



DEFENDING THEISM

Arguments for God's Existence



SESSION 1

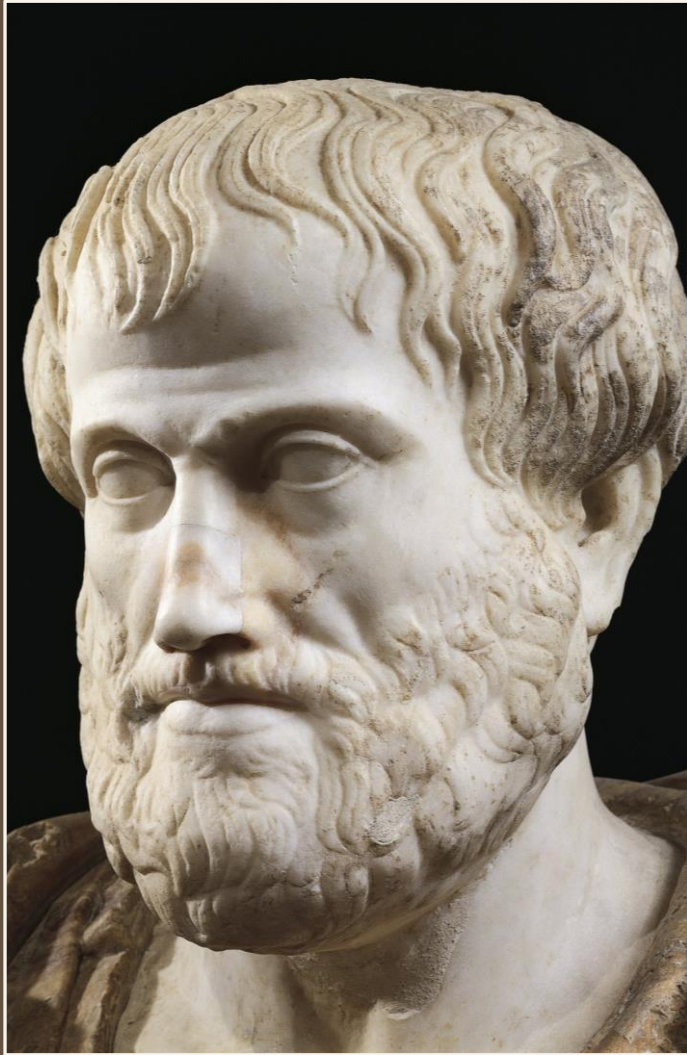
INTRODUCTION

GOALS OF THE COURSE

TERMINOLOGY

7 PRELIMINARY POINTS

ARGUMENT #1:
THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT



Aristotle (384-322 B.C.)

INTRODUCTION

“Tolerance and apathy are the
last virtues of a dying society.”
-Aristotle

GOALS OF THE COURSE

Defending Theism

GOALS OF THE COURSE

1. To strengthen your confidence in the intellectual foundations upon which your faith rests
2. To help you **avoid** common pitfalls in defending belief in God and **defuse** bad objections to theistic belief
3. To equip you (maybe) to use a few of these arguments in real-life discussions

TERMINOLOGY

Defending Theism

LET'S DEFINE OUR TERMS...

Theism - Belief in the existence of a personal God, who is the creator and sustainer of the universe, and who is understood in a manner consonant with both Greek philosophical and Judeo-Christian thought (i.e. God as uncreated, eternal, all-knowing, all-powerful, etc.)

Theoretical Agnosticism - The belief that the existence of such a God is unknowable in principle (or at least unknowable with any useful degree of certitude)

Practical Agnosticism - A personal suspension of belief regarding the existence of God based on insufficient evidence or reflection (in other words: "I don't know")

Atheism - Denial of the existence of God (as understood by the theist)

TWO SUB-CATEGORIES OF “THEISM”

Deism - A religious belief holding that God created the universe and established rationally comprehensible moral and natural laws but does not intervene in human affairs through miracles or supernatural revelation.

Revealed Religion - A religious belief holding the God not only created the universe and established rationally comprehensible moral and natural laws but has and does intervene within his creation, especially by communicating himself and the designs of his will to human creatures by means of Divine Revelation

7 PRELIMINARY POINTS

Defending Theism

PRELIMINARY POINT #1

The SCOPE of these arguments is simply to defend basic theistic belief...not to argue for the whole truth of the Catholic faith.

BE AWARE OF COMMON RED HERRINGS

AS SOON AS YOU HEAR
ANY OF THE
FOLLOWING
OBJECTIONS, BE READY
TO CALL THEM OUT AS
DISTRCTIONS....



"Don't you know
that the Bible is full
of..."

①

"The Catholic
Church has always
impeded scientific
progress...(cough,
cough)... GALILEO"

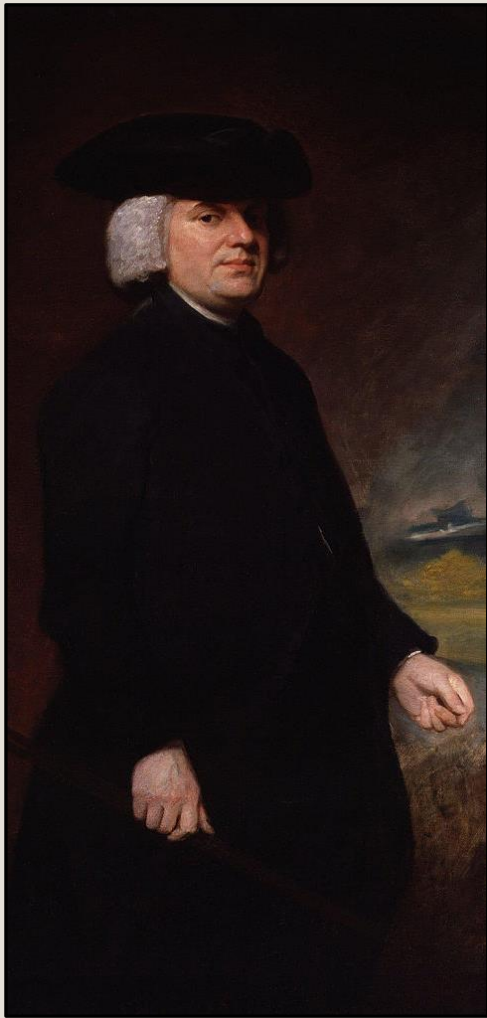
②

"Religious people
throughout the
centuries have
been the cause
of..."

③

EVOLUTION!

④



Evolution only impacts arguments for theism when using primitive “design arguments” like William Paley’s famous WATCHMAKER ARGUMENT...

(which almost no one uses today)

William Paley (1743 – 1805)

"For my part, I take my stand in human anatomy [where there appears] the necessity, in each particular case, of an intelligent designing mind for the contriving and determining of the forms which organized bodies bear"

PRELIMINARY POINT #2

We will be using real arguments organized in logical structure.

They will be of two kinds:

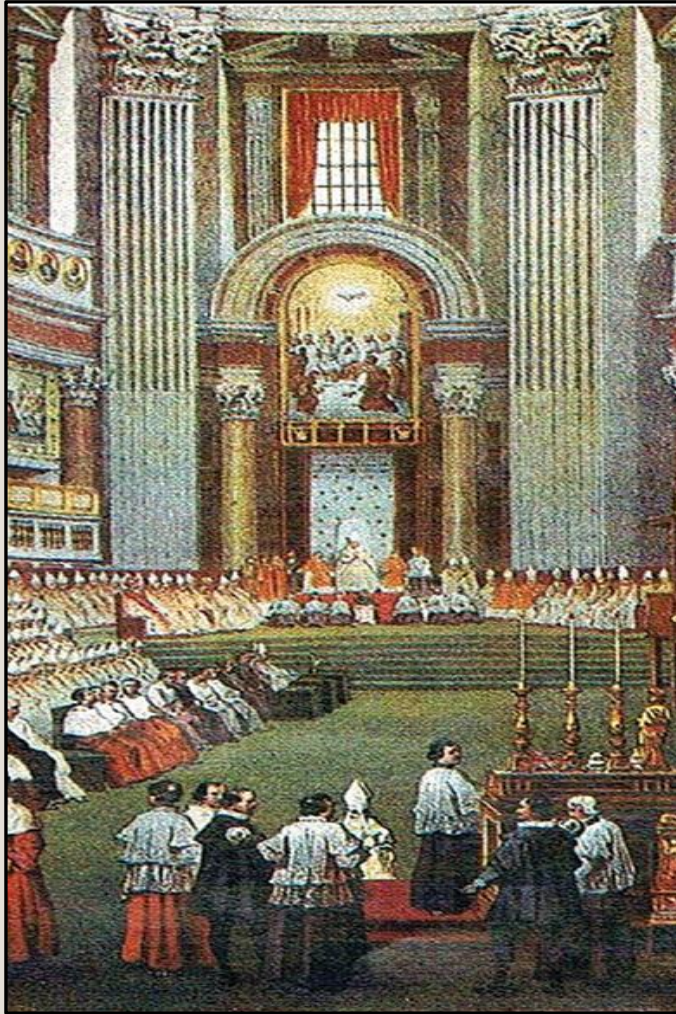
- Abductive arguments**
- Deductive arguments**

PRELIMINARY POINT #3

The quality of evidence is not to be judged solely by how it is received.

PRELIMINARY POINT #4

Faith is a gift from God, but that does not mean that arguments for God's existence are futile.



Vatican I (1869-1870)

“If anyone says that the one, true God, our creator and lord, cannot be known with certainty from the things that have been made, by the natural light of human reason: let him be anathema.”

(Vatican I: *Dei Filius*, chapter 2)

PRELIMINARY POINT #5

"Scientism" is badly mistaken

FORMS OF “SCIENTIFICISM”

WEAK FORM

“The Scientific Method has been so amazingly successful at making all sorts of discoveries about the natural world. Surely it would have been able to prove God’s existence by now.”

STRONG FORM

“The Scientific Method is the only way to arrive at knowledge/truth”

CRITIQUES OF “SCIENTISM”

WEAK FORM

“The Scientific Method has been so amazingly successful at making all sorts of discoveries about the natural world. Surely it would have been able to prove God’s existence by now.”

Response: This is a clear category error, as if we believe God to be a material object within the world.

Example: Metal-detector analogy and Lamppost analogy

STRONG FORM

“The Scientific Method is the only way to arrive at knowledge/truth”

Response: This is self-referentially false. It is also manifestly not true (moral truths, first principles of philosophy, etc.). The scientific method itself relies on fundamental truth claims about the natural world that are not subject to empirical verification.

PRELIMINARY POINT #6

**God, as classically understood,
is not a "being among beings."**

NOT WHAT WE MEAN BY GOD...



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY GOD?

EXODUS 3:13-14

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO AM."

ACTS 17: 24-25; 27-28

The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything...Yet he is not far from each one of us, for 'In him we live and move and have our being'

ST. THOMAS
AQUINAS

Ipsium Esse Subsistens → Subsistent Existence Itself

PRELIMINARY POINT #7

Atheism is not the “default” position. Push back on this.

ARGUMENT #1:
THE
“COSMOLOGICAL
ARGUMENT”

Defending Theism