

## Faith & Reason Group Discussion Questions – March 13, 2026

### PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION 101

#### Arguments **FOR** the Existence of God

#### Crash Course in Logic

- Propositional [logic] – true or false statements, logical connectives
- Predicate [logic] – deals with properties, relations, quantifiers [of subjects]
- Universal [modifier] – true of “any”, “every”, “all”
- Existential [modifier] – true of “at least one”, “some”
- Deductive – conclusion valid from premises
- Inductive – conclusion cogent by statistical generalization
- Abductive – “inference to the best explanation”
- Modus ponens – affirming the antecedent (“ $P \rightarrow Q$ .  $P$  true. So,  $Q$ .”)
- Modus tollens – denying the consequent (“ $P \rightarrow Q$ .  $Q$  false. So, not  $P$ .”)

#### THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (i.e., from existence)

1. In concept, God is a being greater than any other imaginable.
2. God exists [at least] as an idea [in the mind].
3. A being that exists as an idea and in reality is greater than a being that exists only as an idea.
4. Thus, if God exists only as an idea, then we can imagine a being greater than God (i.e., one that in fact exists).
5. But we cannot imagine something greater than God (i.e., it is a contradiction to imagine a being greater than a greatest being)
6. Therefore, God exists.

#### Key proponents:

- Anselm of Canterbury (truncated above)
- René Descartes
- Kurt Gödel (modal, of possibility / necessity)
- Alvin Plantinga (also in modal form)

#### Key detractors:

- Gaunilo of Marmoutiers (“perfect island”)
- Thomas Aquinas (God inconceivable)
- David Hume (proving existence impossible)
- Immanuel Kant (“being” not a predicate)

#### Quotes:

“The [ontological] argument does not, to a modern mind, seem very convincing, but it is easier to feel convinced that it must be fallacious than it is to find out precisely where the fallacy lies.” – Bertrand Russell

“Can we imagine a completely perfect being? Is it obvious that perfection is augmented by existence? To the modern ear such pious arguments seem to be about words and definitions rather than about external reality.” – Carl Sagan

#### DISCUSSION PROMPT:

#### **What do you think of the ontological argument? Is it weak or strong? Relevant or not?**

Have you ever engaged someone in this argument before, either side? How did it go?

*Alternate: do you think it is possible to conceive God? What does that say about his existence (or lack thereof)?*

#### THE ARGUMENT FROM REASON

1. No belief is rational (reasonable) if it can be fully explained by nonrational causes (i.e., naturalism)
2. If naturalism is true, [by definition] all beliefs can be fully explained by nonrational causes
3. Therefore, if naturalism is true, no belief is rational [from 1, 2]
4. We should only accept naturalism if it is a rational belief
5. Therefore, accepting naturalism is not (and cannot) be rational

Variations get to God as the source of reason if there be reason.

Key proponents:

- C.S. Lewis (esp. in *Miracles*, revised edition)
- G.K. Chesterton (esp. in *Orthodoxy*)
- Alvin Plantinga (both in its general form, also “evolutionary argument against naturalism”)
- Victor Reppert (building off Lewis, Dennett)

Key detractors:

- G.E.M. Anscombe (to first *Miracles* edition)
- Daniel Dennett (“mind-first” explanation impossible)
- Myriad appeals to computation

Quotes:

“Those who ask me to believe [naturalism] also ask me to believe that Reason is simply the unforeseen and unintended by-product of mindless matter at one stage of its endless and aimless becoming. Here is a flat contradiction. They ask me at the same moment to accept a conclusion and to discredit the only testimony on which that conclusion can be based.” - C.S. Lewis

“But then with me the horrid doubt always arises whether the convictions of man's mind, which has been developed from the mind of lower animals, are of any value or at all trustworthy. Would any one trust in the convictions of a monkey's mind, if there are any convictions in such a mind?” - Charles Darwin

**What do you think of the argument from reason? Is it weak or strong? Relevant or not?**

Have you ever engaged someone in this argument before, either side? How did it go?

*Alternate: how do you trust your reason to be reliable? How do you know that you know things?*

## THE ARGUMENT FROM MORALITY

1. If morality is objective and absolute, God (or at least something supernatural) must exist.
2. Morality is objective and absolute.
3. Therefore, God (or at least something supernatural) must exist.

Noteworthy variations:

- Morality and practical reason must assume God (Kant)
- Conscience and certain moral actions supernatural (Newman)

Key proponents:

- Fyodor Dostoevsky (*Brothers Karamazov*)
- C.S. Lewis (esp. in *Mere Christianity*)
- J.L. Mackie (i.e., objective → supernatural)
- Many today: Craig, Keller, Lennox, McGrath

Key detractors:

- David Hume, John Locke, Immanuel Kant
- J.L. Mackie (in a way ... supernatural ≠ God)
- Many today rejecting premise #2 via naturalism

Quotes:

“Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the more often and steadily we reflect upon them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.” - Immanuel Kant

“But what will become of men then? ... without God and immortal life? All things are permitted then, they can do what they like?” - Fyodor Dostoevsky

**What do you think of the argument from morality? Is it weak or strong? Relevant or not?**

Have you ever engaged someone in this argument before, either side? How did it go?

*Alternate: can “good-ness” or “ought-ness” exist independently of God? If so, from whom, what, where, or how?*