

*Aristotle (384-322 BC) was a Greek philosopher, a student of Plato and the teacher of Alexander the Great.*

# Is there proof of GOD'S EXISTENCE?

**D**ear **Father Kerper**: I work at a software company. My co-workers have strong scientific and mathematical backgrounds, as do I. Whenever people learn that I am a practicing Catholic, many say, “You can’t believe in God. There’s no proof.” In college I heard of “proofs” of God’s existence. If God’s existence can be proven, why don’t people believe? I’m confused about what to say.

Living as we do in a society saturated with technology and science, people demand – and expect – conclusive evidence for everything. This, of course, extends to God. We should not be surprised or put off by such demands. And we do have a response.

Catholic theological tradition, from earliest times, has always affirmed “proofs” for the existence of God. Proofs, however, are not the same as evidence. Let’s consider the crucial difference.

Evidence is usually visible and tangible, capable of being grasped by the senses. For example, if you hear the voice of your daughter downstairs, you have persuasive evidence that she is there, even though you cannot see her from the second floor.

Of course, we accept the truth of all

sorts of propositions without direct empirical evidence. Almost everyone in New Hampshire believes that China, a definable mass of land with its own distinct people and culture, exists. Most people, however, have never actually seen China with their own eyes. Moreover, there is abundant material evidence: Chinese people, photographs, artifacts, and so on.

God, by contrast, is spiritual and infinite. As such, God cannot be seen, measured, weighed, or transported from one place to another. Strictly speaking, then, there is no “hard” empirical evidence for the existence of God. Hence, those who limit reality to that which can be discerned by the senses dismiss the existence of God (atheism) or insist that no one can

know for sure (agnosticism).

Though we have no “scientific” evidence for God’s existence, we do have proofs. Please remember that evidence and proof are not identical. Unlike evidence, which is usually material, a proof emerges from the operation of human reason, which uses arguments in an orderly way to demonstrate that a proposition is either true or false.

From ancient times, various thinkers have offered a variety of proofs for God’s existence. The best known proof comes from Aristotle, the great pre-Christian Greek philosopher, whose ideas entered Christian tradition largely through Saint Thomas Aquinas. His proof is quite simple.

According to Aristotle, observation of the world will show that everything

that moves is moved by something else. If the pages of an open book begin to move, one can see an open window nearby through which a mild breeze blows. And, if one studies physical science, one can learn how various factors produce winds of various intensities. Nothing happens on its own. Every movement is caused by some other moving thing. At the end of the long sequence, like a huge line of dominos, stands the “Unmoved Mover,” who is God.

The second popular proof is the “Proof from Design,” which asserts that ordered realities, like the human body and solar system, have some source for their order. If, for example, you walk into a dining room and see a table with silverware and dishes all set out in beautiful harmony, you can reasonably conclude that some intelligent being produced the order. It would be absurd to say, “Oh, this all just happened by itself. How nice!”

Likewise, gazing into the world and noting its fundamental order rather than chaos should lead one to conclude that Someone has created the order.

For sure, almost everyone has heard these proofs before. In fact, even children can think them up on their own. Yet, many people do not believe in God. Are these proofs, then, invalid or worthless?

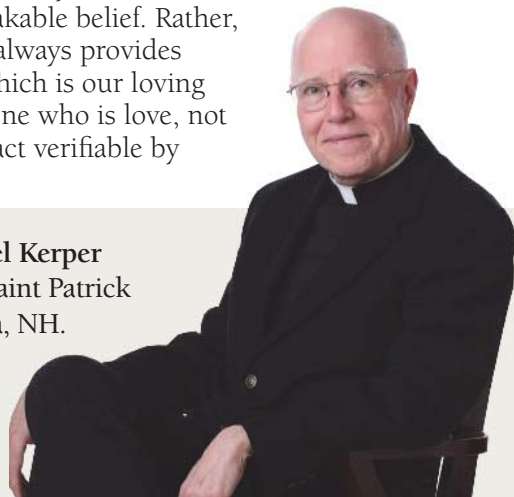
Absolutely not. These proofs, as well as others like them, have enormous value because they verify to believers that their faith is not irrational and absurd as some unbelievers insist.

Saint Thomas Aquinas, in Volume I of his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, made this point: “Our intention should not be to convince our adversary by arguments; it should answer his argument against the truth; for, as we have shown, the natural reason cannot be contrary to the truth of faith.”

Many people, especially young people who get their first taste of science, fall away from belief because faith seems to insist on the abandonment of reason. The opposite is true: the Catholic Church has always taught that the propositions of the faith perfectly conform to human reason. As such, there is never a conflict between faith and science, provided both are understood properly.

God, who created us with free will, deals with us with exquisite delicacy. God provides us with many faint manifestations of his existence. Yet these never brutally force us into instant and unshakable belief. Rather, God’s gentleness always provides space for faith, which is our loving response to the One who is love, not a cold scientific fact verifiable by “hard evidence.”

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