

## **Theism**

In order to communicate to people about God, we first must have a common understanding of what type of God we are talking about. It is easy to assume that everyone thinks of God in the same way. But this is not the case and an examination of differing views of God and why theism is the correct view will help us in ministering to others. There are presently seven common views of God that are widely held.

### **Views of God**

#### 1. Theism

Theism views God as being beyond the world. God created the world and is infinite. God can act in the world in a supernatural way as He chooses. He is both beyond the universe and in the universe. Theism is represented by traditional Christianity, Judaism and Islam.

#### 2. Deism

Deism is similar to theism without the supernatural interaction by God. God is the creator and is beyond the universe but not in the universe. A materialistic world view is held because God is not presently interacting with His creation. Some deists believe that God cannot do miracles, but most believe God does not do miracles. Men such as Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine and Voltaire were deists.

#### 3. Atheism

Atheism denies the existence of God, either in the universe or beyond the universe. All that was, is and ever will be is the universe, which is self-sustaining. Famous atheistic philosophers include Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean Paul Sartre.

A sub-form of atheism is agnosticism. Agnosticism says that the existence of God is not known. Agnosticism falls into two groups, the soft agnostic, who says that God may be known but he does not know if God exists, and the hard agnostic, who says that he does not know if God exists and neither does anyone else.

#### 4. Finite Godism

Finite godism is similar to theism in that God is both beyond the universe and active in the universe (unlike deism). However, God's power is viewed to be limited. God is loving and desiring good, but also finite and incapable of bringing the desired good about. William James, Edgar Brightman and Peter Bertocci are proponents of this view.

#### 5. Pantheism

Pantheism views God as being active in the universe but not beyond the universe. In fact, God is seen as being the universe. There is no creation and Creator, only one reality. God is everything and everything is God. Pantheism is found in forms of Hinduism, Zen Buddhism and Christian Science. It is very prevalent among eastern religions.

## 6. Polytheism

Polytheism believes that there are many finite gods in the world who actively influence the world. They are unlike theism in that there is no infinite God. They are unlike deism in that there is supernatural activity in the world. They are unlike finite godism in that there is no God beyond the universe. Some pantheists are also polytheists in that many gods are representative expressions of the god that is everything. Many people throughout the world are polytheistic, most notably modern Mormons. The ancient Greeks of the days of the New Testament were polytheists.

## 7. Pan-en-theism

This view says God is in the universe and is growing to achieve his potential beyond the universe. It is similar to finite godism in that it views God as limited, but it is different in the sense that God is potentially infinite as he develops. Adherents include Charles Hartshorne and Shubert Ogden.

### **Arguments for Theism**

Over the years, many have sought to bring evidence for the existence of a theistic God. This evidence has taken many forms as summarized below. These arguments for the existence of God are presented as a support for faith rather than as a means of convincing the non-theist of God's existence.

Since God has made Himself known (Romans 1:19-20), the non-theist can observe the truth about Him apart from our persuasion. Since the truth of God is undeniable, mankind simply needs to consider this truth honestly and toward that end these arguments may be of value. Yet the best approach to take is what God does in His Word, that is to simply assume the truth of one theistic God. These arguments then support this assumption by showing it to be reasonable. You will find that some of these arguments are stronger than others.

#### 1. Religious Experience Argument (Elton Trueblood)

- Millions of people claim to have experienced God
- If even one experience is valid, then God exists
- It is highly unlikely that all men are being totally deceived about their experience of God
- Therefore, it is highly likely that God exists

#### 2. Teleological Argument (William Paley)

- Design implies a designer
- The universe manifests design
- Therefore, the universe has a designer

#### 3. Moral Argument (C. S. Lewis)

- Moral law implies a Moral Law Giver

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- There is a moral law

- Therefore, there is a Moral Law Giver

### 4. Ontological Argument (Anselm of Canterbury)

- A necessary being is by definition one that cannot not exist

- But what cannot not exist, must exist

- Therefore, a necessary being must exist

### 5. Cosmological Argument (Thomas Aquinas)

- Every event has a cause

- The universe had a beginning

- Therefore, the universe has a cause

### 6. Religious Need Argument

- Man has a deep-seated need for God

- What men really need, really exists

- Therefore, God really exists

### 7. Argument from Truth (Augustine)

- There are absolute truths

- Absolute truth comes from an absolute mind

- Therefore, there is an Absolute Mind

### 8. Argument from Perfection (Anselm)

- There are more or less perfect things

- But the more or less implies a most

- Therefore, there must be a Most Perfect Being

### 9. Anthropological Argument

- Man is an intelligent being

- Only intelligence can produce the intelligent

- Therefore, an Intelligent Being created man

### 10. Axiological Argument

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- Value judgments are impossible without values
- Value implies a Value-Giver
- Therefore, a Value-Giver exists

### 11. Biological Argument (Fred Hoyle)

- Life is a highly complex organism
- The chances for life arising without a creator are minute
- Therefore, it is highly probable that there is a Creator

### **Expansion of the Moral Argument (C.S. Lewis)**

#### 1. There must be a universal moral law because...

- ...disagreements on morality would be meaningless.
- ...moral criticisms would be meaningless.
- ...promises or treaties would be futile.
- ...we would not make excuses for breaking the moral law.

#### 2. This moral law cannot be instinctive because...

- ...the stronger impulse does not always win.
- ...we do not always act from instinct.
- ...instincts would always be right, which they are not.

#### 3. This moral law cannot be sociological...

- ...not everything is learned from society.
- ...judgment about the moral progress of society makes sense only if the value judgment is formed apart from society.
- ...variations in value judgments are largely based on fact, not morality.

#### 4. This moral law is separate from the law of nature...

- ...the moral law is not a descriptive "is" but a prescriptive "ought."
- ...situations that are equal in convenience differ morally.
- ...sometimes acts that result in worse affects are morally better than acts which have a lesser result.

#### 5. This moral law cannot be only an illusion...

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...we cannot get rid of it even though we would sometimes like to.

...we did not make it; it is impressed upon us.

...value judgments would be meaningless without it.

6. Man is the key to understanding this moral law...

...man has inside information about what "ought to be" in contrast to what "is."

...moral laws come from within man, not from nature around man.

...the source of moral law cannot be merely part of the universe any more than the architect is part of the building he makes.

7. Therefore, there is an absolutely perfect power outside of mankind which is above anything we know (i.e. God)...

...it gives us moral commands.

...it is very much interested in our behavior.

...if it were not absolutely good, then all moral effort would be futile. We may be sacrificing our lives for the vain cause of "right" when there would be no absolute right.

...the source of right must be absolutely good, for the standard maker for all good cannot be less than completely good Himself.

### **Defense of Theism (Norman Geisler)**

1. Something undeniably exists. You cannot truthfully deny your existence.

2. Nothing cannot cause something.

3. Something eternally and necessarily exists.

- If this statement is false, then somewhere along the line nothing must have created something.

- Something must eternally exist or else nothing would then cause something.

- Something must necessarily exist because if it did not exist, it is not eternal.

- A necessary being cannot change, because if it could change it would be possible for a necessary being to cease to exist.

- A necessary being cannot change because if he gains or loses anything he would not be originally necessary.

4. I am not eternal and necessary.

- I am not necessary because I change.

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- I am not necessary because things exist which do not depend on me.
  - I am not eternal because of the second law of thermodynamics.
5. Whatever is not eternal and necessary needs a cause.
  6. Therefore, there is an eternal and necessary cause of my non-eternality and non-necessary existence.
  7. But I am a personal, intelligent and moral being.
  8. Only an intelligent and moral being can create an intelligent and moral being.
- The effect cannot be greater than the cause. Non-intelligence cannot produce intelligence. This is the downfall of atheistic evolution.
9. Therefore, a personal, moral, intelligent, eternal and necessary being exists (i.e. God).
  10. There cannot be more than one such being.
- You cannot have two different beings that are exactly the same.
  - In order to differ there must be a difference and two infinitely perfect beings would have to be exactly the same.
  - Infinite means all-inclusive and you can only have one all-inclusive.
11. Therefore, only one God exists as the cause of all else that exists (Theism).