §30.
[64] *Principles*, §146. The italicized portions are found in the *Bible* at I Cor. 12: 6 and Col. I: 17 respectively.

There is not sufficient space here to discuss Berkeley's arguments for idealism here, so let us pass over that rather hefty assumption. We can see that Berkeley still has a problem with the inference from our sensations as regular, orderly, and coherent to the claim that they are caused by a powerful, wise, and good being. Berkeley accepts the causal principle that a cause cannot transmit anything it does not have to an effect. So he may infer that the cause of our ideas of sense is powerful, wise, and good enough to produce our orderly and coherent ideas. However, it does not follow from this that there must be a *singular* cause for all our ideas of sense.[65] It is perfectly consistent with the causal principle mentioned above that there be a multitude of causes that work together to produce our orderly and coherent ideas of sensation.

"Minor Figures"

In what follows, I will briefly discuss interesting arguments made by philosophers who are not traditionally considered canonical. I include them because they are interesting in their own right, and because I hope that their inclusion might spur further interest in their views.

Pierre Gassendi (1592 – 1655)

Pierre Gassendi gives a design argument in the *Syntagma*. Like all design arguments, Gassendi's argument is probabilistic. That is, it is not a valid deductive argument, but resembles an inference to the best explanation. Gassendi begins by showing that we receive through the senses a sign that may lead us via reasoning to truths that cannot be known by sense perception. He writes,

> Since it is well known that we perceive some things through the mind and some through the senses, and that all knowledge which we have in the mind had its

[65] Berkeley does not give the causal principle explicitly in the *Principles*. However, it is stated explicitly in the *Second Dialogue*. He writes, "Yes, it is infinitely more extravagant to say--a thing which is inert operates on the mind, and which is unperceiving is the cause of our perceptions, without any regard either to consistency, or the old known axiom, *nothing can give to another that which it hath not itself*."

> beginning in the senses (even Plato, when he contends that knowledge is nothing more than recollection, teaches that it is aroused by things perceived through the senses), therefore a certain sensible sign must come before the mind by which it is led to the knowledge of the thing lying hidden unperceived by the senses.[66]

Next, Gassendi argues that we can (through this method) know of things hidden to the senses, such as the pores of the skin, the legs of mites, and the soul of man. Gassendi argues that the latter case is as secure as the former cases because it was only with the development of the microscope that it was possible to confirm such truths as that the skin contains pores and that mites have legs. He writes,

> But really, before they appeared to us, were they less true than they are now, however much less known they may have been? And were they not on the same footing as many things which are known now by reason alone, and I do not mean those that are defined as hidden only temporarily, to which some empirical sign is ascribed? Then why aren't so many of these things considered true with equal authority though they are perceived by the mind alone and can no more appear to the senses than those other truths could in the past?[67]

And so by similar reasoning we can know from the sign of the order, harmony, and grandeur of the universe that God exists. He concludes,

> For when among other questions we hear it asked if God is or exists in the universe, that is a truth of existence which it would be a great service to establish firmly even if it is not proven at the same time what he is or what his nature is. Although God is such that he can no more come under the perusal of the senses than the soul can, still we infer that the soul exists in the body from the actions that occur before the senses and are so peculiarly appropriate to a soul that if one were not present, they would not be either. In the same way we deduce that God exists in the universe from his effects perceived by the senses, which could not be produced by anything but God and which therefore would not be observed unless God were present in the world, such as the great order of the universe, its great beauty, its grandeur, its harmony, which are so great that they can only result from a sovereignly wise, good, powerful, and inexhaustible cause.[68]

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[66] Pierre Gassendi, "The Syntagma", in *The Selected Works of Pierre Gassendi*, edited and translated by Craig Bush (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1972), 333. (*Syntagma*, Book II, Chap. 5)
[67] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 335.
[68] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 336.

Gassendi is well aware of the leading objection to the design argument, viz., that it does not prove the existence of the Christian God as conceived by philosophers. In other words, the argument does not conclude with the claim that a necessary, omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient God exists. Rather, his argument only seeks to show that the world is created by a wise and powerful ruler or designer. However, Gassendi claims that even if we cannot know, because of our limited means of attaining knowledge, what God is like, we can be as certain of his existence as we can of any truth we gain knowledge of by means of the senses and reason.

> …In the same way we do not know from those works, so great and so perfect, which are some sort of sign, just what God looks like or what his true nature is; but we understand with the greatest certainty that he is present in the universe, for the lines that he has traced in the universe, so to speak, are such that they can come only from an incomparable artisan.[69]

Benjamin Whichcote (1609 – 1683)

Whichcote, a Cambridge Platonist, provides a causal argument for the existence of God. In "The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion," he argues that there are many effects that we observe in the world which are not of our making and are beyond our understanding. These effects must have a cause, and the cause must be such that it is able to produce the effects that we see. Since these effects include intelligent beings, we can know that the cause is some higher intelligent being. He writes,

> There are *Effects* in the World natural; of Inanimates, of Vegetables, and Sensitives; and in the World moral, of spiritual Substances, and intelligent Agents, that shew there is a God. For they do far transcend Mind and Understanding in Man: Therefore they must be the Product of some higher Being. And if we bring a Man to acknowledge a Being that is abler and wiser than himself, he acknowledges *Deity*.[70]

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[69] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 337.
[70] Benjamin Whichcote, "The Use of Reason in Matters of Religion," in *The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 54.

It is in reasoning about the nature of the world - from effects to cause - that we can learn of God's existence. Whichcote argues that the nature of the stars, moon, and planets transcends our reason, and we are led to the conclusion that there must be an intelligence greater than our own that is responsible for these effects.

Henry More (1614 – 1687)

In More's "An Antidote to Atheism," he presents several arguments for the existence of God. In Section VIII, he provides a version of Descartes' ontological argument and addresses some leading objections. In Section IX, he argues that our innate idea of God is a sign that God exists, and in Section X, he provides a moral argument for God's existence. Here I present the moral argument.

More's basic argument is simple: human beings share a natural conscience and this is evidence of God's existence. By 'natural conscience,' More means a propensity to feel fear and remorse for wrongdoing (even when the acts are not punishable by men), and a hope or expectation of being successful and prosperous for doing what is good.[71] He claims all human beings share this natural conscience. From the fact that there is natural conscience, More concludes that there must be a "Superintendent Principle" which ensures that good will happen to those who deserve it - either in this world, or in a world to come. He writes,

> It is also very naturall for a man that follows honestly the dictates of his own Conscience, to be full of good hopes, and much at ease, and secure that all things at home and abroad will goe successfully with him, though his actions or sincere motions of his Mind act nothing upon Nature or the course of the world to change them any way: wherefore it implyes that there is a Superintendent Principle over Nature, and the materiall frame of the world, that lookes to it so that nothing shall come to passe, but what is consistent with the good and welfare of honest and conscientious Men. And if it does not happen to them according to their

[71] Henry More, "An Antidote Against Atheism," in *The Cambridge Platonists*, edited by C. A. Patrides (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 235.

> expectations in this world, it does naturally bring in them a belief of a world to come.[72]

The argument is based on the claim that neither universal remorse for wrongdoing nor hope of reward for right actions can exist without a universal law and enforcer of that law. The best explanation for our moral or "natural" conscience then, is that God has instilled in us a sense of the moral laws, and an expectation of the punishment and rewards that will follow on our disobeying or obeying these laws, respectively.

Moore's argument is open to the criticism that, even if we grant that all humans do have a sort of moral conscience, there may be other explanations of its development, such as evolutionary processes or acculturation.

Ralph Cudworth (1617 – 1688)

Cudworth's *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* is an extended argument for the existence of God. This long book contains two general strands of argumentation. One is the attempt to undermine atheistic arguments against God's existence; the other is an attempt to show that throughout history, all men, including the so-called pagans, have believed in the existence of God. Since it is beyond the scope of this article, or any article, to discuss all of Cudworth's arguments, we shall focus on two.

The first argument is a reply to what Cudworth calls the "First Atheistic Argument." Here, Cudworth attempts to show that we can know God through the nature of knowledge and intellection. According to Cudworth, we can have knowledge of things other than particulars. He writes,

> Wherefore, besides the phantasms of singular bodies or of sensible things existing without us (which are not mere passions neither), it is plain that our human mind hath other cogitations or conceptions in it; namely the ideas of the intelligible

[72] Ibid., 236.

> natures and essences of things which are universal, and by and under which it understands singulars.[73]

He supports the claim that we must have knowledge of universals with two examples. First, we understand abstract, universal notions which have no singular, perceptible units or instances, such as life, senses, reason, and knowledge. Second, we have ideas of properties that can never exist in reality, such as being a perfectly straight line or being a perfect circle. He writes, "Notwithstanding which, they are not absolute non-entities, since we can demonstrate things concerning them, and though they never were nor will be, yet are they possible to exist, since nothing can be conceived but it either is or else is possible to be."[74] If conceivability is our guide to possibility, then it seems that these entities are possible entities. Cudworth continues:

> But when from our conceptions, we conclude of some things, that though they are not, yet they are possible to be (since nothing that is not can be possible to be, unless there be something actually in being which hath sufficient power to produce it) we do implicitly suppose the existence of God or omnipotent Being thereby, which can make whatsoever is conceivable, though it yet be not, to exist; and therefore material triangles, circles, spheres, cubes, mathematically exact.[75]

Thus, Cudworth concludes that there must be an omnipotent being from our knowledge of the possibility of unactualized universals. His explanation of the origin and ground of our universal knowledge and understanding is that God, in considering his own power, eternally and immutably understands the extent of that power, and thus, of all possibility.[76]

The second argument we will consider is Cudworth's version of the "prime mover" argument. The argument has its roots in Aristotle, is repeated by Aquinas, and eventually evolves into versions of the cosmological argument that seek the first cause of the world. In

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[73] Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London: Richard Royton, 1678), reprint (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1964), 731. (*True Intellectual System*, Book I, Chapter IV)
[74] Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System*, 732.
[75] Cudworth, The True Intellectual System, 732.
[76] Cf. Aquinas.

Book I, Chapter V of the *Intellectual System*, Cudworth considers the atheistic claim that there is no non-material unmoved first cause of motion or action in the world because all motion is local motion and all things are moved by some other preceding thing. Thus, the atheist claims, the material world is, and has been always, in motion. Against this claim, Cudworth writes,

> Moreover it is certain from hence also, that there is another species of action, distinct form local motion, and such as is … self-activity. For since the local motion of body is efficiently…not caused by the substance itself moving, but by something else acting upon it, that action by which local motion is first caused, cannot be it self local motion, but must be …self-activity, that which is not a passion from any other agent, but springs from the immediate agent it self; which species of action is called *cogitation*.[77]

Here, Cudworth argues that we must have resort to a first cause of motion that is not caused by some other thing. Cudworth concludes that the first cause of all motion in the world is cogitation or thinking being, an incorporeal and thinking substance. However, Cudworth's claim that local motion must be efficiently caused by another - and so cannot be the first and only cause of all motion in the world - is undermined by the possibility of an infinite chain of local motions.

Isaac Newton (1642-1727)

Isaac Newton puts forth a design argument for the existence of God in the General Scholium of *The Principia* and in query 31 of the *Opticks*. In both places the argument is fairly brief, and is based on the claim that the universe, although maintained in its current state by general laws of nature, could not have been originally formed by these general laws. Newton thought that in order for the universe to manifest the order and arrangement that it does, it must have not only a designer, but a ruler. In the General Scholium he writes, "this most elegant

[77] Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System*, 844.

system of the sun, planets, and comets could not have arisen without the design and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being."[78]

Newton explains that although the stars and planets can maintain their orbits by means of the law of gravity, they could not have obtained their original positions by gravity. That the stars and planets are so fortuitously arranged and that the other galaxies which we can observe are at such a distance that they do not collapse into one another can only be explained by reference to the purposeful actions of an intelligent designer. He writes,

> And if the fixed stars are the centers of similar systems, they will all be constructed according to a similar design and subject to the dominion of *One*, especially since the light of the fixed stars is of the same nature as the light of the sun, and all the systems send light into all the others. And so that the systems of the fixed stars will not fall upon one another as a result of their gravity, he has placed them at immense distances from one another.[79]

He expounds a similar argument in query 31 of the *Opticks*.

> Now by the help of these principles, all material things seem to have been composed of the hard and solid particles above mentioned, variously associated in the first creation by the counsel of an intelligent agent. For it became him who created them to set them in order. And if he did so, it's unphilosophical to seek for any other origin of the world, or to pretend that it might arise out of a chaos by the mere laws of nature; though being once formed, it may continue by those laws for many ages.[80]

In addition to the appeal to design that we find in the General Scholium query 31, Newton appeals to the symmetry of bodies, and the origin of the sense organs, brains, and internal organs of animals as evidence of intelligent design.

> Such a wonderful uniformity in the planetary system must be allowed the effect of choice. And so must the uniformity in the bodies of animals… Also the first contrivance of those very artifical parts of animals, the eyes, ears, brain, muscles,

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[78] Isaac Newton, "The Principia," in *Newton: Philosophical Writings*, edited by Andrew Janiak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 90.
[79] *Principia*, 90.
[80] Isaac Newton, "Queries to the Opticks" in *Newton: Philosophical Writings*, edited by Andrew Janiak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 138.

> heart, lungs, midriff, glands, larynx, hands, wings, swimming bladders, natural spectacles and other organs of sense and motion; and the instinct of brutes and insects, can be the effect of nothing else than the wisdom and skill of a powerful ever-living agent, who being in all places, is more able by his will to move the bodies within his boundless uniform sensorium, and thereby to form and reform the parts of the universe, than we are by our will to move the parts of our own bodies.[81]

Newton was criticized for calling space, "God's sensorium," and he went to great lengths to explain that space is not a part of God, nor is God identical with space. Immediately after presenting the design argument n *The Principia*, Newton goes on to explain some of God's attributes, as well as the relation between God and absolute space.

Another criticism that Newton faced was based on the continuation of the passage cited above (*Opticks*, query 31). Newton writes,

> For while comets move in very eccentric orbits in all manner of positions, blind fate could never make all the planets move one and the same way in orbits concentric, some inconsiderable irregularities excepted, which may have risen from the mutual actions of comets and planets upon one another, and which will be apt to increase, till this system wants a reformation.[82]

Here, Newton seems to say that the universe is an imperfect machine that will eventually need repair or modification. In addition to implying that God did not adequately design the universe, it also seems to imply that God simply designed or created the universe and then left it to run according to general laws inadequate for its conservation.

John Norris (1657 – 1711)

Norris provides an argument for the existence of God from the "steady and immutable nature of truth." He begins by dividing truth into two categories: the truth of the object or thing, and the truth of the subject or understanding. His argument is based on the truth of the object, which is also divided into two sorts. First, there is simple truth. Simple truth, he writes, is

[81] Query 31, 138.
[82] Query 31, 138.

"transcendental truth, which is convertible with *Ens* [Being] and concerns all being whereby everything is really what it is."[83] Second, there is complex truth. Complex truth involves "certain relations and habitudes of things one towards another."[84] Truth, according to Norris is, "the composition or division of ideas according to their respective habitudes and relations." Norris gives examples of the relations between things to show that these relations are immutable and steady. He cites the logical proposition that *a cause must precede its effect*, the physical proposition that *all local motion is successive*, the metaphysical proposition that *nothing both is and is not at the same time and place*, and mathematical propositions such as that *all right angles are equal*.[85] These propositions are not made true by human will or intellect, and would be true even if no human existed. Thus, he concludes they are immutable and steady truths. In addition, according to Norris, these truths must be based on the simple essences of things. The mathematical truth that *if two circles intersect, they do not share the same center* would not hold if there were no simple essence of circles or centers. From this he concludes that simple essences are eternal and immutable.

He then argues that simple essences are eternal and immutable either in nature or in ideas of the understanding. Since it is obvious that no thing in nature is eternal and immutable, he concludes that it is the idea of simple essences which must be eternal and immutable. But being ideas, these simple essences must exist in a mind. Therefore, he concludes that eternal and

[83] John Norris, "A Metaphysical Essay, towards the demonstration of a God, from the steady and immutable nature of Truth," in *A Collection of Miscellanies: Consisting of Poems, Essays, Discourses and Letters, Occasionally Written* (London: W. Bowyer for S. Manship, 1717), 144.
[84] Norris, 144.
[85] Norris, 146.

immutable simple essences exist in "an eternal mind or understanding, omniscient, immutable and endowed with all possible perfections, which we call God."[86]

Damaris Cudworth Masham (1659-1708)

Damaris Masham's proof for the existence of God is a combination of the cosmological and design arguments.[87] It bears a strong resemblance to Cudworth's and Locke's arguments, but unlike them, Masham clearly states that her argument contains non-deductive elements. Masham introduces her demonstration of God's existence by offering some methodological remarks. She, like Cudworth (her father) and Locke, will use the knowledge gained immediately from ideas of sensation and reflection to support the existence of a first cause of the universe.[88] She writes,

> To see what light we receive from Nature to direct our Actions, and how far we are Naturally able to obey that Light; Men must be consider'd purely as in the state of Nature, viz. as having no extrinsick Law to direct them, but indu'd only with a faculty of comparing their distant Ideas by intermediate Ones, and Thence of deducing, or inferring one thing from another; whereby our Knowledge immediately received from Sense, or Reflection, is inlarg'd to a view of Truths remote, or future, in an Application of which Faculty of the mind to a consideration of our own Existence and Nature, together with the beauty and order of the Universe, so far as it falls under our view, we may come to the knowledge of a First Cause; and that this must be an Intelligent Being, Wise and Powerful, beyond what we are able to conceive.[89]

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[86] Norris, 148.

[87] For a more detailed discussion of Masham's arguments see the author's "Early Modern Women on the Cosmological Argument: A Case Study in Feminist History of Philosophy" in *Feminist History of Philosophy: The Recovery and Evaluation of Women's Philosophical Thought*, edited by Eileen O'Neill and Marcy Lascano (forthcoming Springer).

[88] Masham accepts the Lockean view of ideas and the claim that all our ideas are grounded in sensory or perceptual experience. She also accepts the empiricist view that all of our most important knowledge comes from inductive reasoning, especially inference to the best explanation.

[89] Damaris Masham, *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life* (London: A. and J. Churchil, 1705), 29-30.

First, by means of reflection, we can consider our own existence and nature. From such refection, we can infer that the cause of our existence is intelligent. Second, we can consider our ideas from sensation concerning the order and beauty of the universe. From this, we can infer that the first cause of the universe is wise and powerful. The wisdom of the first cause is manifest in the orderly nature of the universe, and the power of the first cause is manifest in the production of the universe out of nothing. She continues:

> And as we delight in our selves, and receive pleasure from the objects which surround us, sufficient to indear to us the possession and injoyment of Life, we cannot from thence but infer, that this Wise and Powerful Being is also most Good, since he has made us out of nothing to give us a Being wherein we find such Happiness, as makes us very unwilling to part therewith.[90]

Since we have been provided with those faculties and external objects which are necessary for our pleasure and happiness, we can infer that the first cause of the universe is good. Finally, she argues that the attributes which are manifest when we contemplate the universe – intelligence, wisdom, power, and goodness – must inhere in a substance. The substance that contains these attributes is the first cause, i.e., God. She writes:

> And thus, by a consideration of the Attributes of God, visible in the Works of the Creation, we come to a knowledge of his Existence, who is an Invisible Being: For since Power, Wisdom, and Goodnesss, which we manifestly discern in the production and conservation of our selves, and the Universe, could not subsist independently of some substance for them to inhere in, we are assur'd that there is a substance where unto they do belong, or of which they are the Attributes.[91]

Much of this argument is non-deductive in nature, which is in keeping with Masham's empiricist methodology. We can only attain knowledge (whether probabilistic or demonstrative) by means of reasoning from ideas gathered from reflection and sensation.

[90] Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, 29-30.
[91] Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, 29-30.

However, Masham's argument does not seem to guarantee the unity of God. Her inference that the attributes that are found in the world must inhere in *one* being rather than many is not substantiated. It is consistent with all that she writes that there be several different beings, each of whom manifests only one of the attributes, and who together cause the existence of all other things.

Mary Astell (1666–1731)

Mary Astell's argument for the existence of God combines elements of the ontological and cosmological arguments.[92] She proceeds by first acknowledging that we have an idea of a perfect being, where this idea includes the attributes of wisdom, justice, holiness, omnipresence, and omnipotence. This idea of God also includes the idea of self-existence: such a being must be self-existent, because if it were caused, then there would be something greater – a being that causes itself and which is capable of giving God all the aforementioned perfections. However, no cause is possible for God, since he is a perfect being (there is no greater being). She then argues that a perfect being must exist in order to create all the perfections that are exhibited in the world; otherwise, some perfections would have no cause, which she holds is impossible.

Astell writes:

> And when I think of God, I can't possibly think of him to be any other than the most perfect being; a being infinite in all perfections. We need not be told wherein perfection consists, for let us be ever so skeptical, we must needs acknowledge that wisdom and goodness, justice and holiness, are perfections, and indeed the greatest perfections. So that an intelligent nature defective in these can't be perfect, but destitute of them must needs be miserable. Knowledge and power without them would not be beauties but blemishes; nor can a being be

[92] For a detailed discussion of Astell's argument, see the author's "Mary Astell on the Existence and Nature of God," in *Feminist Interpretations of Mary Astell*, edited by Penelope Weiss and Alice Sowaal (forthcoming Pennsylvania State University Press).

> infinitely wise and good, just and holy, unless he be also omnipresent and omnipotent.[93]

Here, Astell answers the objection that we cannot have the idea of a perfect being because we cannot, as limited and imperfect beings, fully understand what constitutes perfection. In her view, we do not need to know precisely what would constitute perfection, so long as we can establish that a perfect being must have certain attributes. These attributes are those such that any being who lacked them would be miserable. We can verify by observation which attributes make for miserable creatures, and so we can presumably extrapolate from this, and our experience of what makes a being well-off, to determine which attributes are good-making. These are the attributes that can be perfections.

As already mentioned, Astell goes on to make the case that a being with all the perfections must be self-existent. She writes,

> For if God derived his being from any but himself, there must be something greater and more perfect than God, which is absurd since God is by supposition the most perfect being and consequently self-existing. Because there can be no absolute and infinite perfection but where there is self-existence; from whence should it be derived? And self-existence is such a perfection as necessarily includes all other perfections. That there is a self-existing being is evident to the meanest understanding, for without it there could have been no men, no world, no being at all. Since that which once was not, could never have made itself; nor can any being communicate that to another which it has not itself. Therefore the self-existing being must contain all other perfections; therefore, it must be an intelligent being, and therefore, it must be God.[94]

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[93] Mary Astell, *The Christian Religion, As Profess'd by a Daughter Of The Church of England. In a Letter to the Right Honourable, T.L.CI.(*London: for R. Wilkin, 1705; 1717), reissued as *The Christian Religion, As Profeess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England Containing Proper Directions for the due Behaviour of Women in every Station of Life. With a few cursory Remarks on Archbishop Tillotson's Doctrine of the Satisfaction of Christ, &c* (London: for W. Parker, 1730), 5.

[94] Mary Astell, *The Christian Religion, As Profess'd by a Daughter Of The Church of England. In a Letter to the Right Honourable, T.L.CI.(*London: for R. Wilkin, 1705; 1717), reissued as *The Christian Religion, As Profeess'd by a Daughter of the Church of England Containing Proper Directions for the due Behaviour of Women in every Station of Life. With a few cursory*

Since Astell's argument is a version of the ontological argument, it inherits many of the difficulties that face other versions of this argument. However, she makes an interesting addition to the argument when she claims that if there were no self-existent being with all the perfections we see exhibited in the world – wisdom, goodness, justice, etc. – then these perfections would have had to come from nothing. Here she commits herself to the causal principle that no thing can exist without a cause (*ex nihilo, nihil fit*), and its corollary that no effect can have something that was not in its cause.

Samuel Clarke (1675-1729)

Samuel Clarke offers an extremely detailed and tightly argued version of the cosmological argument in his *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*.[95] The first two sections of this work concern the cosmological argument, while the rest of the work is dedicated to demonstrating the attributes of God. Like all cosmological arguments, Clarke's begins with an empirical fact that something now exists. He writes at the beginning of Section I,

> For, since something now is, it is evident that something always was, otherwise the things that now are must have been produced out of nothing, absolutely and without a cause, which is a plain contradiction in terms. For, to say a thing is produced and yet that there is no cause at all for that production, is to say that something is effected when it is effected by nothing, that is, at the same time when it is not effected at all.[96]

Clarke's argument, like Leibniz's, utilizes the principle of sufficient reason. He states the principle as follows:

> Whatever exists has a cause, a reason, a ground of its existence, a foundation on which its existence relies, a ground or reason why it does exist rather than not

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Remarks on Archbishop Tillotson's Doctrine of the Satisfaction of Christ, &c (London: for W. Parker, 1730), 7-9.

[95] Samuel Clarke, *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God and Other Writings*, edited by Ezio Vailati (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[96] *A Demonstration*, 8.

> exist, either in the necessity of its own nature (and then it must have been of itself eternal), or in the will of some other being (and then that other being must, at lest in the order of nature and causality, have existed before it).[97]

He continues in Section II to argue that if there has always been something from eternity, then either there is an infinite chain of finite beings or there is one necessary being.

> For, since something must needs have been from eternity, as has been already proved and is granted on all hands, either there has always exited some one unchangeable and independent being from which all other beings that are or ever were in the universe have received their original, or else there has been an infinite succession of changeable and dependent beings produced from one another in an endless progression without any original cause at all.[98]

Clarke then argues that an infinite chain of changeable and dependent beings can have no cause or reason for its existence. He says that the chain of dependent beings can have no cause or reason outside the chain; for by hypothesis, the chain includes all the dependent beings that exist. In addition, the chain can have no reason inside the chain because no being in the chain is self-existent or necessary. An infinite chain of changeable and dependent beings can have no cause or reason for its existence in itself, it must have its cause or reason in the will of some other being. Therefore, we can conclude that there has been from eternity one unchangeable and independent being. Clarke goes on to argue that the unchangeable and independent being is self-existent, infinite in power, intelligent, and has freedom of will and choice. Since Clarke's argument utilizes the principle of sufficient reason, it is subject to the objection that this principle is false.

[97] *A Demonstration*, 8.
[98] *A Demonstration*, 10.

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Further Reading:

In addition to the primary sources listed in the bibliography, the reader is directed to the following sources for more information about the arguments discussed in this article.

Robert Merrihew Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Adams' book is regarded as the most comprehensive and penetrating examination of Leibniz's philosophy. Chapter Five is dedicated to the ontological argument. Here, Adams looks at Leibniz's criticisms of Descartes and Leibniz's various attempts at completing the proof. Chapter Seven examines the argument for the existence of God from the eternal truths.

Jean-Marie Beyssade, "The Idea of God and the Proofs of His Existence" in *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, edited and translated by John Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 174-199. The author explicates the complicated relationship between the role that the idea of God plays in the proofs for the existence of God and the how we come to have the idea of God.

Jonathan Bennett, "God and Matter in Locke: An Exposition of Essay 4.10" in *Early Modern Philosophy: Mind, Matter, and Metaphysics*, edited by Christia Mercer and Eileen O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 161-182. Bennett provides detailed criticisms of Locke's cosmological argument and discusses Locke's suggestion that matter might think.

Alan Donagan, "Spinoza's Theology" in The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza, edited by Don Garrett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 343-382. A comprehensive overview of Spinoza's natural theology and his views on revelation, imagination, and universal religious faith.

Douglas M. Jesseph, "Berkeley, God, and Explanation" in *Early Modern Philosophy: Mind, Matter, and Metaphysics*, edited by Christia Mercer and Eileen O'Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 183-205. This paper analyzes Berkeley's arguments for the existence of God in the *Principles of Human Knowledge, Three Dialogues, and Alciphron*. Against traditional interpretations which portray Berkeley as offering three distinct proofs of God's existence, Jesseph argues that these three proofs are actually all variations of a single proof that utilizes inference to the best explanation. He continues by showing how his interpretation of Berkeley's arguments connects Berkeley's conception of God to his views about causation and explanation.

Mogens Laerke, "Leibniz's Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God" in Archiv Fuer Geschichte der Philosophie 93 (1):58 - 84 (2011). This paper discussed the development of Leibniz's cosmological argument. Leibniz's rejects key components of cosmological proofs of Avicenna and St. Thomas Aquinas. The article discusses Leibniz's version of the proof and to what extent it might have been influenced by Spinoza.

Lawrence Nolan and Alan Nelson, “Proofs for the Existence of God” in *The Blackwell Guide to Descartes’ Meditations*, edited by Stephen Gaukroger (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 104-121. The authors attempt to argue for a more simple view of Descartes's theistic proofs in the *Meditations*. They argue that the cosmological proof of the Third Meditation depends on the causal principle that nothing comes from nothing, rather than the more robust and controversial causal principle that the objective reality of an idea must have a cause with at least as much formal reality. They also attempt to show that the ontological proof of the Fifth Meditation is best understood not as a formal proof but as an axiom, revealed as self-evident by analytic meditation.

Antonia Lolordo, *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). A book-length treatment of Gassendi’s philosophical system. Chapter 10 includes a discussion of our knowledge of God, as well as the role of the soul and reason in Gassendi’s theology.

William Rowe, *The Cosmological Argument* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998). This book is a comprehensive study of the cosmological argument for the existence of God that looks at the arguments from Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and Samuel Clarke. Rowe also examines the principle of sufficient reason and discusses both historical and contemporary criticisms of the argument.