



What is Ultimate Reality?

What is “ultimate reality?”¹ Many people believe that God is the “ultimate reality.” However, there are different ideas about “god.”

Different Concepts of “God”

Atheism	“God” is an invention of human beings, and does not really exist.
Pantheism	God is in the universe, but not distinct from it; God <i>is</i> the universe.
Panentheism	God is in the universe like the human soul is in the body; God is the soul.
Dualism	There are two opposing gods (or two interacting & balancing forces)
Polytheism	There are many finite gods, each with their own sphere of activity.
Henotheism	There are many gods, with one who is supreme among them.
Finite Monotheism	There is one finite God, who is beyond the universe, but acts within it in limited ways.
Deism	There is one God, who is distinct from the universe, and does not act within it.
Theism	There is only one true God, who is distinct from the universe, but acts within it.

The above categories are not necessarily all encompassing or mutually exclusive.

Religions and Ultimate Reality²

Religion/Philosophy	The Ultimate Reality or Being
Naturalism	Matter, in one form or another, is all that has existed from eternity.
Buddhism	Nirvana – an abstract void or emptiness (in Mahayana Buddhism, also an undifferentiated Buddha essence)
Hinduism	Brahman – impersonal oneness, beyond all distinctions (though many stress personal god(s) who are manifestations of the one ultimate reality)
Islam	Allah – one true God; singular unity; sovereign; merciful to those who love him; relationally distant
Christianity	God – one true God to be worshiped; compound unity (Father, Son, Holy Spirit); personal and relational

Does God Exist?

1. Why do many people believe that God exists, while other people do *not* believe?³



¹ In this context, ‘ultimate reality’ means ‘the most fundamental and/or greatest possible state of things that exists (or ‘is’).’ In its broadest sense, ‘reality’ may include both being and nothingness.

² This table presents brief and simplistic notes on orthodox (conventional) beliefs taken from various resources on world religions and worldviews. There is much variation in belief and practice within each religion, involving individuals, sects, and syncretism (that is, a mixing of orthodox beliefs with other beliefs).

³ For one thing, people have different ‘worldviews.’ A ‘worldview’ is the framework of ideas and attitudes through which we ‘see’ and interpret the world. Worldview is largely shaped by one’s culture, subculture and upbringing, and may be formed with little critical thought. It is good to critically examine our worldviews, which *can* change.

- ❑ Is it reasonable to believe in God? Yes! While the existence of God cannot be proved (or disproved) by human reason, belief in God is reasonable.⁴
- ❑ Many rational and intelligent people believe that the biblical God is the best explanation for: the existence and nature of the universe; abstract realities (numbers, laws of logic, etc.); objective ethical values; human sense of meaning, purpose, and significance; etc. (See page 4). The cumulative evidence points to God.



God in Relation to the Universe

- ❑ Read Genesis 1:1 (the very first verse of the Bible).
 - God is the _____ of the universe.
- ❑ God is not only the Creator of the universe; he is the Sustainer of the universe. The continuing existence of the universe is dependent on his sustaining activity.⁵

📖 "...all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (*Colossians 1:16b-17, NIV*).⁶



What Does the Universe Reveal?

- ❑ Read Psalm 19:1-6.⁷ The heavens "declare," "proclaim," and "pour forth speech." They tell us about the greatness of God, because God made the universe. Cosmic nature proclaims God's "glory" – that is, the awesome and innate essence of God.⁸
 2. In what ways do the heavens speak?⁹

📖 "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (*Romans 1:20, NIV*).



⁴ See Jay's 'Can an Intelligent Person Believe in God?' under Articles on the ICF website.

⁵ Who or what governs the universe? God? Natural laws? The relationship between God's sustaining activity and natural law is disputed, but 'supernaturalism' is the view advocated here. Supernaturalism 'endorses the idea of a regular order of nature, not independent of God at any point but endowed by him with cause-and-effect relations which God supports at every moment...this metaphysic allows for *critical realism* in science' (C. John Collins, *The God of Miracles* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000], 36). In any case, God is the ultimate governor of the universe.

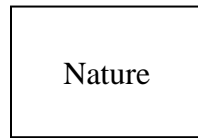
⁶ 'He' (the agent of creation) is Christ – 'the image of the invisible God' (1:15) – God in the flesh (*cf. Heb. 1:3*).

⁷ 'heavens' (*shāmayim*) denotes all that is above the earth, including the realm in which the sun, moon and stars are located. 'Skies' (*rāqîa'*) is a parallel term. Though these terms exclude the earth, they represent the universe of which earth is a part. It is fair to say that the whole universe (including the earth) declares the glory of God.

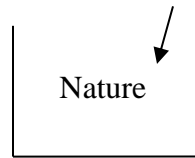
⁸ The universe is so vast, complex and beautiful; its creator must be infinitely great. (In fact, God's glory is also revealed through the smallest components of nature.) If we are teachable, we will see that the heavens inform us (*v. 2b*), giving us an awareness and knowledge of God as creator.

⁹ Not by audible words (*v. 3*). However, nature still reveals something about God – not only the greatness of God, but the existence of God. The more we study nature, the more we see the complexity, design and intelligence in nature, which provides powerful evidence for the existence of an intelligent Designer/Creator.

3. If nature clearly “speaks” about God, why do many people *not* “hear” it?¹⁰



Naturalism/Materialism
Nature in a closed box



Supernaturalism
Nature in an open system, open to God

- Many scientists agree that nature provides strong evidence for the existence of God.¹¹

What About Creation vs. Evolution?

- A more fundamental question needs to be asked first. What about Theism vs. Naturalism? If naturalism is true, God does not exist, creation is ruled out, and purely naturalistic evolution is the only explanation. However, why must naturalism be true? If theism is true, God is creator, and theologians and theistic scientists can debate the details of his creative process.¹²

God in Relation to Us

- God is not only Creator and Sustainer, he is a personal and relational God. The biblical God made us (as human beings) to have a relationship with him. Read Acts 17:24-28.

What Does it Matter?

4. What does it matter if “ultimate reality” is the biblical God rather than other ideas of ultimate reality? How does it affect our daily lives? How does it affect our attitudes, actions, values, relationships and goals?¹³

Reflection/Application

- Do you believe God exists? If not, be willing to critically examine your worldview. Examine the reasons why so many people (including very intelligent people) do believe in God.
- Do you believe in God (or gods), but not the God revealed in the Bible? Identify the specific reasons why. Carefully compare your view of God with the God of the Bible.
- If you are a believer in the biblical God, answer this question in writing: How does my belief in God actually affect my daily life – my attitudes, actions, values, relationships and goals?

¹⁰ Some people accept the existence of God but do not ‘hear’ or see clearly due to a broken relationship with God. For many, the fundamental issue is ‘worldview’ (see page 1). While the evidence of God’s existence is clear to the theist, a person with a naturalistic worldview does not see it, because the supernatural is ruled out beforehand.

¹¹ There are many books, articles, and presentations on the relationship between science and faith. Jay has numerous resources and links. For example, consider the book *God’s Undertaker: Has Science Buried God?*, by John C. Lennox, and the videos *The Privileged Planet* and *Unlocking the Mystery of Life* in the ICF library.

¹² There are valid questions concerning the relationship between science and the Bible’s teaching. But these questions are secondary to the philosophical presuppositions underlying our views.

¹³ Our beliefs about God radically affect our sense of meaning and purpose. If God is creator and sustainer, he is our life-giver, purpose-giver, and source of every good thing. If he is personal and relational, we should seek to know him and live for him. We will align our lives with his character, will, values and goals.

A List of Arguments for the Existence of God



The following is a list of arguments taken from Kreeft and Tacelli.¹⁴ Some of the arguments appear similar, and some of the arguments are certainly better than others. This list *does not* state the argument, but *attempts* to summarize the general idea. You need to read the entire argument to really understand it. The purpose of this list is to introduce you to the variety of arguments used for the existence of God.

1. Argument from Change – The universe (the sum total of matter, space and time) is always changing. Thus there must be an outside force to actualize change.
2. Argument from Efficient Causality – There must be an uncaused being who begins the chain of cause of effect.
3. Argument from Time and Contingency – There must be an absolutely necessary being from which contingent beings come.
4. Argument from Degrees of Perfection – There must be a “best,” a source and real standard of all the perfections that we recognize belongs to us as beings.
5. The Design Argument – The intelligibility and irreducible complexity observed in nature is best explained as being caused by an intelligent agent, not mere chance and time.
6. The Kalam Argument – 1) Whatever begins to exist has a cause; 2) The universe began to exist; 3) Thus the universe has a cause. There must be a beginning because an actual infinite is not possible (If there was no beginning, the present moment would never arrive).
7. Argument from Contingency – Dependent or contingent being implies something else must exist outside, ultimately outside the universe that is bounded by space and time.
8. Argument from the World as an Interacting Whole – Since the parts make sense only within the whole, there must be a unifying efficient cause that is intelligent and transcendent.
9. Argument from Miracles – (offered as a clue or sign, not a proof).
10. Argument from Consciousness – The intelligible universe and the finite minds so well suited to grasp it are the products of intelligence (purely natural forces are nonrational forces).
11. Argument from Truth – Since our limited minds can discover eternal truths, and the human mind is not eternal, there must exist an eternal mind in which these truths reside.
12. Argument from the Origin of the Idea of God – The idea of an infinite, all-perfect being could not be caused by ourselves (as limited & imperfect beings), so it must come from God.
13. The Ontological Argument – Our thoughts of God imply his existence
14. The Moral Argument – Real moral obligation must be rooted in an objective standard of morality, that is, an ultimate lawgiver.
15. Argument from Conscience – The only source of absolute moral obligation is something superior to me – something like God.
16. Argument from Desire – Our natural, innate desire for something that neither time nor earth nor creatures can satisfy implies that something beyond time, earth, and creatures exists.
17. Argument from Aesthetic Experience
18. Argument from Religious Experience – The consistency, character, and effects of religious experience help validate the truth of divine reality.
19. The Common Consent Argument – The vast majority of human beings have believed in an ultimate being deserving of reverence and worship, so it is most plausible that God exists.
20. Pascal’s Wager – Logical reasoning cannot by itself prove whether or not God exists, so we must wager (bet). If you bet against God, and you are wrong, you have everything to lose. If you bet for God, and you are correct, you have everything to gain.

¹⁴Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 48-88.