

Apologetics Glossary

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Apologetics [*ἀπολογία apología*] the defense of the Christian faith; the study and application of presenting an organized, carefully reasoned defense of Christianity in answer to questions, objections, misrepresentations, accusations, or attacks. Based on 1 Peter 3:15, every believer is commanded to be able to provide an answer, an *apologia*, to questions about their Christian beliefs. These answers may range from simple, informal answers to more sophisticated, formal presentations of why Christianity is true. The study of evidences for the truth of Christianity is only one subdivision of the study of apologetics.

Historically, Christian theologians have differed over the best method of engaging the unbeliever or pagan mind. How questions related to the effects of sin on the human mind, the common ground between believer and unbeliever, the relation of apologetics to evangelism and theology are answered determine which methodology is preferred. Those who hold to reason or logic as common ground are identified as *classical apologists*. Those who believe that common ground between the believer and unbeliever lies in the neutral facts or evidence of history and empirical evidence are called *evidential apologists*. Those who do not believe rational evidence is possible or should be used and emphasize personal, subjective, or mystical encounters are called *fideist apologists*. And those who hold to the authority of revelation and emphasize the image of God and the testimony of general revelation as the common ground are called *presuppositional apologists*. See *Christian Evidences, Presuppositional, Evidentialist, Classical apologetics*.

Cosmogony a theory or story about the origin of the universe.

Cosmology the study of the origin and structure of the universe or refers to a particular account of how the universe began.

Empiricism is that theory of knowledge that holds that all knowledge derives from experience and is validated through experience. This is the experience of the five senses, not the experience of subjectivity or mysticism. Empiricists believe that all knowledge derives from observation through the five senses and from this foundation, through the rigorous use of logic and reason, unaided by revelation, man can come to know ultimate truth. The weakness is there is always the possibility that one more piece of data or information may cause a complete renovation of previous theories and knowledge. Further, it is grounded on faith or belief that man with unaided reason can accurately interpret his experience. While experience may yield much truth, there are critical pieces of information which may only be known through revelation which might cause a vast revision of knowledge. For example, all of the observation and experience with the world of the Garden of Eden would never yield the information that eating of the fruit of the tree of

knowledge of good and evil would instantly bring spiritual death. That reality could only be known through revelation. Ultimately, like every other theory of knowledge, empiricism rests on faith, not facts—faith in human intellectual ability to correctly interpret observed facts. In the ancient world Aristotle was the primary advocate of empiricism, and Plato of rationalism. In the Middle Ages Aquinas followed Aristotle more closely and in modern philosophy John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume are the most influential empiricists.

Epistemology is the study of the nature and basis for knowledge. Epistemology seeks to answer questions like: How do we know? What is the basis for certainty in knowledge? Is there absolute truth? What are the limits to knowledge, if any? In the history of human thought four bases for knowledge have been set forth: rationalism, empiricism, mysticism, and authority (divine revelation).

Existence of God, Arguments for the

One of the more significant expressions of the arguments for the existence of God was provided by Thomas Aquinas. These are referred to as the “five ways” or five arguments for the existence of God: the argument from motion, the argument from efficient causes, the argument from possibility and necessity, the argument from gradation of being, and the argument from design. Others have expressed these as the **cosmological argument**, **teleological argument**, **moral argument**, and **ontological argument**. Still other arguments have been formulated. The Bible does not express any of these, but presupposes the existence of God.

Cosmological argument for the existence of God: also known as the argument from effect to cause. The cosmological argument begins with the existence of the universe and argues that every effect has a cause adequate to produce it, therefore the existence of the universe as an effect must have a cause. The only possible cause for such an effect would be an all-powerful God. A weakness with some forms of this argument is that all it demonstrates is either an infinite regression of causes which is a logical impossibility, or an infinite cause or Uncaused Cause. But the difficulty is moving from an Uncaused Cause to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Holy Creator God of the Bible.

Teleological argument for the existence of God: or the argument from intelligent design: The argument is based on the empirical evidence that the universe from macro to micro evidences reveals incredible design and purpose. Based on the intricate details of the universe an Intelligent Designer must have created all things. Again, the weakness is moving from an Intelligent Designer to the personal, infinite, holy God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Moral argument for the existence of God: the basis for this argument is the existence of a conscience and morality in the human soul, along with the universality of religious feelings. The argument moves from the existence of morality to an ultimate cause which must be the highest form of morality, which must then be identified as a perfect, Moral Being. The weakness is moving from this perfectly Moral Being to the personal, infinite, holy God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (sometimes also called the Moral argument for the existence of God).

Ontological argument: also known as the *per se notum*, or self-evident argument for the existence of God. The idea of a perfect being must necessarily include His existence, because if He did not exist, He would not be perfect. This is one of the more sophisticated arguments for the existence of God. First set forth by Anselm (1033–1109) it has been both criticized (by Aquinas, Hume, and Kant) and refined (Descartes, Leibniz, and Alvin Plantinga). The syllogism set forth by Anselm is as follows:

Major premise: The human mind can conceive of a most perfect being (“that than which nothing greater can be conceived”).

Minor premise: A most perfect being implies the necessity of existence because that which must exist is more perfect than that which might exist, i.e., a being that exists as both an idea in the mind and in reality is more perfect than a being that exists only in the mind.

Conclusion: We can conceive of nothing more perfect than a God who exists, therefore God necessarily exists.

Metaphysics [from *meta* “beyond” and “*phusis*” for the physical world, hence] the branch of philosophy which seeks to determine the nature of reality, as such it focuses on that which is beyond the physical world, usually involving the question of the existence of God and finding answers apart from religion or revelation. Metaphysics is also a synonym for ontology, the study of being or ultimate existence.

Mysticism the theory of knowledge that rejects logic and reason as the means to truth and emphasizes a direct apprehension of knowledge which transcends empiricism and rationalism. As such it is based on irrationalism and claims direct intuitive insights into the nature of reality. Often these insights are identified (without support) as divine revelation. Mystics claim to know truth in ineffable ways which are thus non-verifiable. Ultimately, mysticism rests on faith in the ability of the individual’s intellect to correctly interpret inner emotions, intuitions, insights, and imagination.

Polemics the act of engaging in a verbal or written refutation of another viewpoint. In theology, *polemics* describes an element in a Biblical passage which is designed to show the superiority of Biblical theism over other religions and philosophies.

Presupposition a foundational belief or basic conviction underlying any person’s thought regarding ultimate reality, knowledge, and values of right and wrong. These foundational convictions form a network of beliefs that shape a person’s worldview or philosophy of life. All knowledge and logic ultimately rest on certain unprovable assumptions or axioms. For example, in Genesis 1 the Bible presupposes the existence of God and does not seek to prove God’s existence. In apologetics, the term is used to refer to a branch of apologetics which emphasizes the truth that all mankind knows God exists from the external evidence of His creation and also an internal knowledge. As a result of man’s sinful corruption, he seeks to suppress this knowledge (Rom. 1:18–23).

Rationalism the epistemological theory that man can arrive at ultimate truth by starting with truths apparent to reason alone, unaided by revelation or empiricism, and proceeding through the rigorous application of logic and reason. Ultimately, rationalism rests on faith in the ability of the individual's intellect to correctly reason from first principles to all knowledge. Plato extolled rationalism in the ancient world; René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, and Gottfried Leibniz were the Enlightenment advocates of rationalism.