
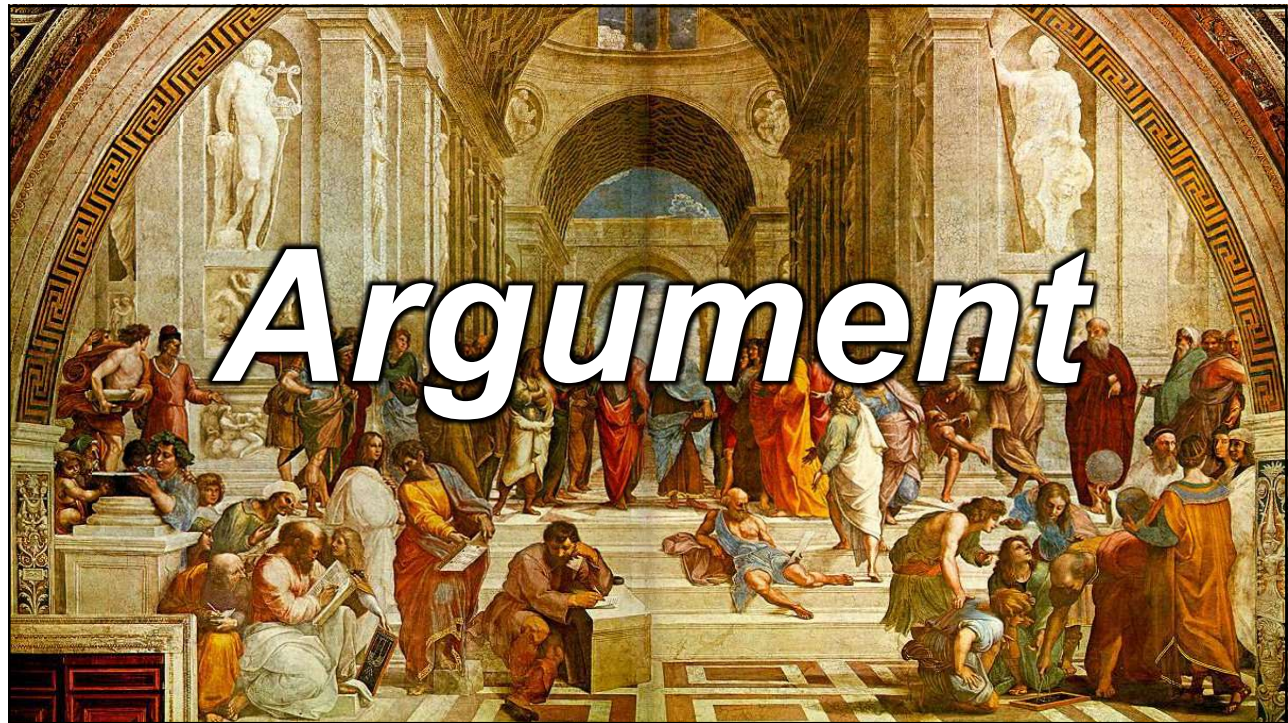


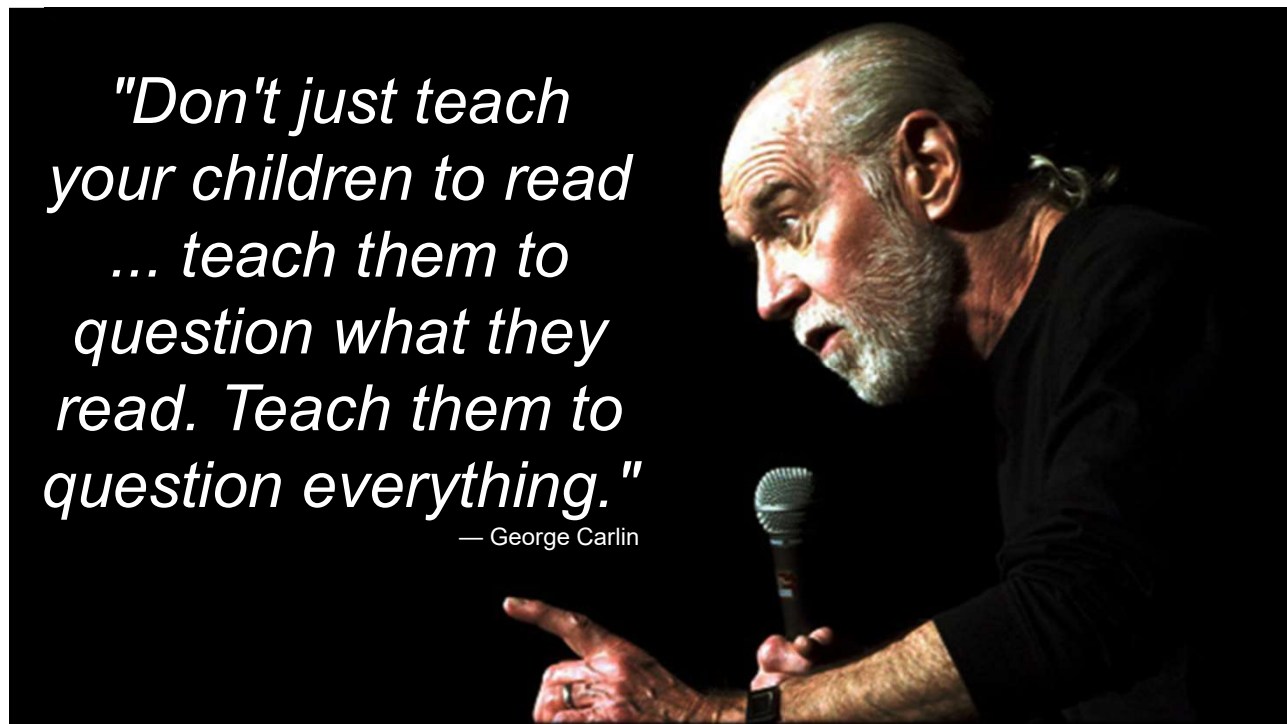
A photograph of two men in suits, facing each other and shouting with their mouths wide open. The image is used as a background for the title text.

Answering the Arguments of Popular Atheism

A photograph of two men in suits, facing each other and shouting with their mouths wide open. The image is used as a background for the title text.

Part 4: Philosophical Arguments





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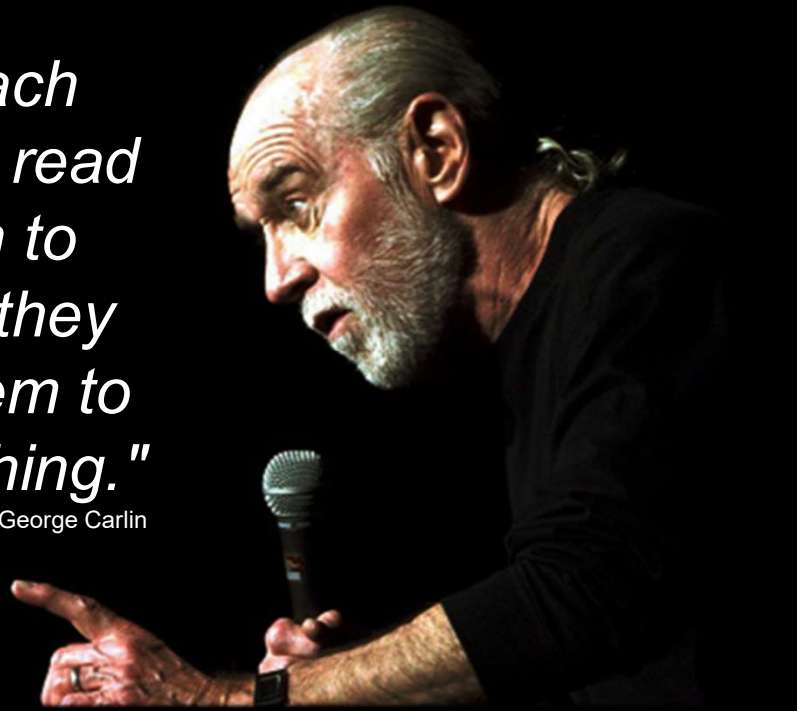
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*"Don't just teach
your children to read
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question everything."*

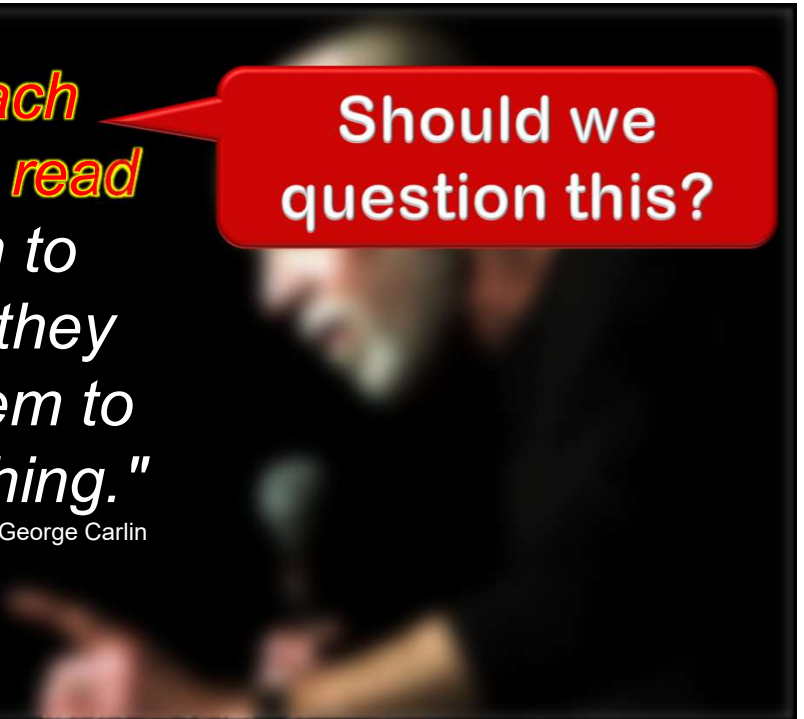
— George Carlin

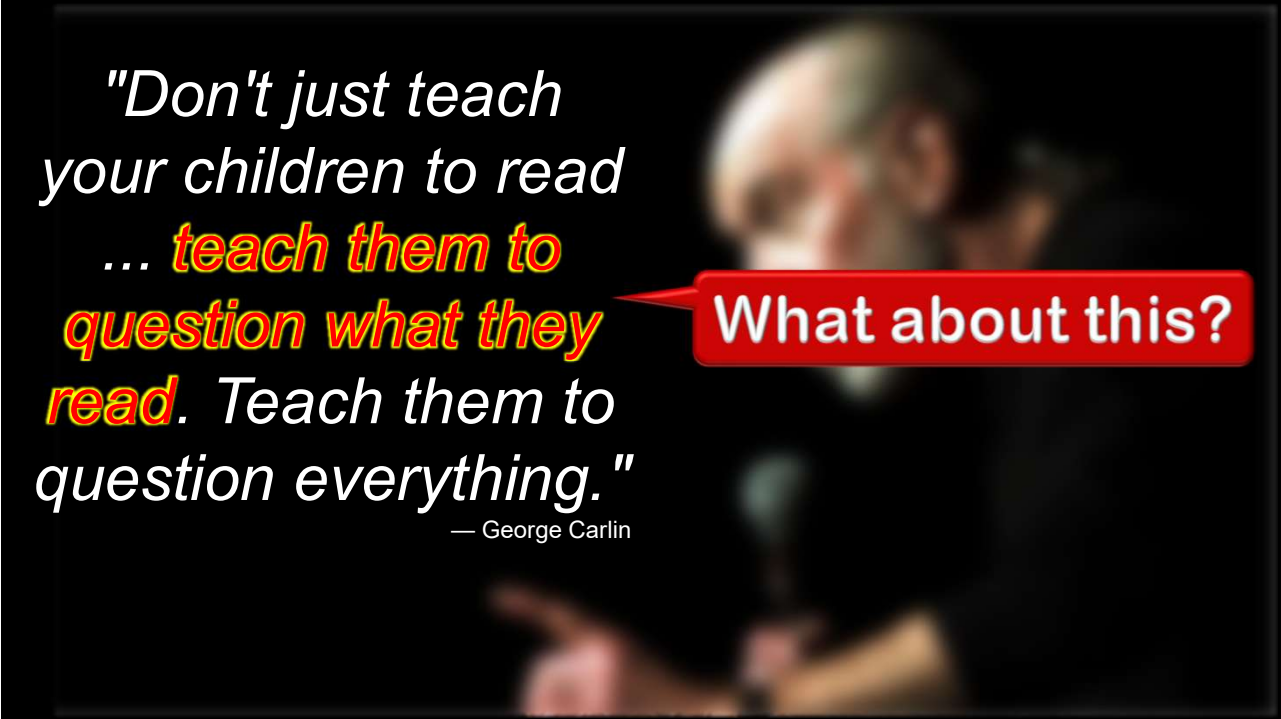


*"Don't just teach
your children to read
... teach them to
question what they
read. Teach them to
question everything."*

— George Carlin

Should we
question this?





*"Don't just teach
your children to read
... **teach them to
question what they
read**. Teach them to
question everything."*

— George Carlin

What about this?

*"Don't just teach
your children to read
... teach them to
question what they
read. Teach them to
question everything."*

— George Carlin

In effect, do you
think George Carlin
would want us to
teach our children to
question his claim
that they should
question everything?

*"Don't just teach
your children to read
... teach them to
question what they
read. Teach them to
question everything."*

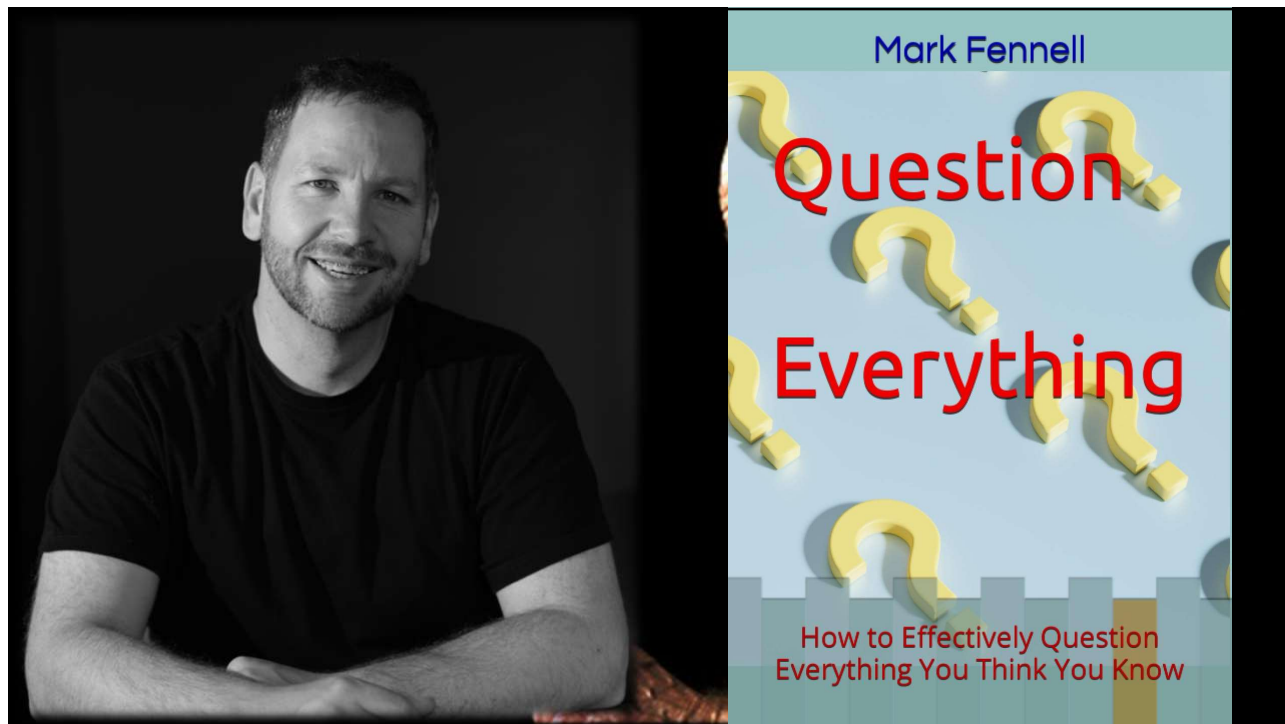
— George Carlin

Further, do you think
there are some
things, the very
questioning of which
is already to abrogate
human knowing?

*"Don't just teach
your children to read
... teach them to
question what they
read. Teach them to
question everything."*

— George Carlin

For example, if we
question whether
humans can
objectively know
reality, how could
we hope to discover
the objectively real
answer to the
question?



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We encourage you to Question your life. Question your beliefs. Question what you have been told, about yourself and your world. Question everything...all of it.

For example, ask questions such as:
Am I truly happy?
Are my Beliefs getting my desires?
How can I have better relationships?

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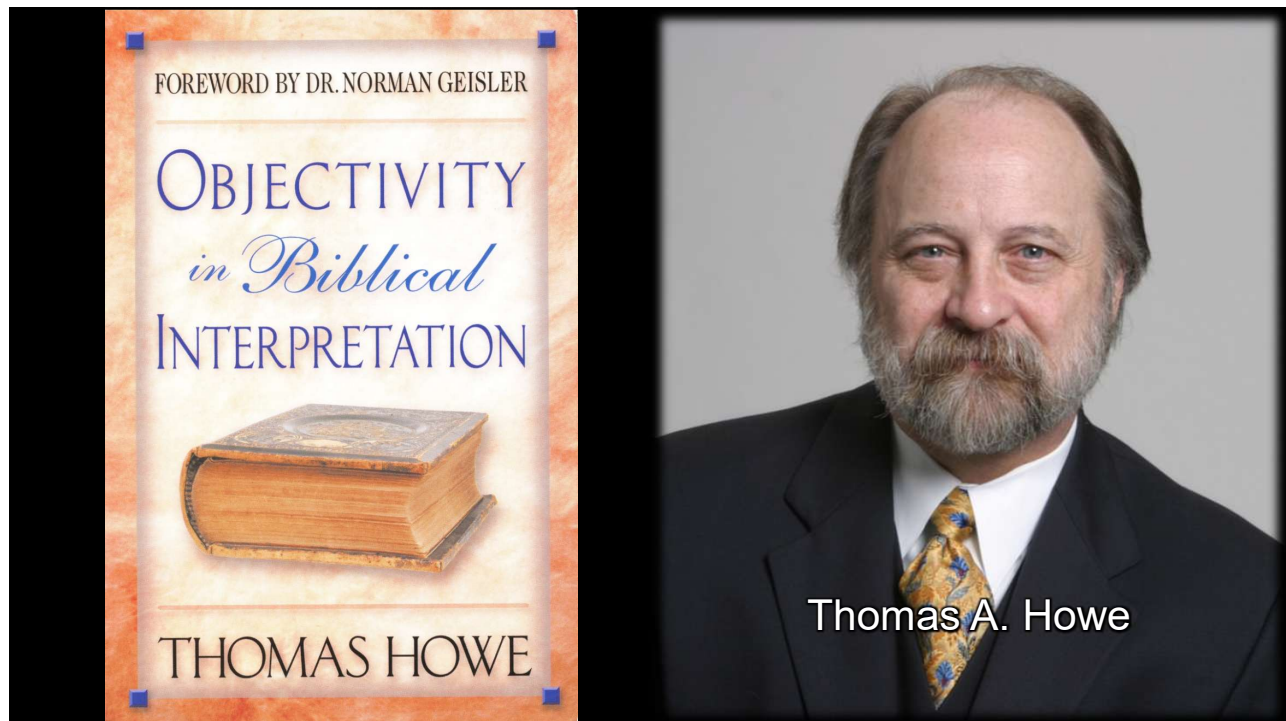
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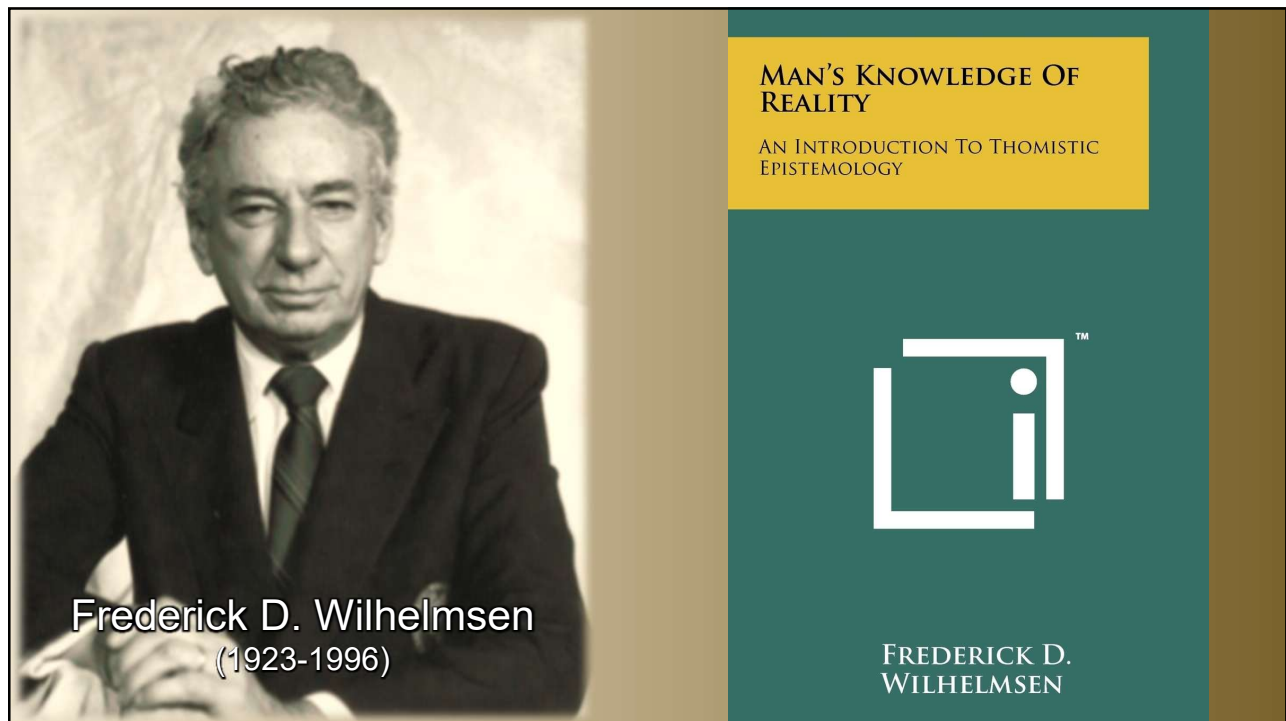
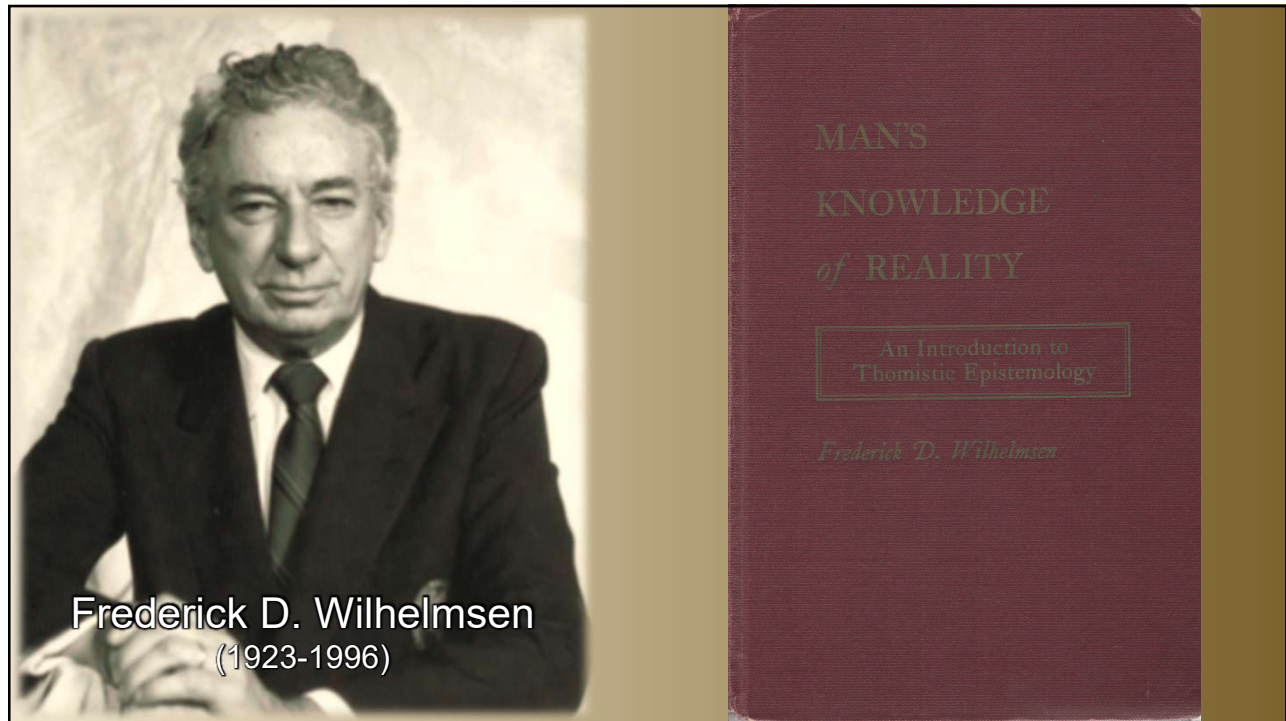
For example, ask questions such as:
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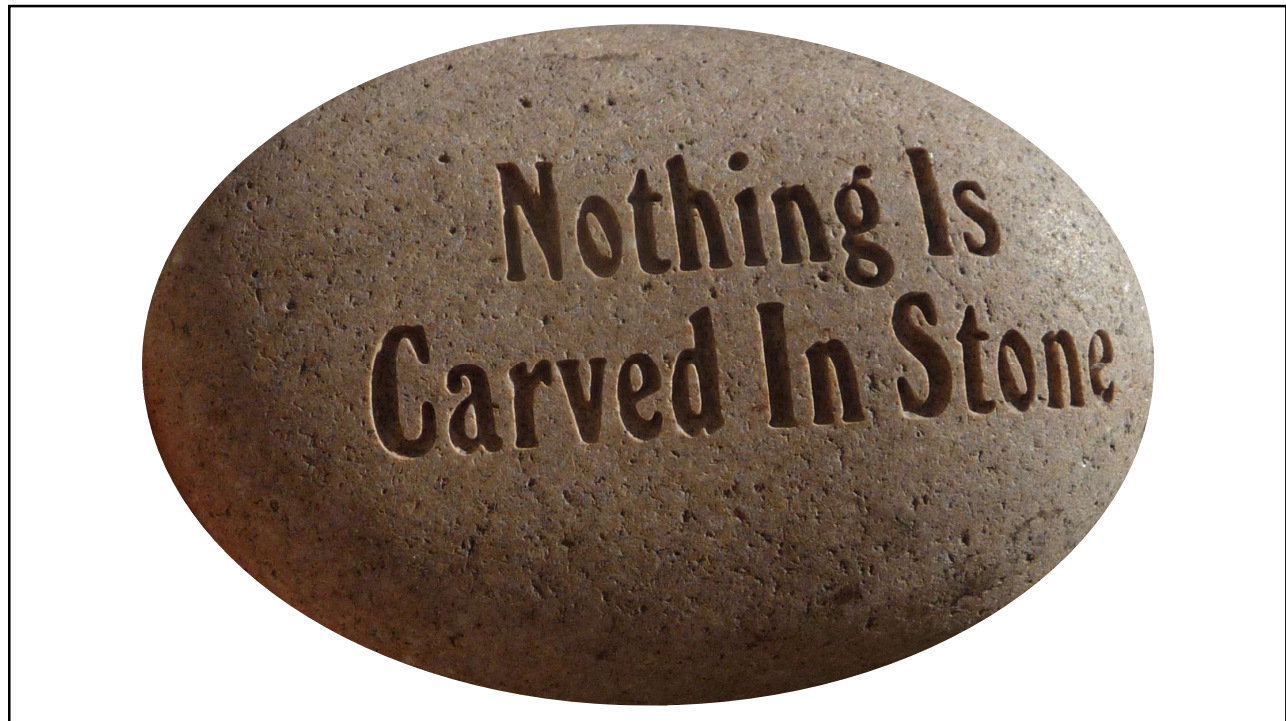
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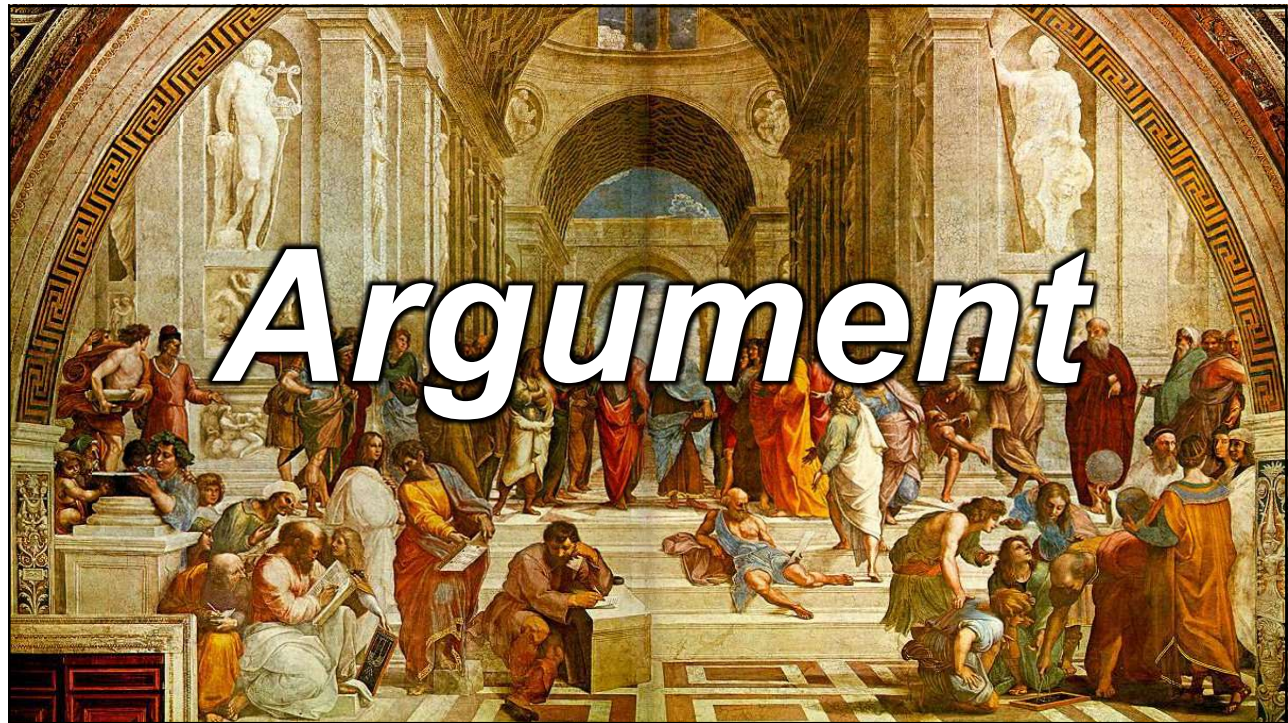
How do I eliminate my fears?
How can I create the life I want?
Is it really possible to have a better world?



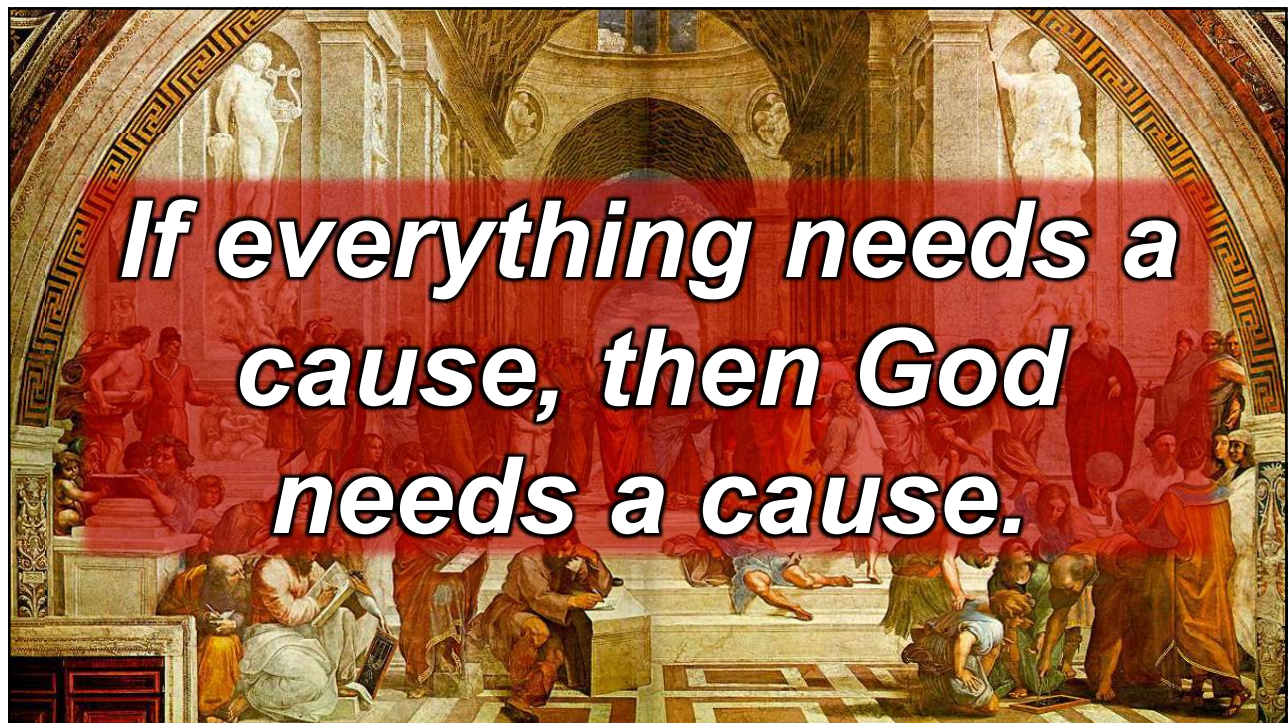
Thomas A. Howe



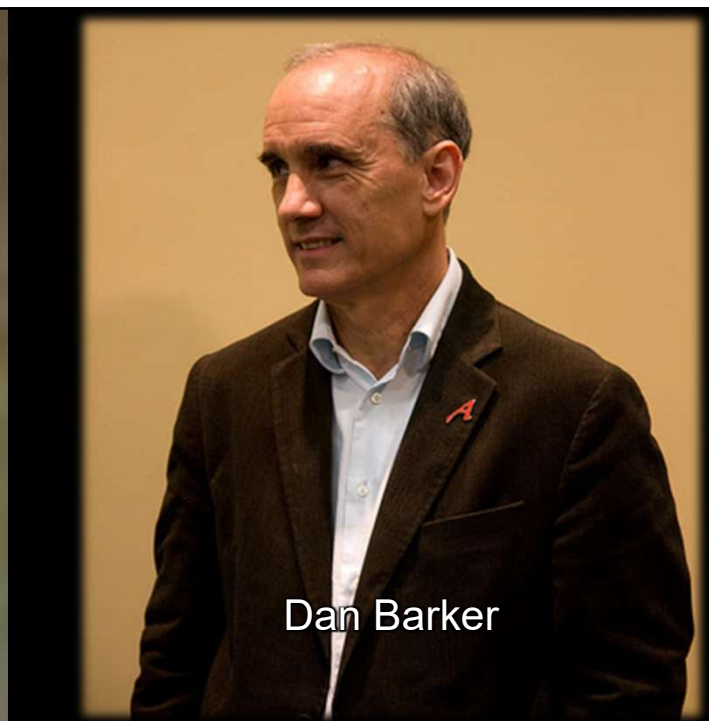
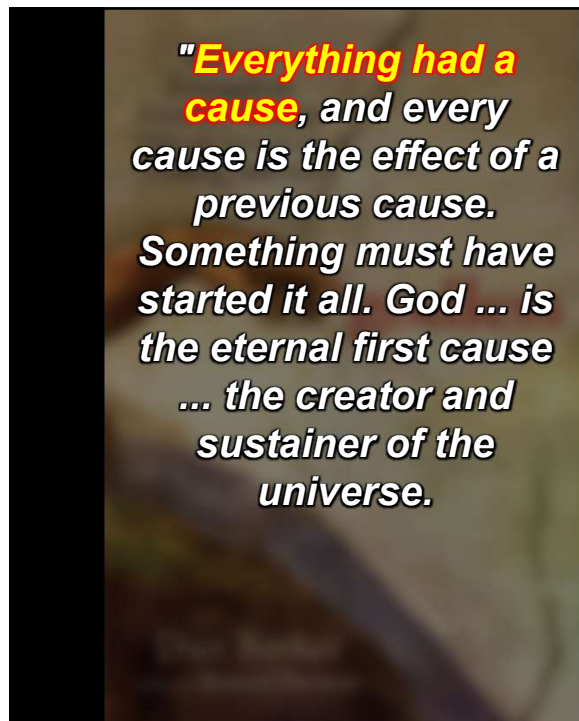
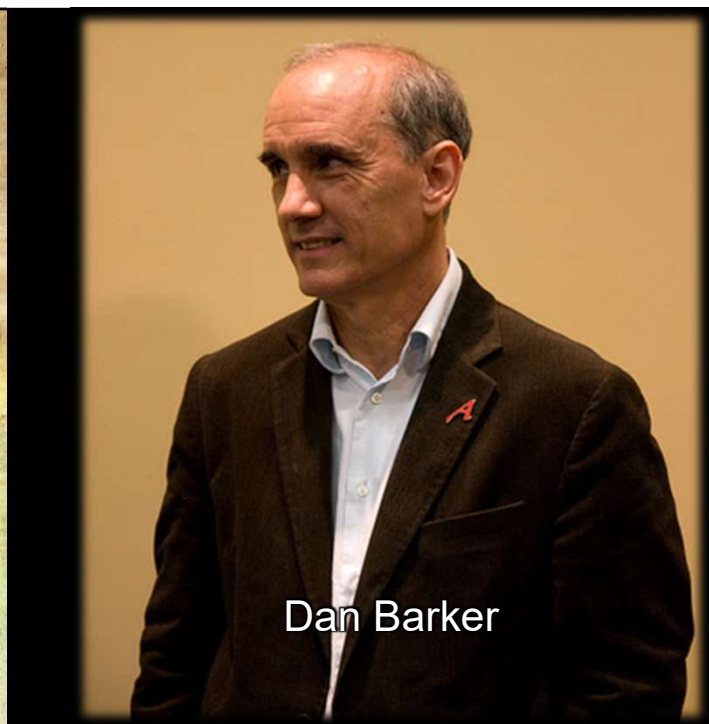
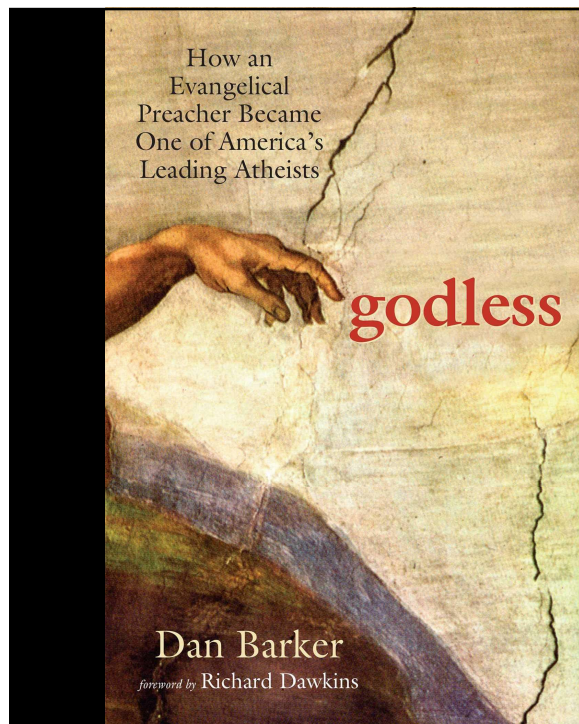




Argument

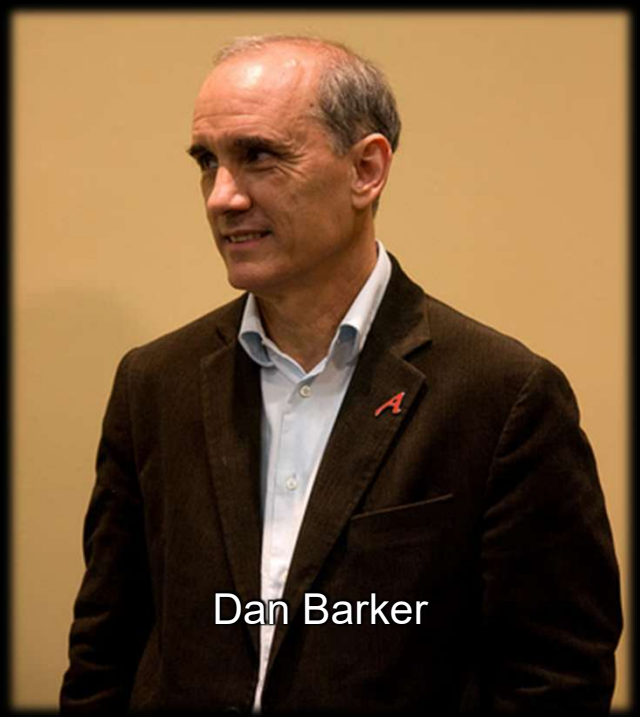


***If everything needs a
cause, then God
needs a cause.***



"The major premise of this argument 'everything had a cause,' is contradicted by the conclusion that 'God did not have a cause.' You can't have it both ways. If everything had to have a cause, then there could not be a first cause."

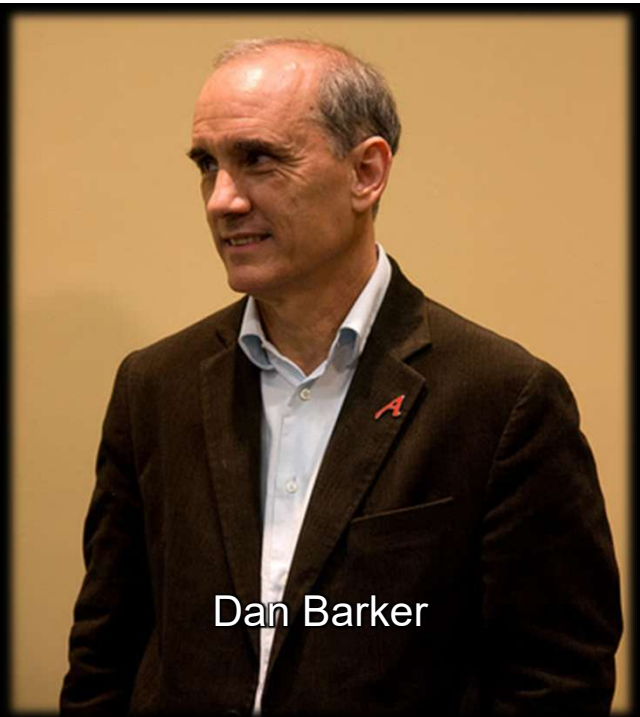
[Dan Barker, *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists* (Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 2008), 113-114]



Dan Barker

"The old cosmological argument claimed that since everything has a cause, there must be a first cause, an 'unmoved first mover.' Today no theistic philosophers defend that primitive line because if everything needs a cause, so does God."

[Dan Barker, *Godless*, 130]



Dan Barker



Gordon Stein
(1941-1996)

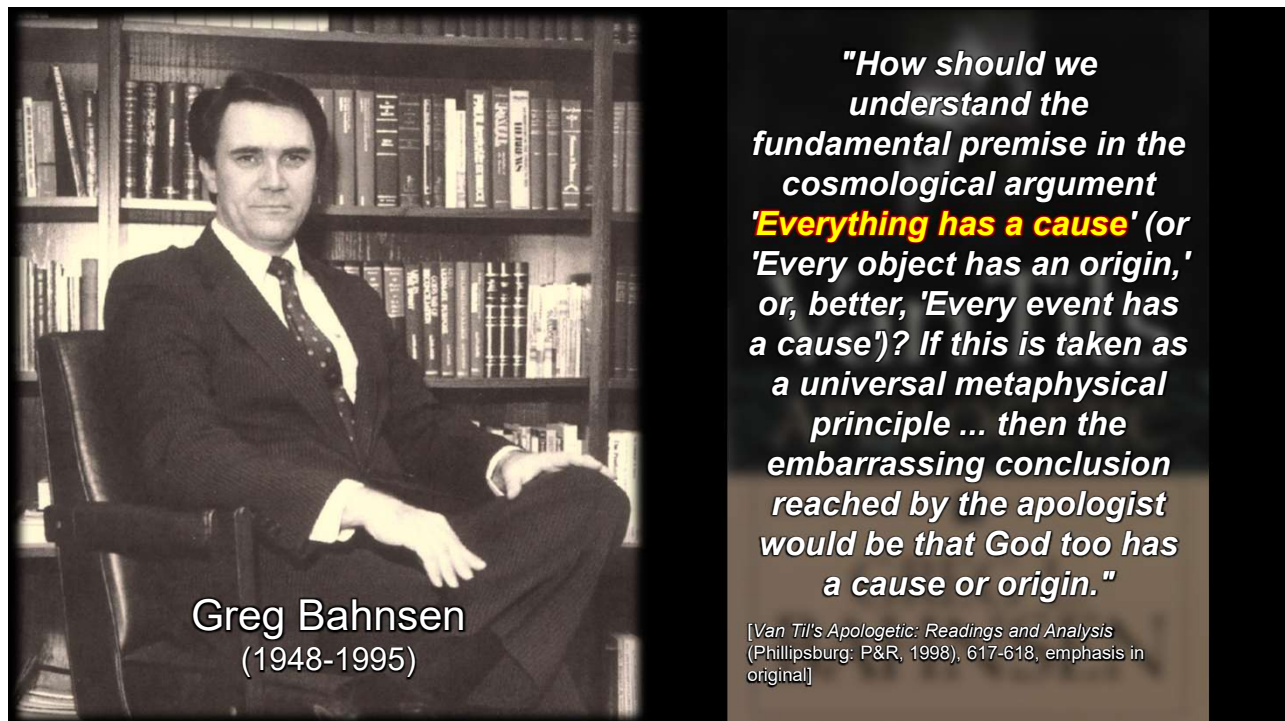
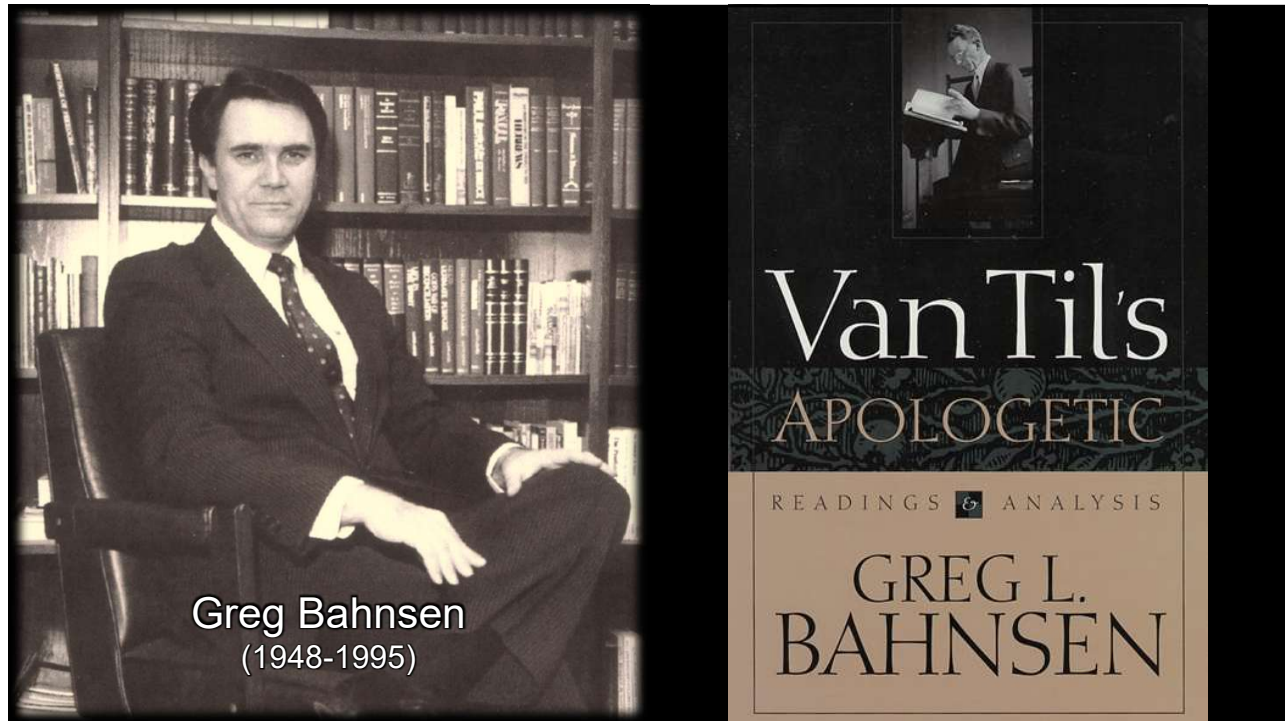
*"I want to quickly go over some of the eleven major proofs. They have been 900 years in the formulation, and during this 900 years, this is what people have basically come up with. ... **Everything must have a cause**, therefore the universe must have a cause, and that cause was God. God was the first or uncaused cause. ... This leads to a real logical bind for the theist, because, **if everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause.**"*

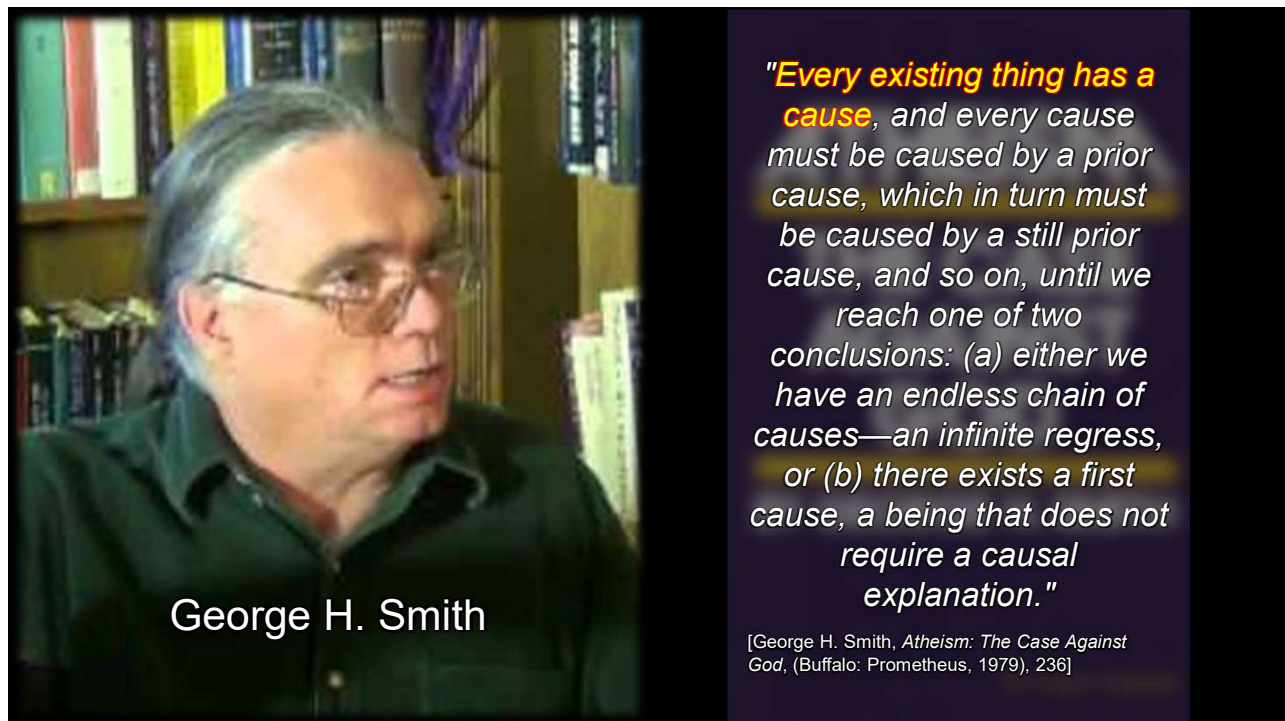
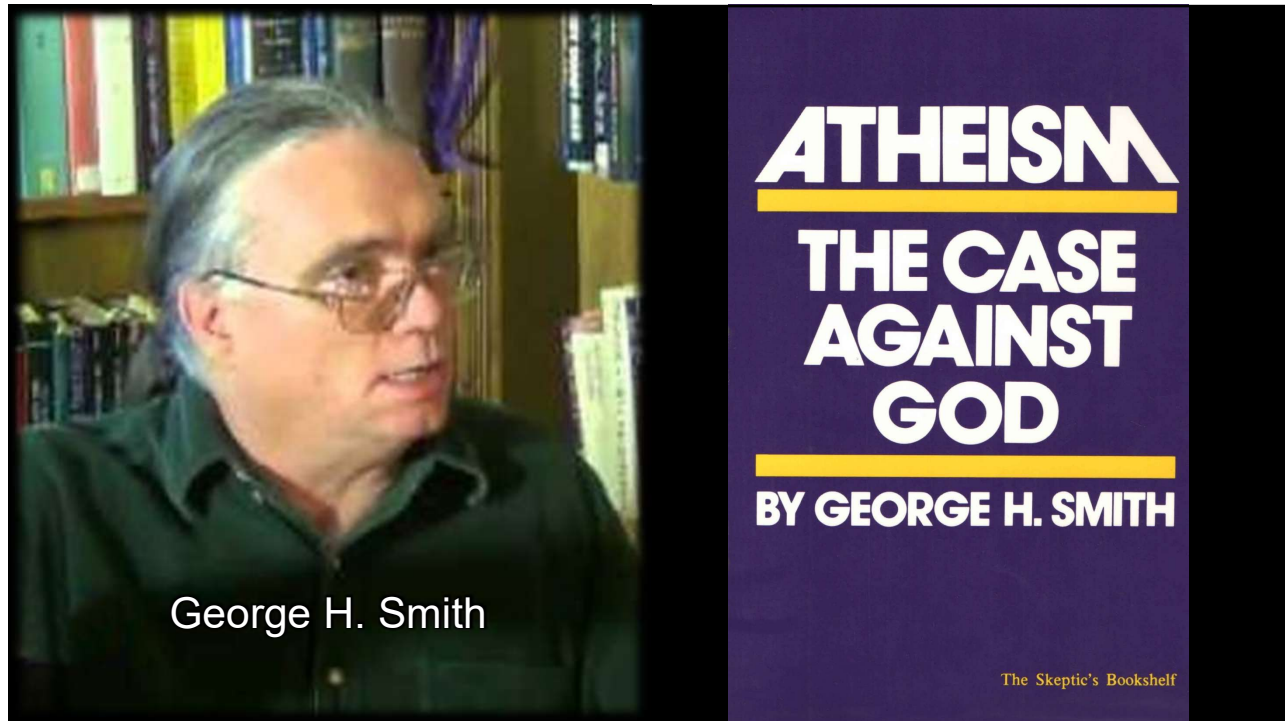


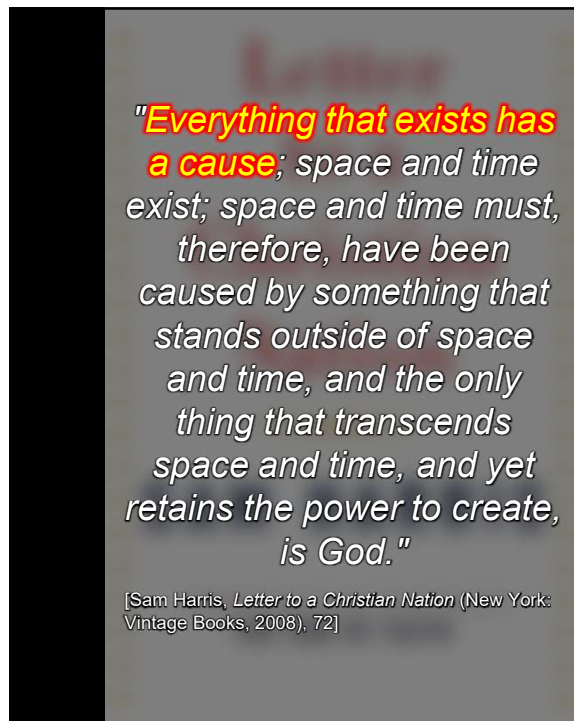
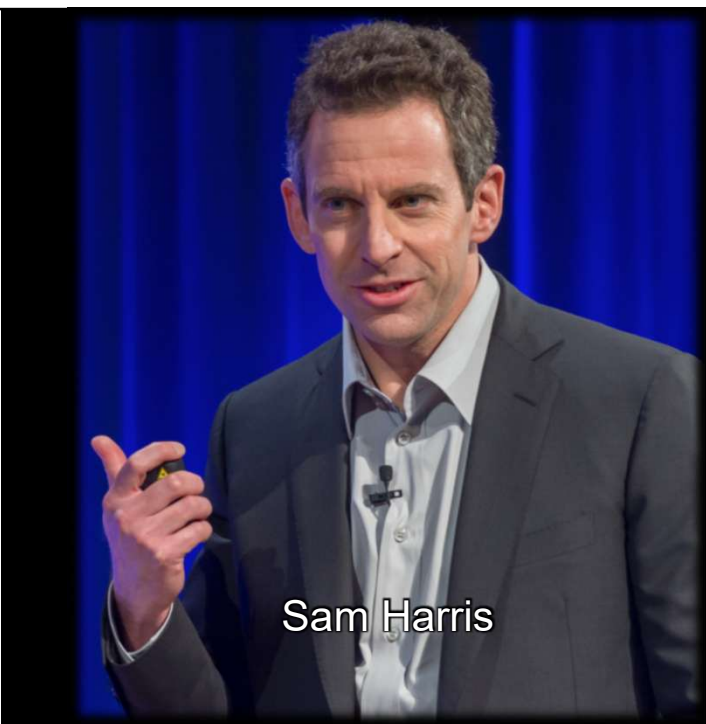
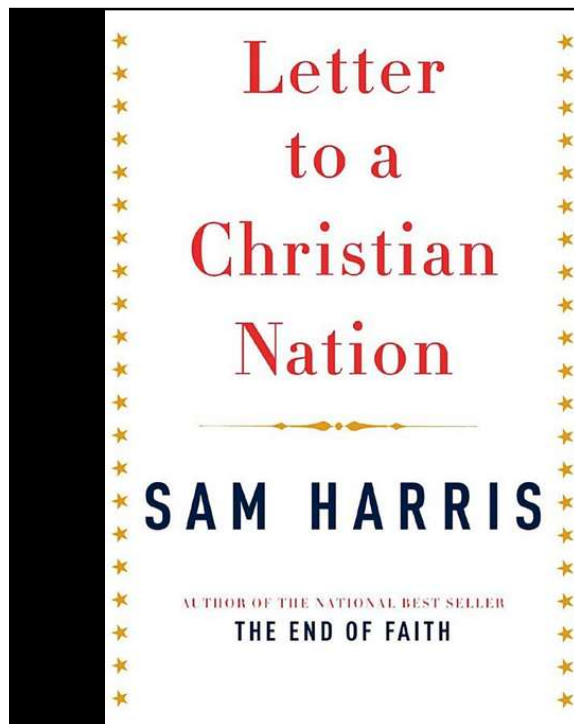
Gordon Stein
(1941-1996)

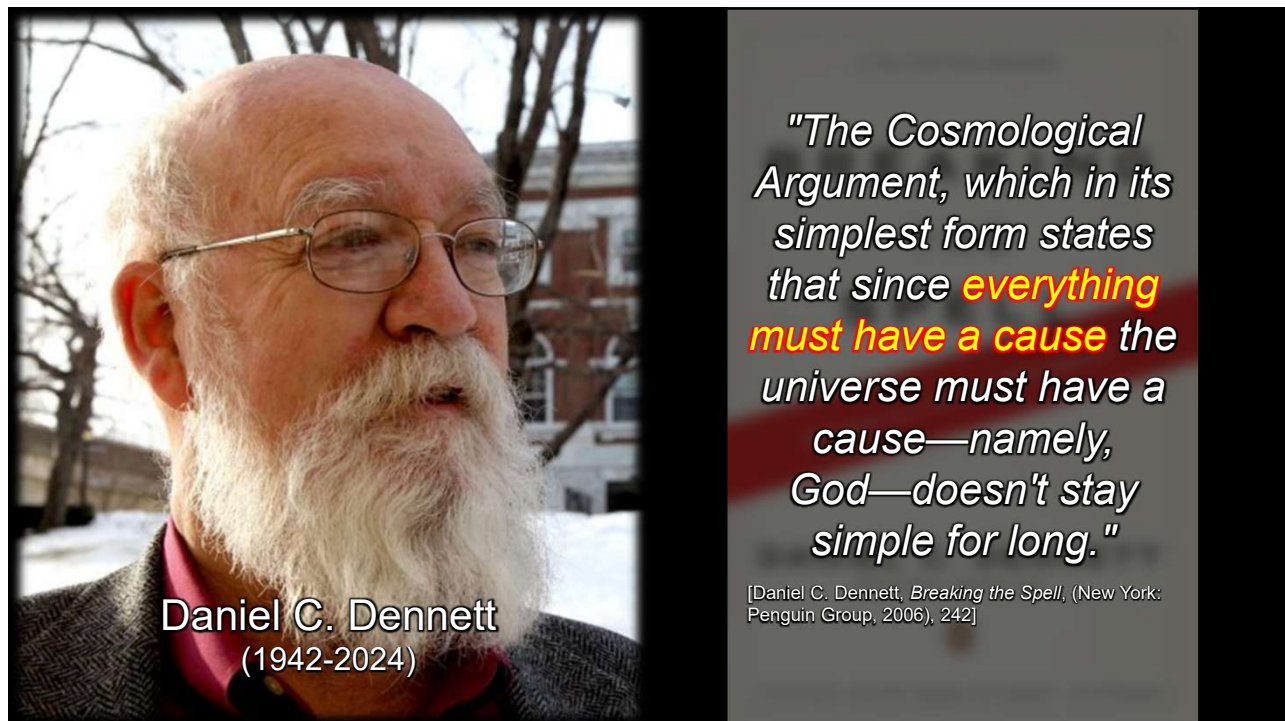
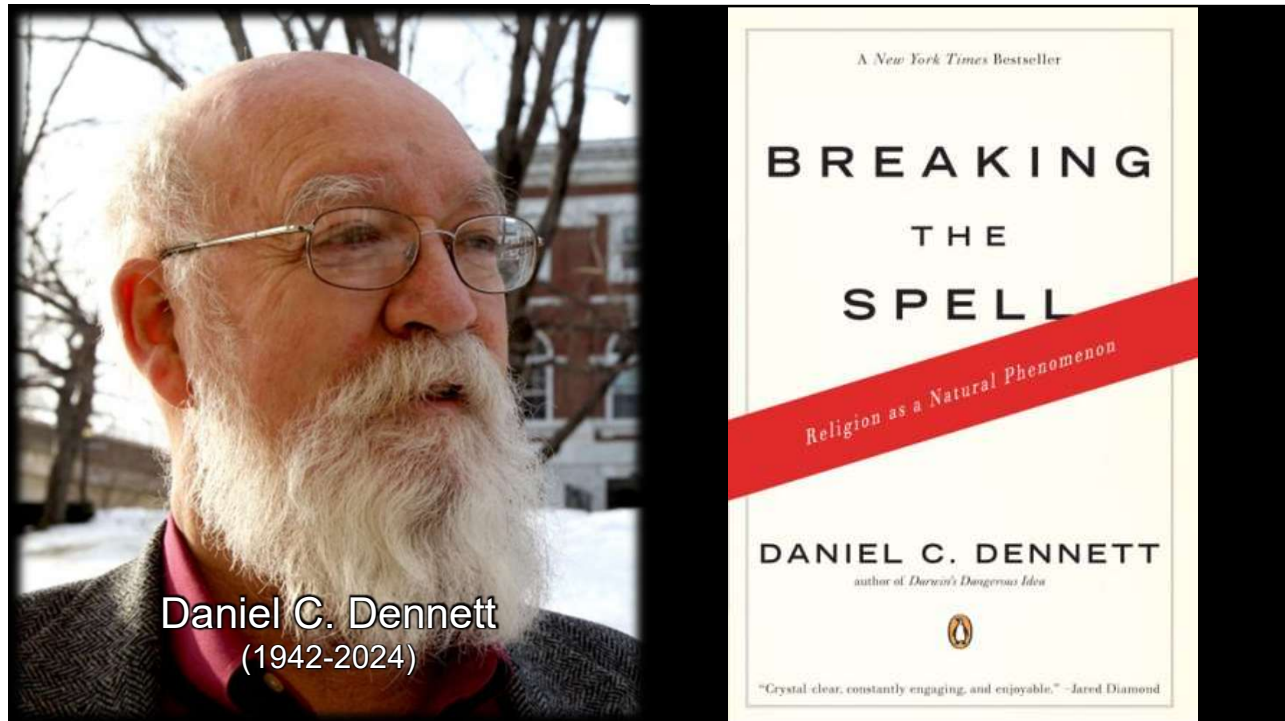
"If God had a cause, he cannot be the first or uncaused cause. If God did not have a cause, then not everything must have a cause. If not everything needs a cause, then perhaps the universe doesn't need a cause. Thus, there is a logical bind and the proof fails."

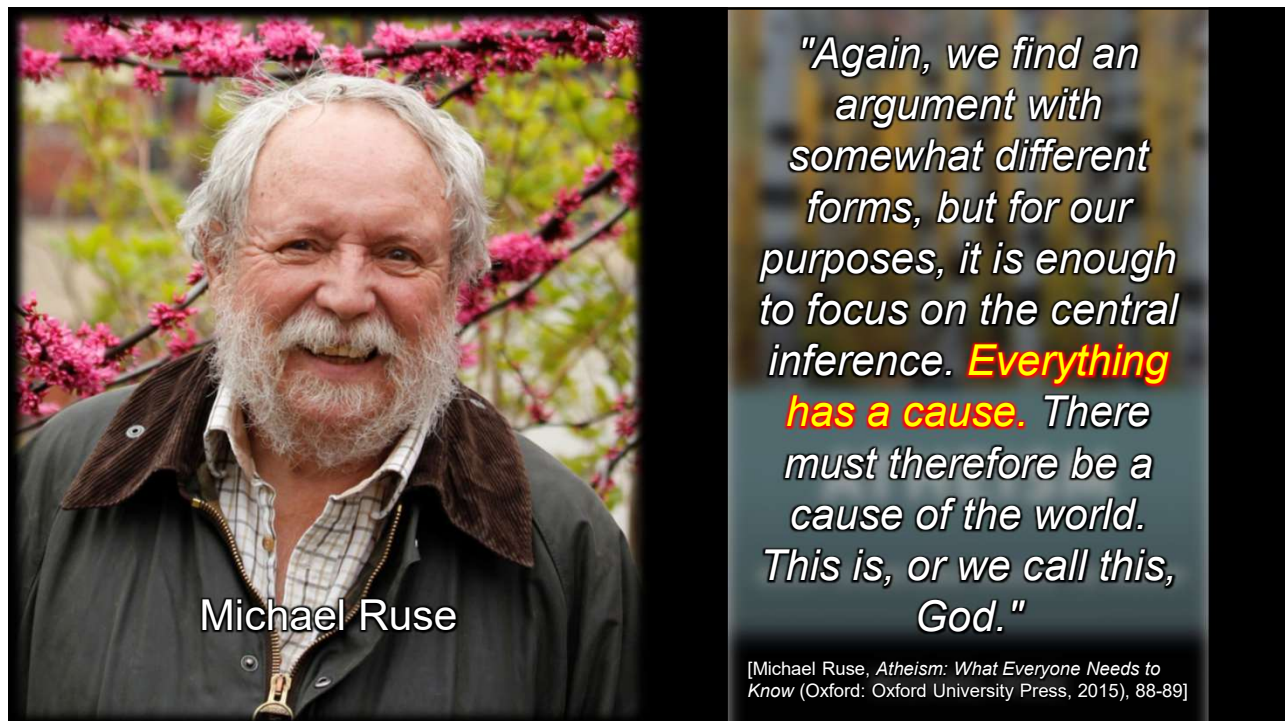
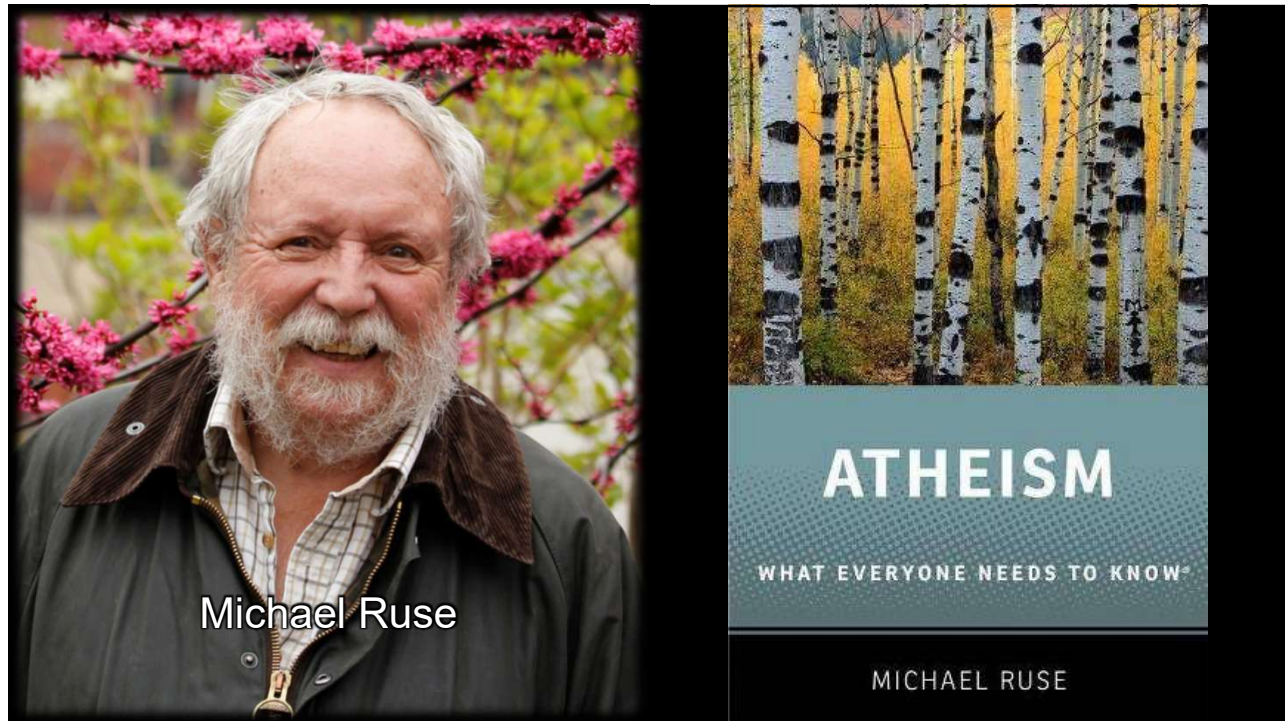
[The Great Debate: Does God Exist? Greg L. Bahnsen and Gordon Stein, University of California, Irvine, 1985]

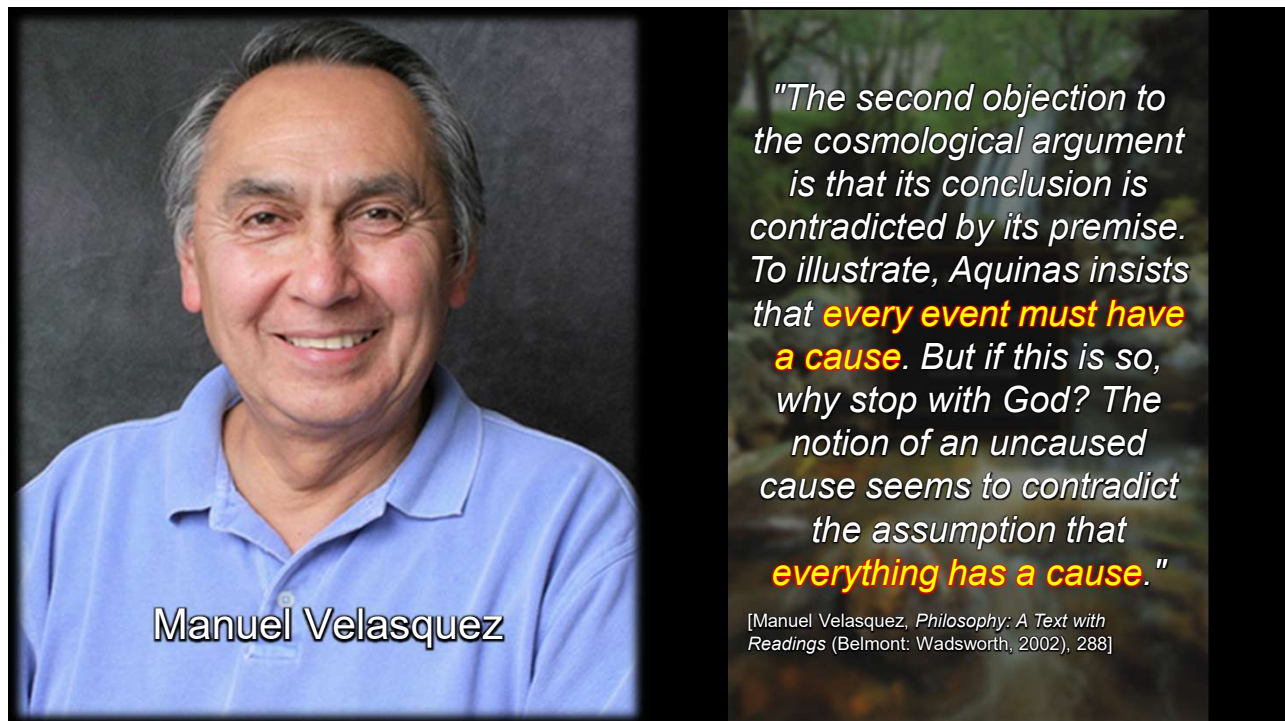
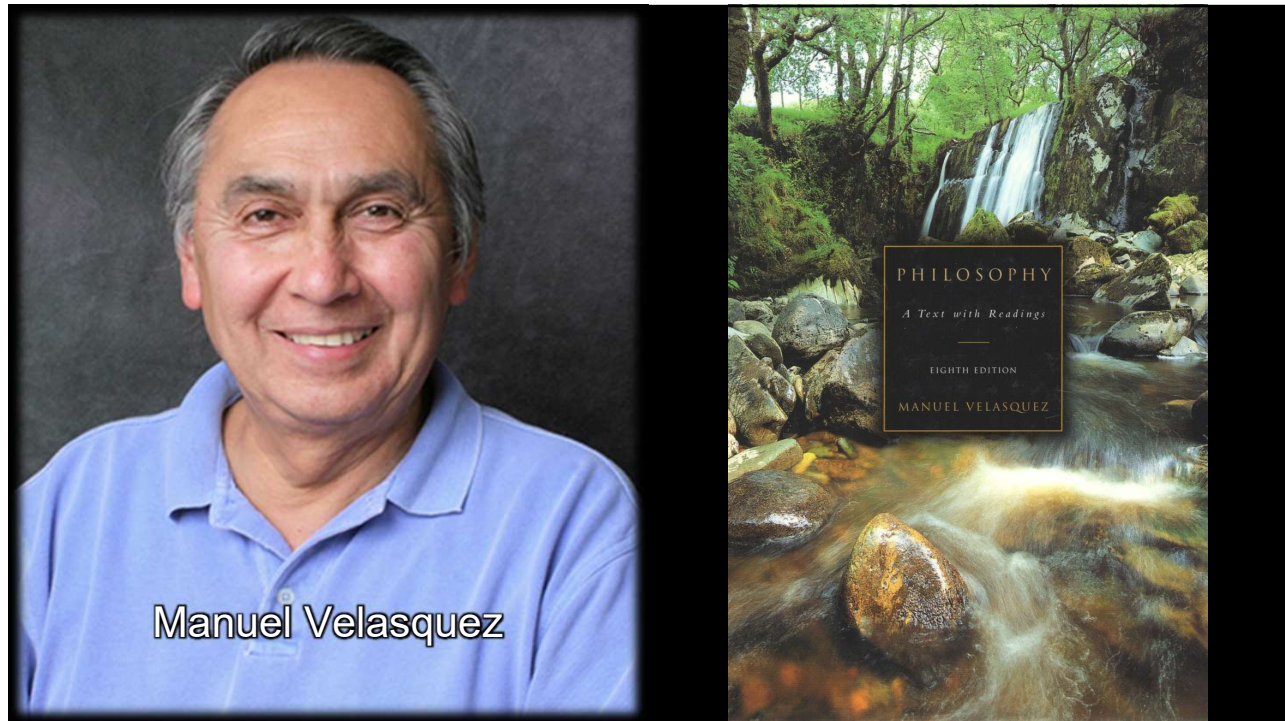












First, even if Aquinas argued that "every event must have a cause," God is not an event.

Second, notice in his misconstruing of Aquinas's argument, he illicitly shifts from "every event" to "everything." Even if one argued that every event must have a cause, this is not equivalent to saying that everything has a cause.

"The second objection to the cosmological argument is that its conclusion is contradicted by its premise. To illustrate, Aquinas insists that **every event must have a cause**. But if this is so, why stop with God? The notion of an uncaused cause seems to contradict the assumption that **everything has a cause**."

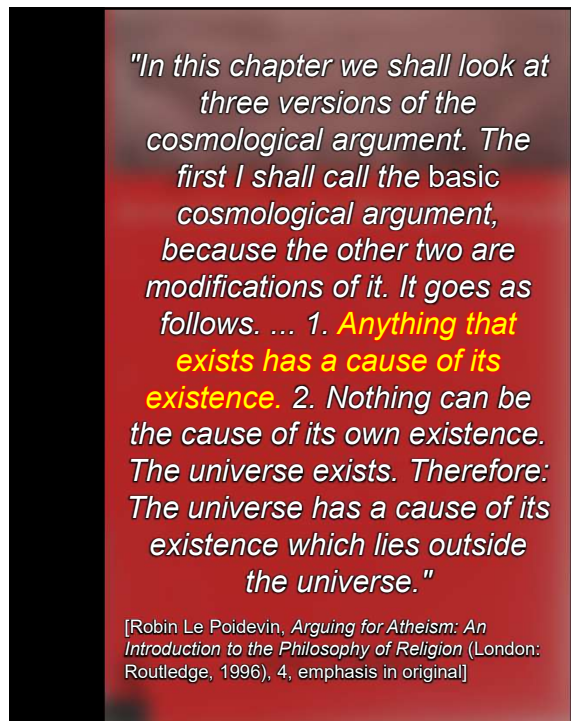
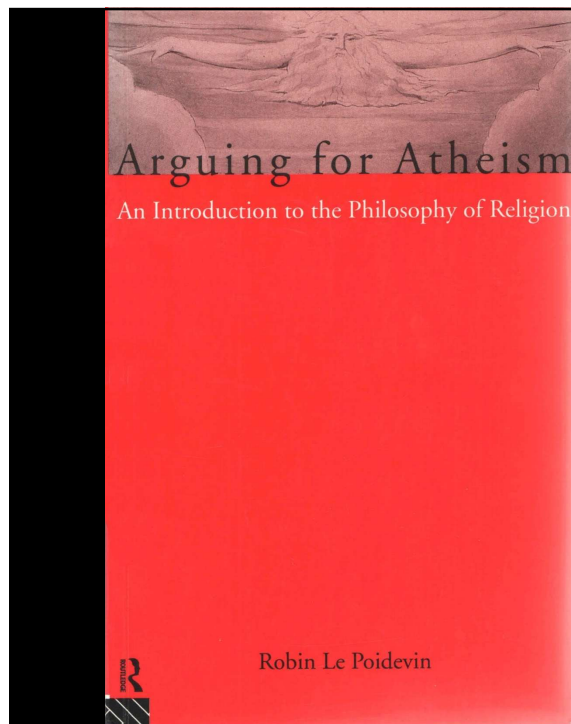
[Manuel Velasquez, *Philosophy: A Text with Readings* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2002), 288]

Third, in any event, Aquinas is not merely arguing that every event must have a cause. Rather, he is arguing that every "thing" in the sensible world has a cause.

What is more, Aquinas is not arguing that every thing in the sensible world has a cause of its "coming into being." Rather he is arguing that every thing in the sensible world has a current cause of its "existing."

"The second objection to the cosmological argument is that its conclusion is contradicted by its premise. To illustrate, Aquinas insists that **every event must have a cause**. But if this is so, why stop with God? The notion of an uncaused cause seems to contradict the assumption that **everything has a cause**."

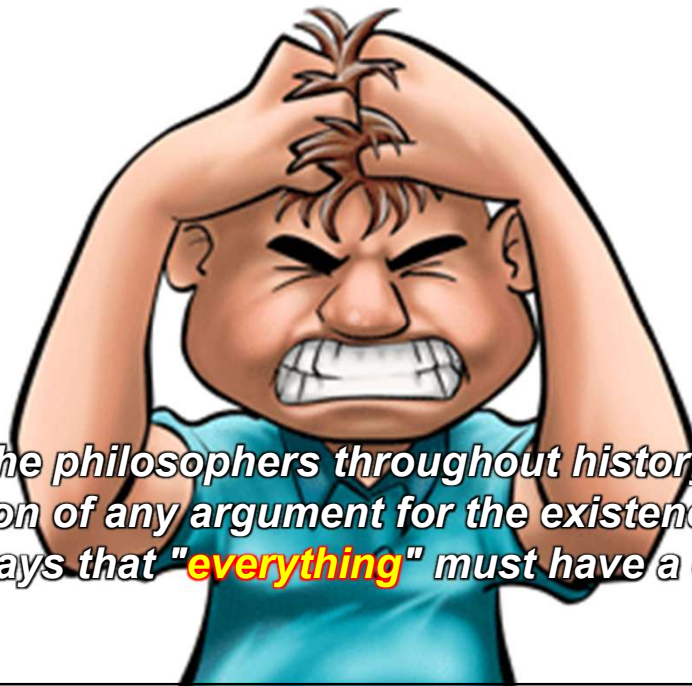
[Manuel Velasquez, *Philosophy: A Text with Readings* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2002), 288]



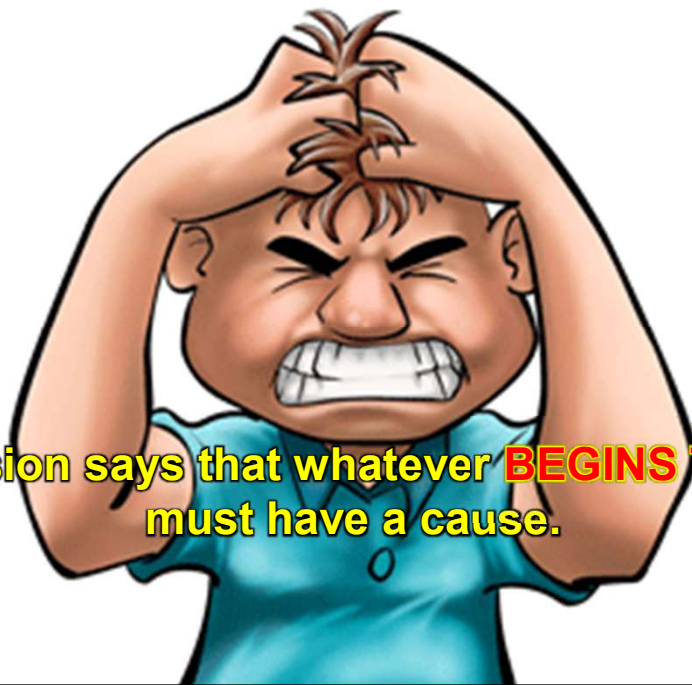
"Although no one has defended a cosmological argument of precisely this form, it provides a useful stepping-stone to the other, more sophisticated versions."

[Robin Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Routledge, 1996), 4]

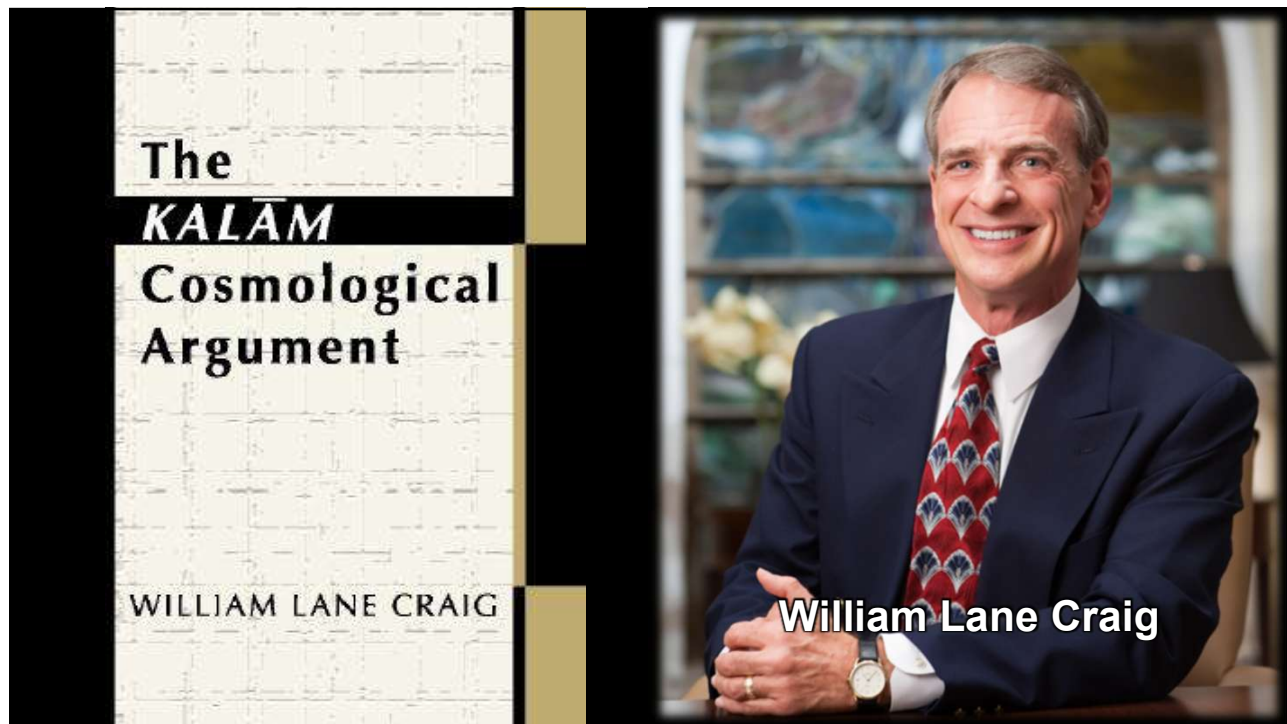




*Among the philosophers throughout history, there is no version of any argument for the existence of God that says that **"everything"** must have a cause!*



One version says that whatever **BEGINS TO EXIST must have a cause.**





"No respectable theologian or theistic philosopher has ever made the claim, 'everything has a cause.' Yet various new atheists have proceeded to attack that straw man of their own making."



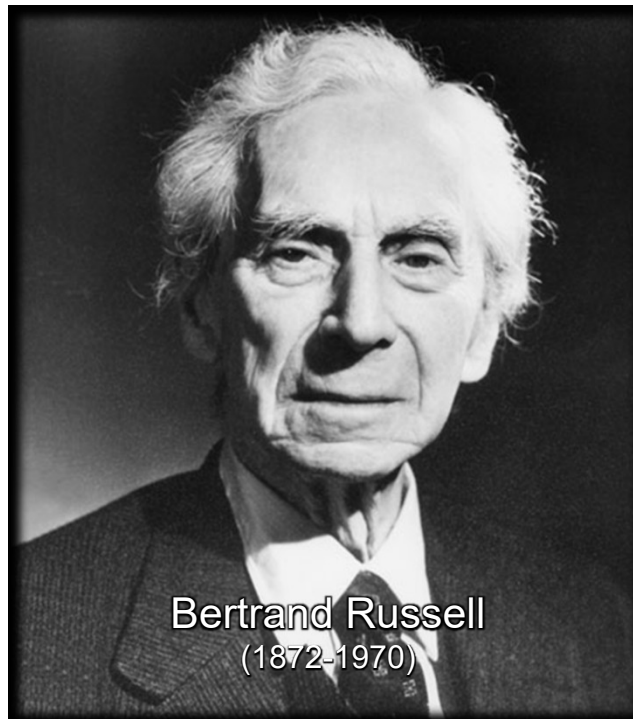
Jeffery Jay Lowder

*"I remember, when reading The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins, where he attacked that straw man and cringing. There are many different cosmological arguments for God's existence and **none of them rely upon the stupid claim, 'everything has a cause.'**"*

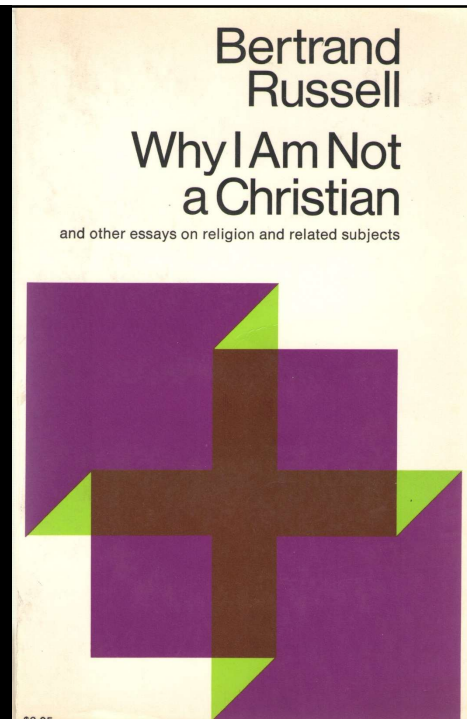
[<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/secularoutpost/2014/02/17/feser-insults-readers-of-www-infidels-org/#comment-1248907824>, accessed 02/06/21. This article evidently has been removed from Patheos.]

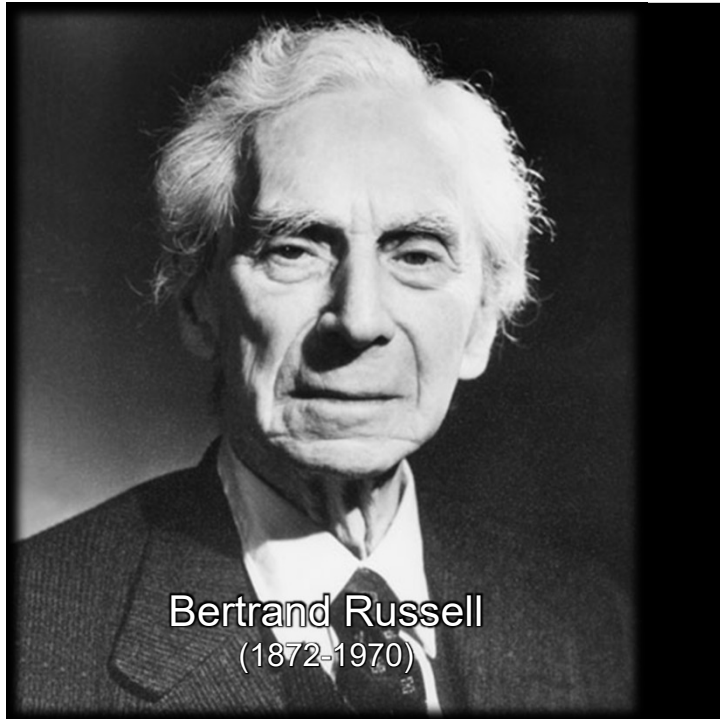


Jeffery Jay Lowder



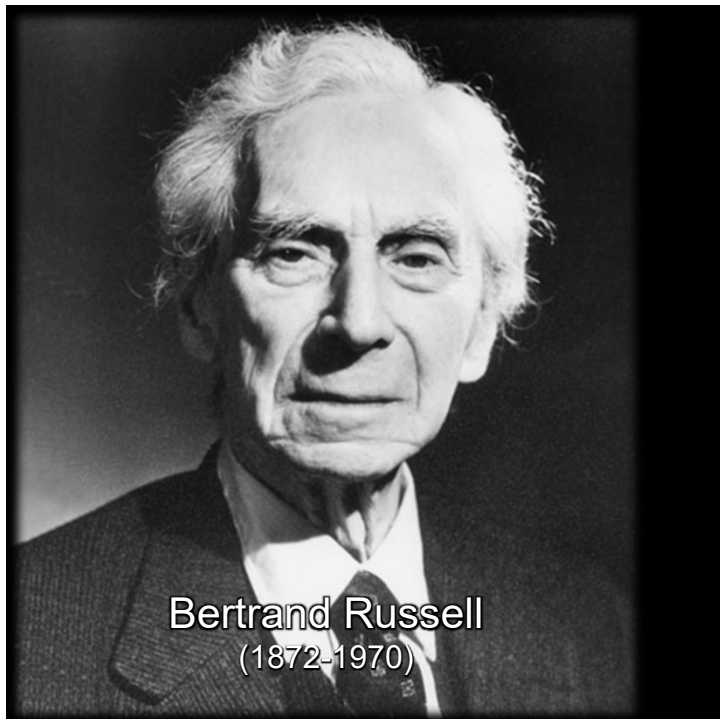
Bertrand Russell
(1872-1970)





Bertrand Russell
(1872-1970)

"Perhaps the simplest and easiest to understand is the argument of the First Cause. (It is maintained that everything we see in this world has a cause, and as you go back in the chain of causes further and further you must come to a First Cause, and to that First Cause you give the name of God.) ..."

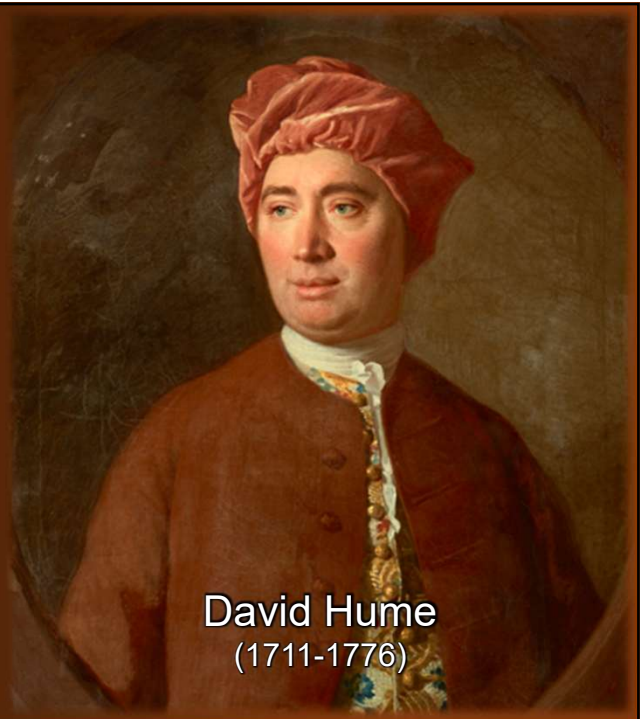


Bertrand Russell
(1872-1970)

*"That very simple sentence showed me, as I still think; the fallacy in the argument of the First Cause. **If everything must have a cause, then God must have a cause.**"*

[Bertrand Russell, *Why I Am Not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), 6-7]

***These atheists
are perhaps
taking their cue
from the famous
Scottish
philosopher
David Hume.***

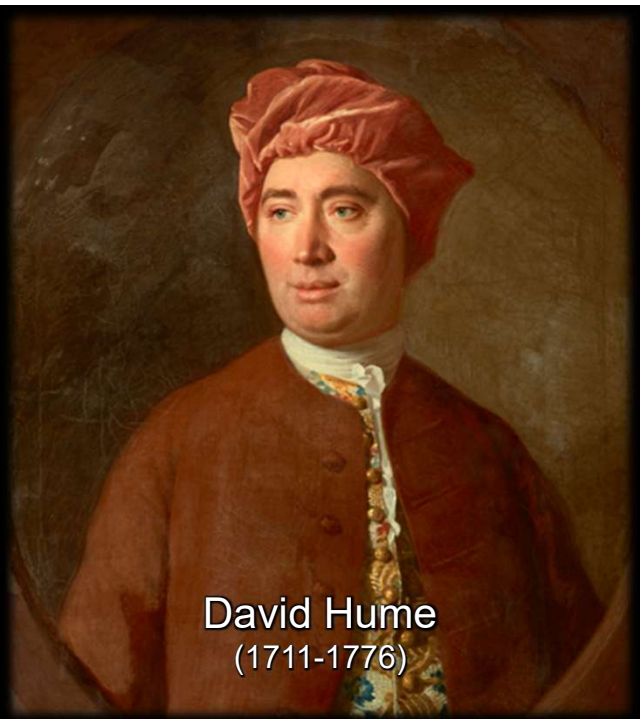


David Hume
(1711-1776)

DIALOGUES
CONCERNING
NATURAL
RELIGION

DAVID
HUME

GREAT BOOKS IN PHILOSOPHY



David Hume
(1711-1776)

In his *Dialogues
Concerning
Natural Religion*,
Hume comments
through the
mouth of the
interlocutor
Demea,



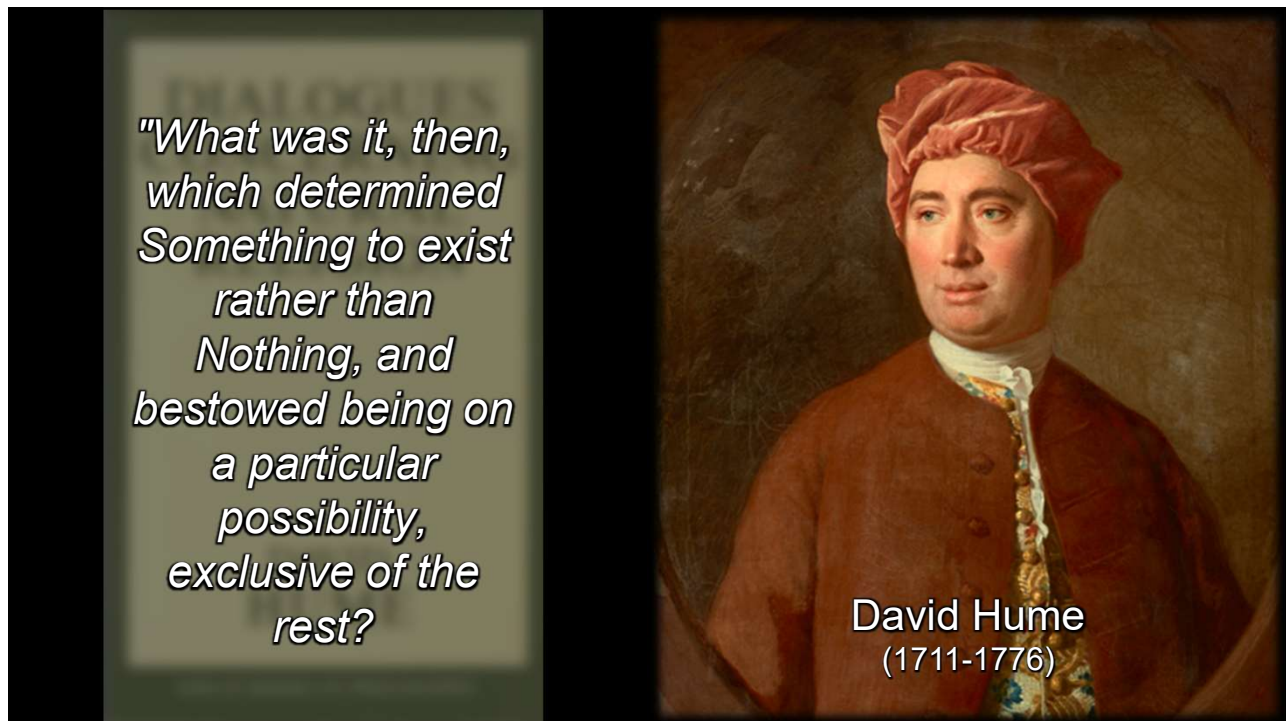
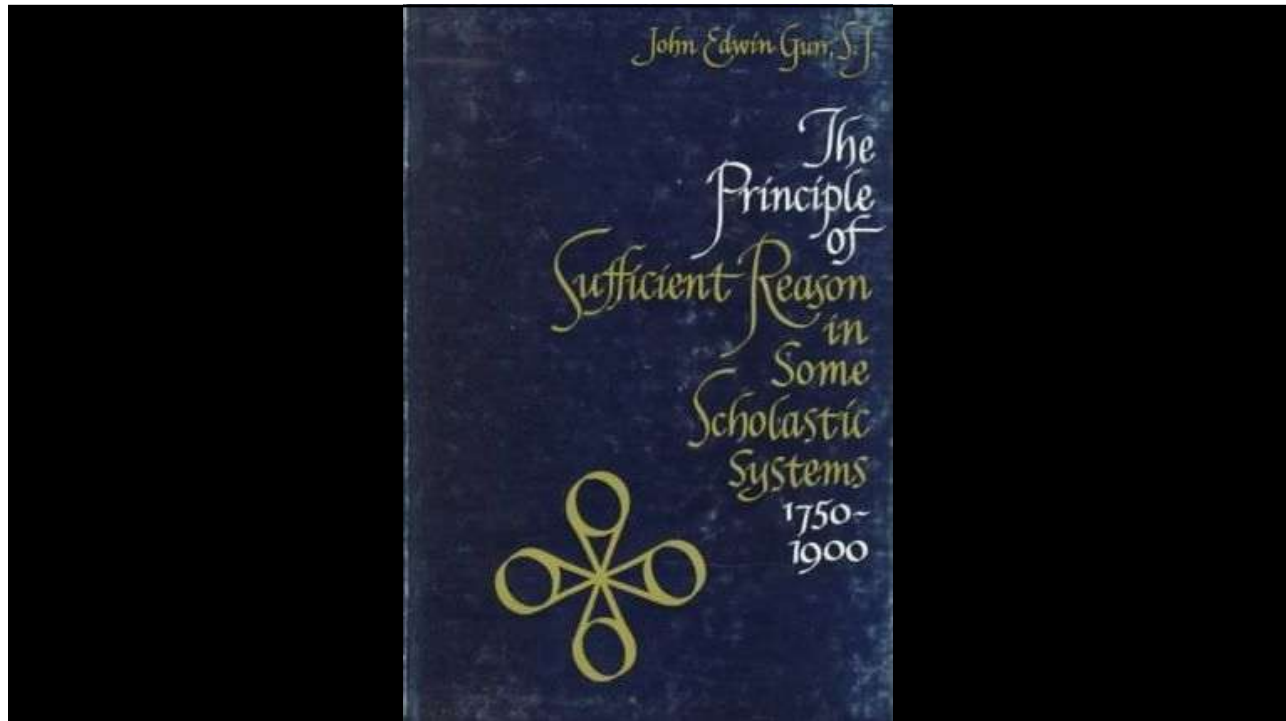
David Hume
(1711-1776)

"Whatever exists
must have a cause
or reason of its
existence; it being
absolutely
impossible for
anything to produce
itself, or be the
cause of its own
existence."

[Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion
(Amherst: Prometheus, 1989), 73]



David Hume
(1711-1776)



*"External causes,
there are supposed
to be none. Chance
is a word without a
meaning. Was it
Nothing? But that
can never produce
any thing."*



David Hume
(1711-1776)

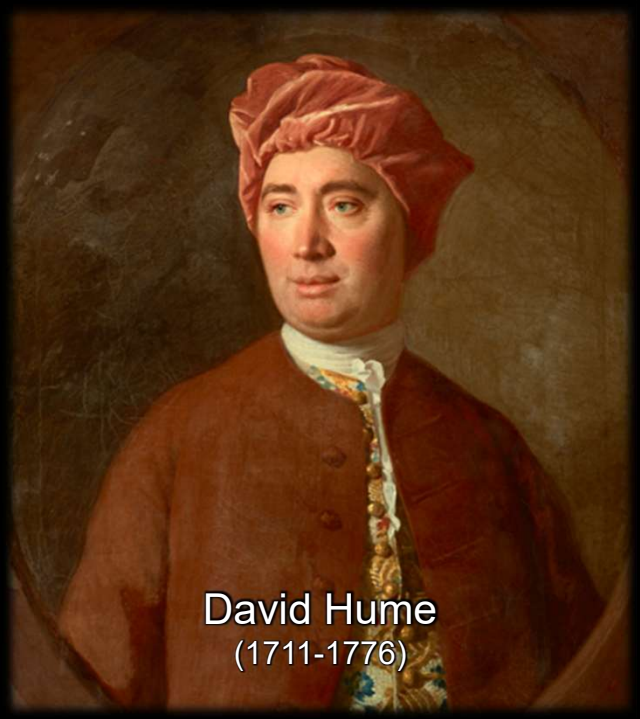
*"We must,
therefore, have
recourse to a
necessarily existent
Being, who carries
the **REASON of his
existence in
himself,**"*



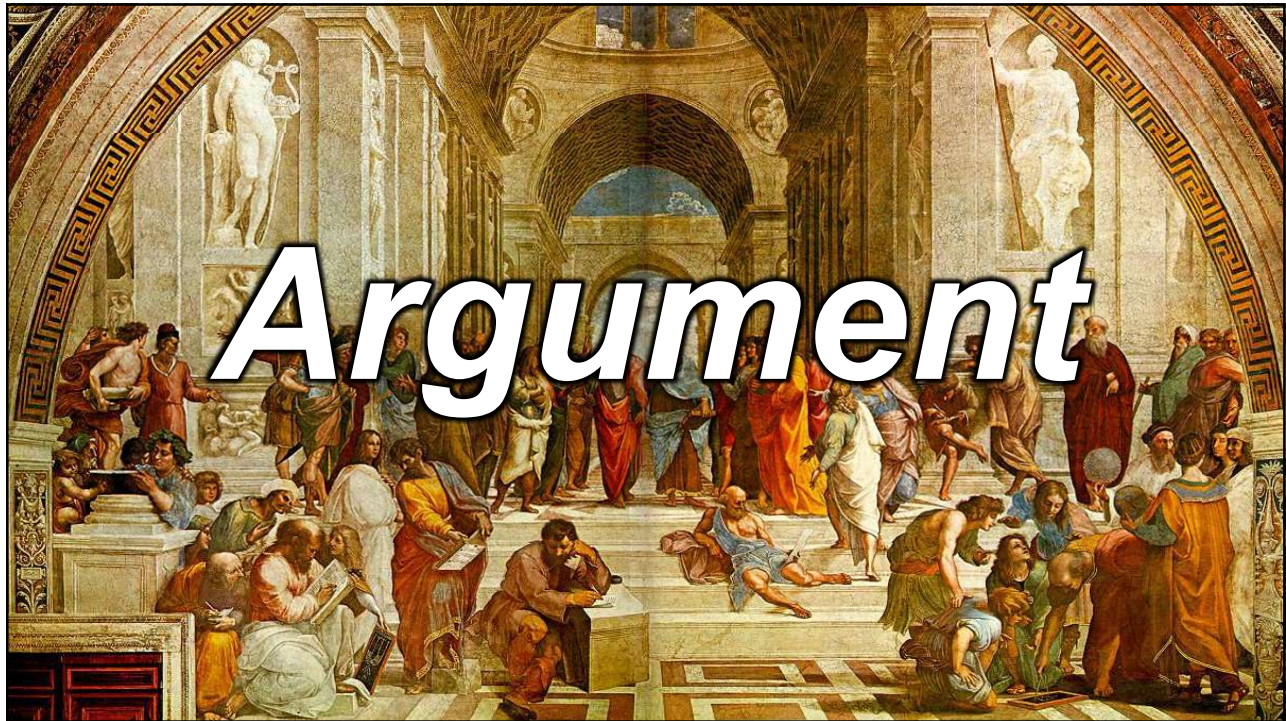
David Hume
(1711-1776)

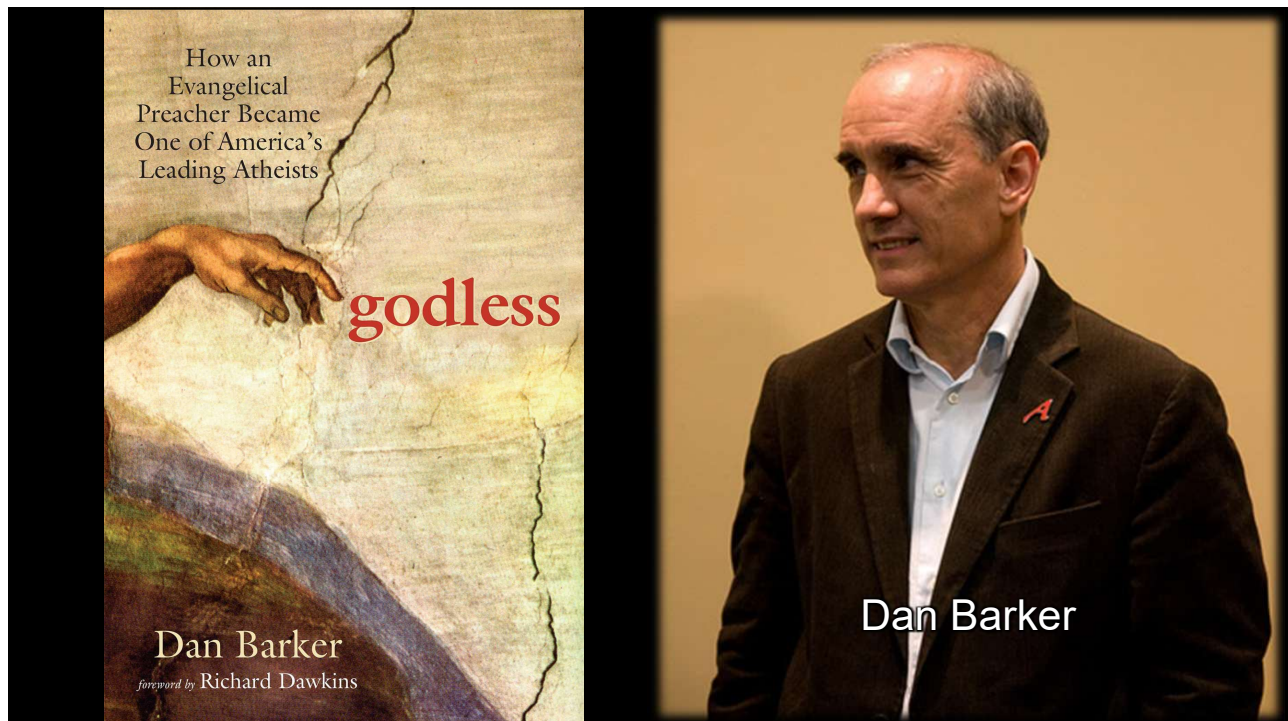
*"and who cannot be
supposed not to
exist, without an
express
contradiction.
There is,
consequently, such
a Being; that is,
there is a Deity."*

[Dialogues, 74]



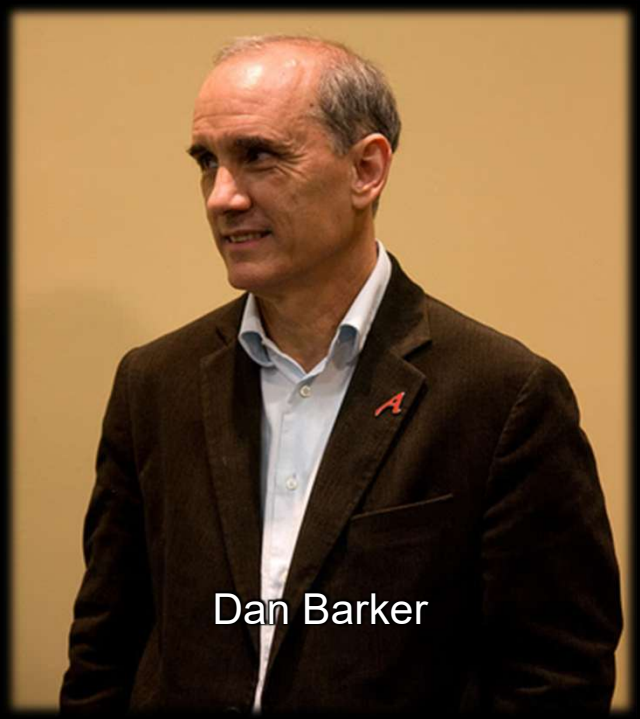
David Hume
(1711-1776)





"The mind of the designer would be at least as complex and orderly as the nature it created and would be subject to the same question: 'Who made god?'"

[Dan Barker, *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists* (Berkeley: Ulysses Press, 2008), 105]

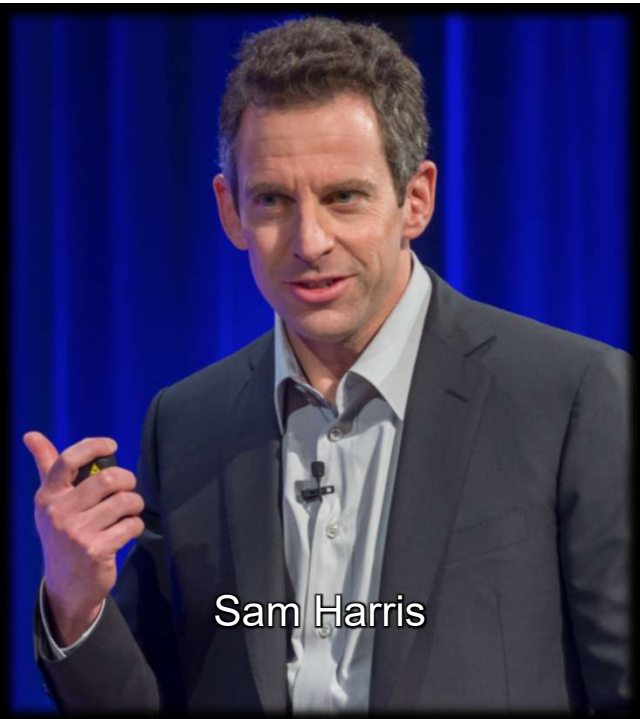


Dan Barker

Letter
to a
Christian
Nation

SAM HARRIS

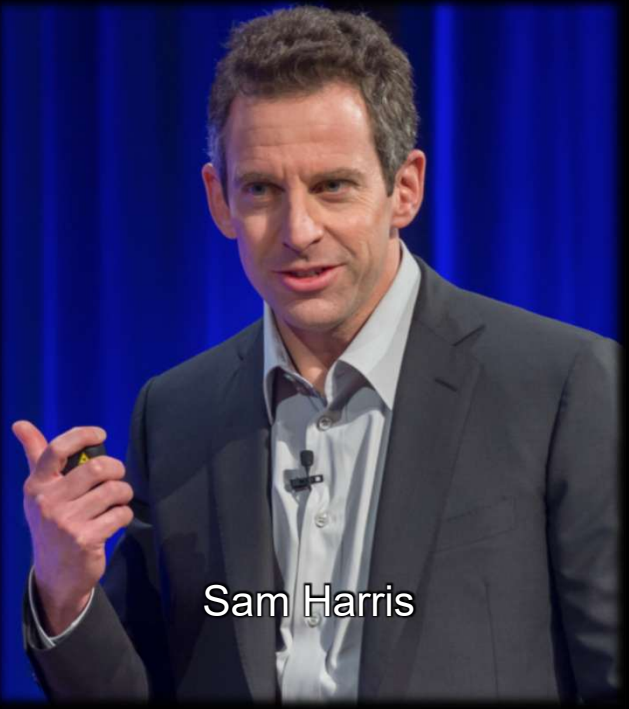
AUTHOR OF THE NATIONAL BEST SELLER
THE END OF FAITH



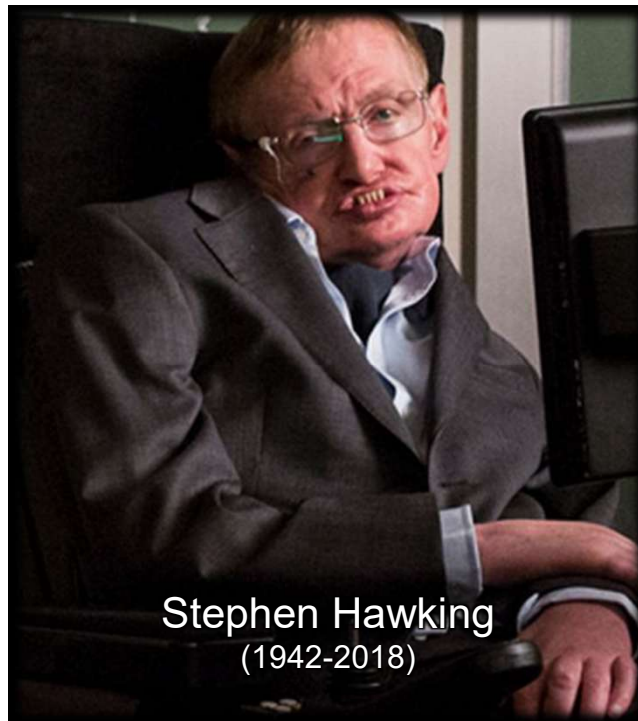
Sam Harris

"If God created the universe, what created God? To say that God, by definition, is uncreated simply begs the question."

[Letter to a Christian Nation, (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 73]



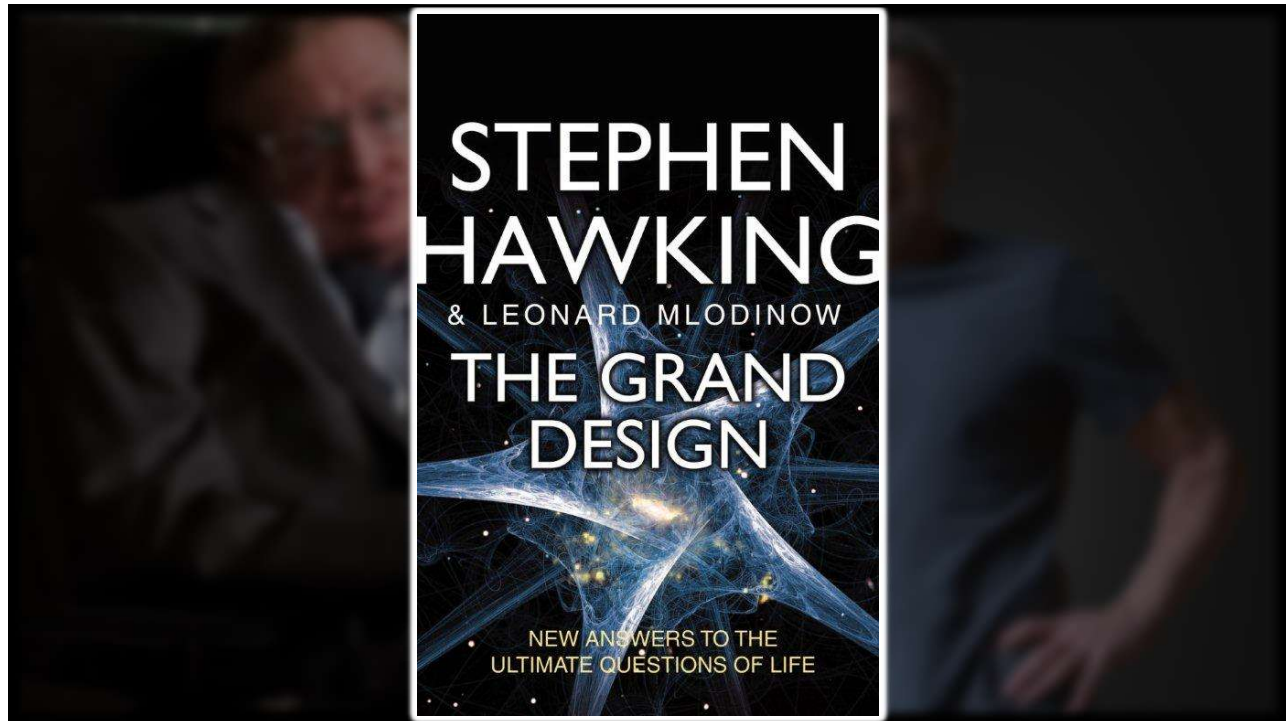
Sam Harris



Stephen Hawking
(1942-2018)

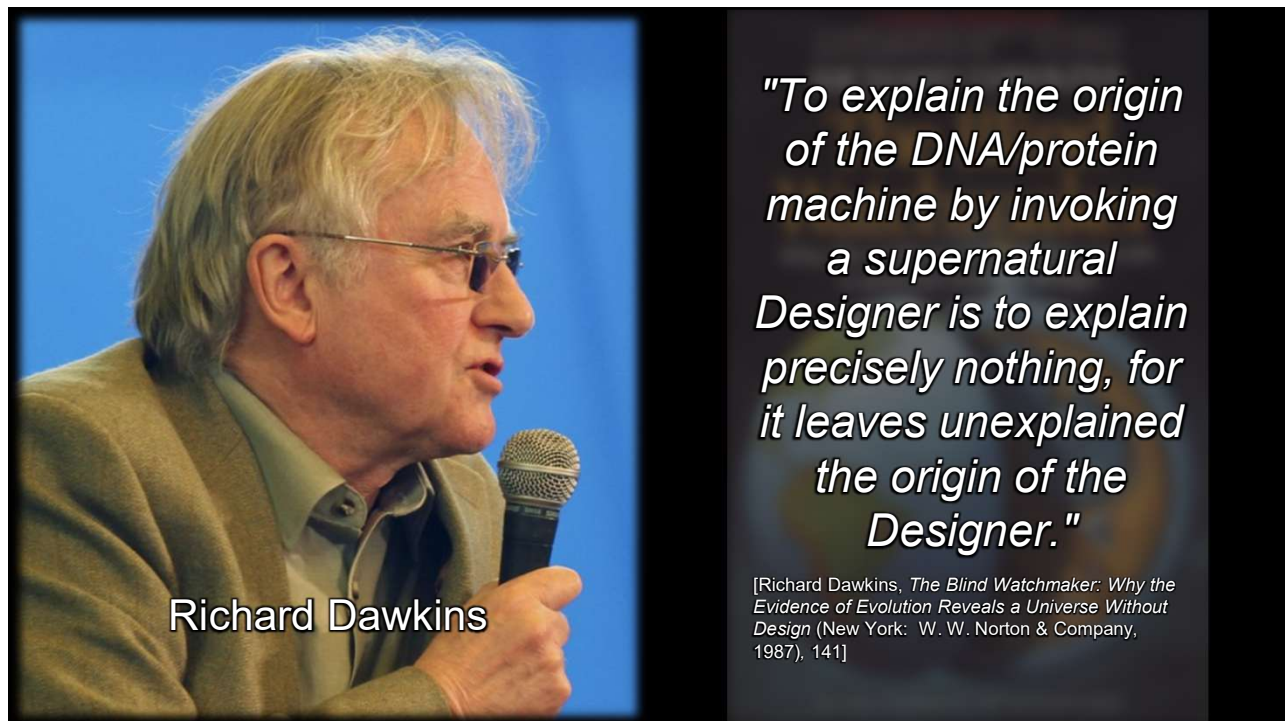
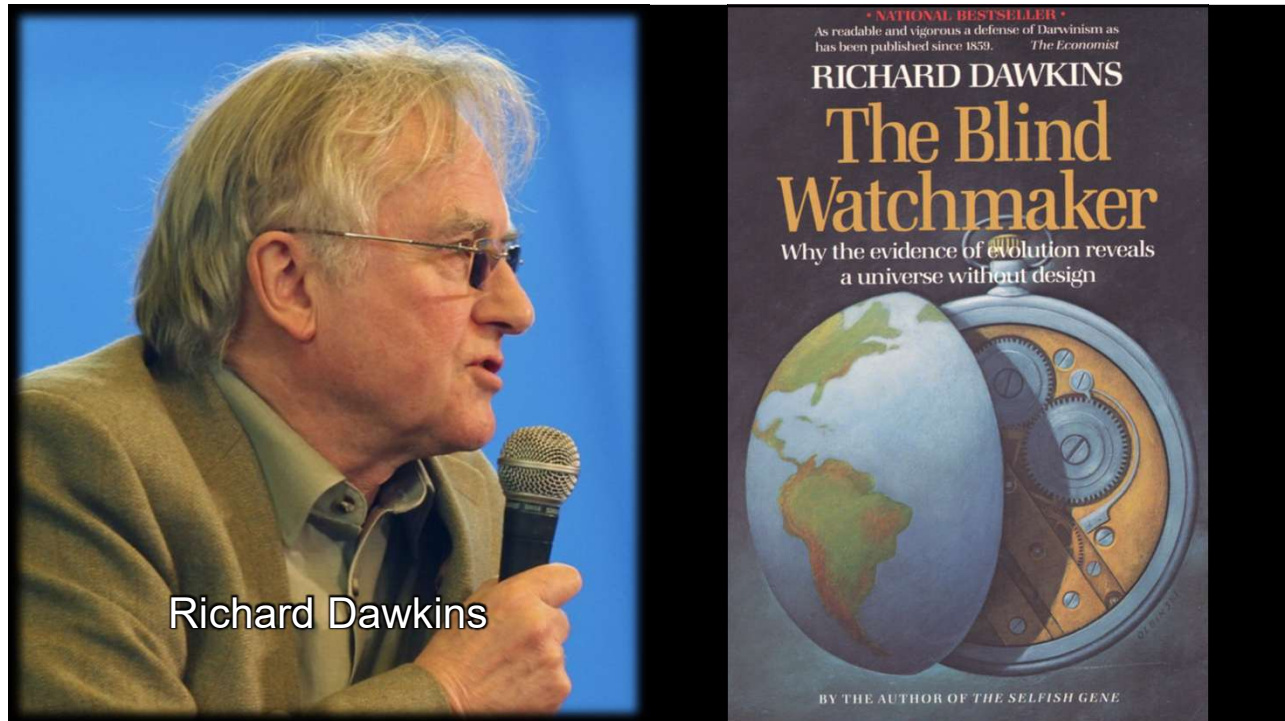


Leonard Mlodinow



*"How can we understand the world in which we find ourselves? How does the universe behave? What is the nature of reality? Where did all this come from? Did the universe need a creator? ... Traditionally these are questions for philosophy, but **philosophy is dead**. Philosophy has not kept up with modern developments in science, particularly physics."*

[Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 5]





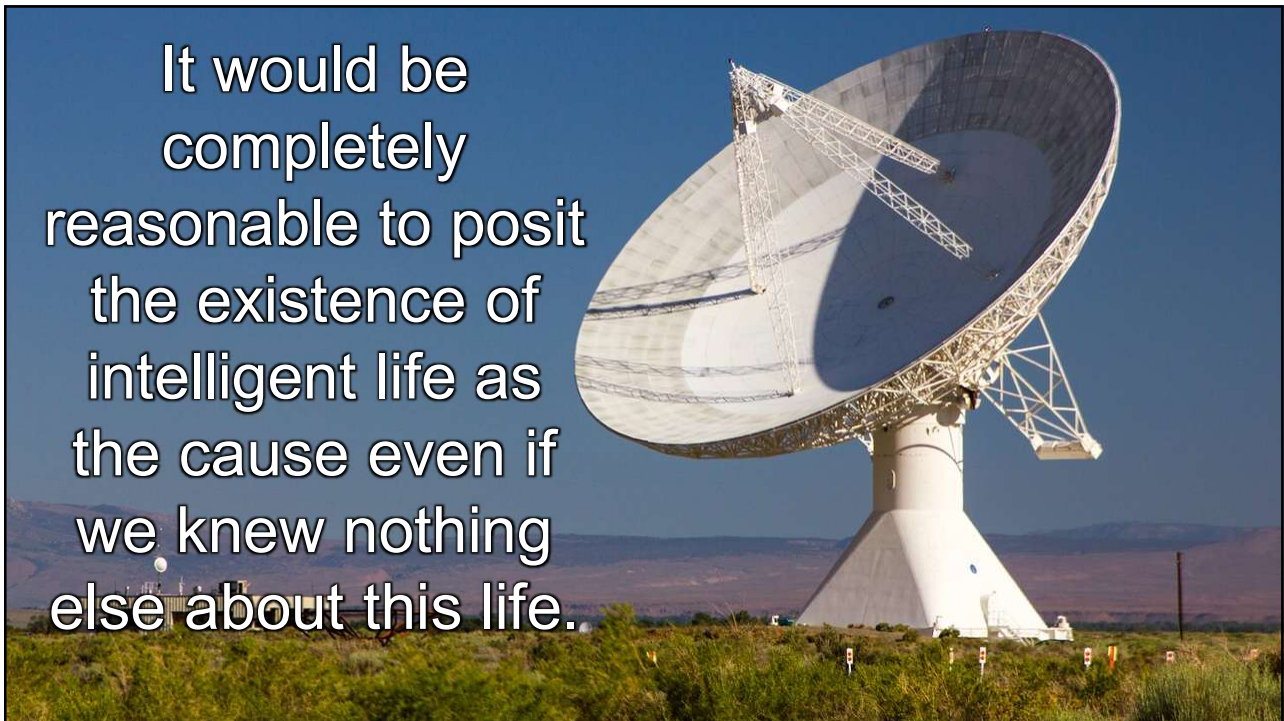
**Even if it was the case
that we could not
explain the origin of
the designer or of
God, it does not
follow from this that
positing God
"explains precisely
nothing."**



Suppose we got an intelligent message from outer space.



It would be completely reasonable to posit the existence of intelligent life as the cause even if we knew nothing else about this life.

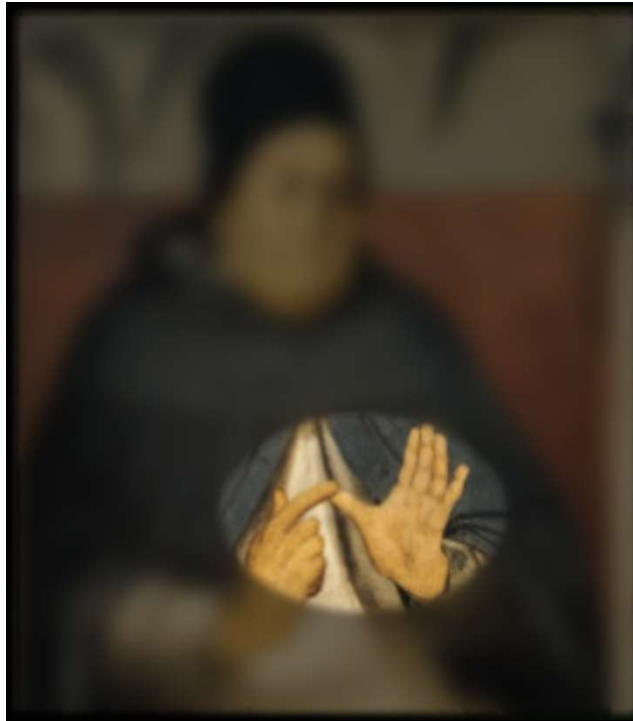


In any event, while there may be some debate as to how much of the nature of God is demonstrated by the scientific arguments,



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

the Aristotelian / Thomistic arguments demonstrate not only the existence of God, but all of His classical attributes as well.



**the Aristotelian /
Thomistic
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Michael Ruse

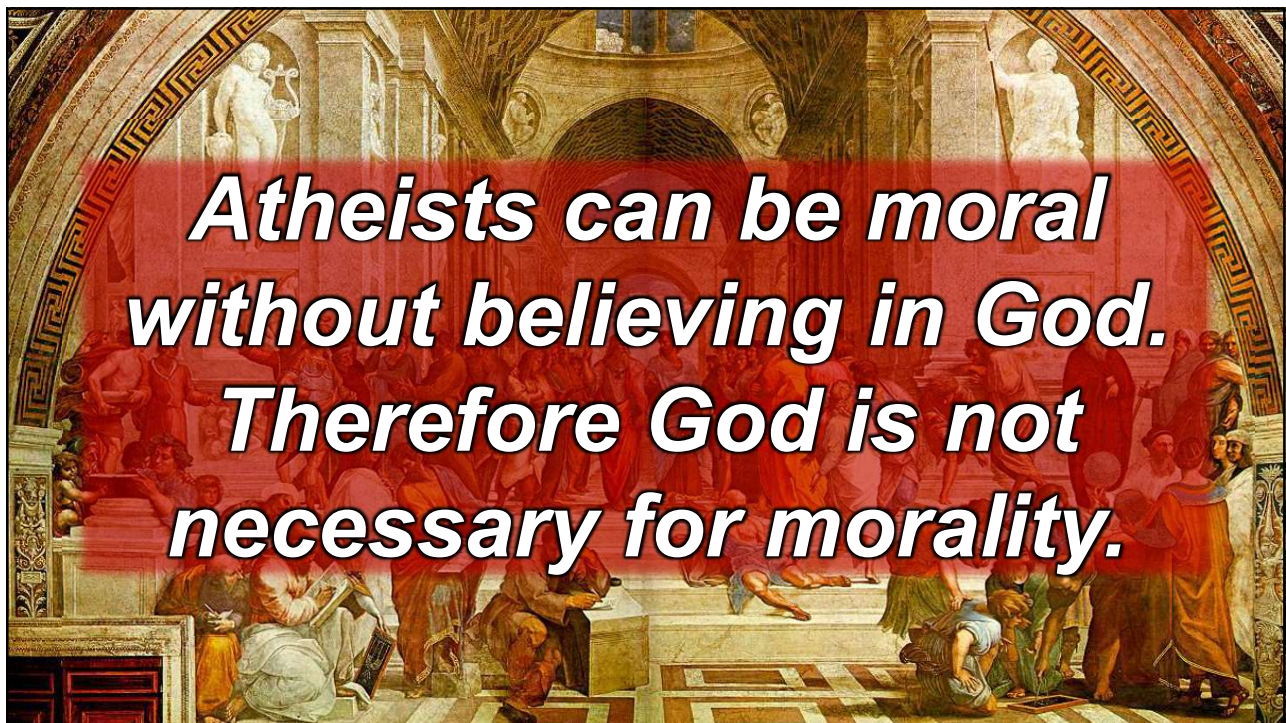
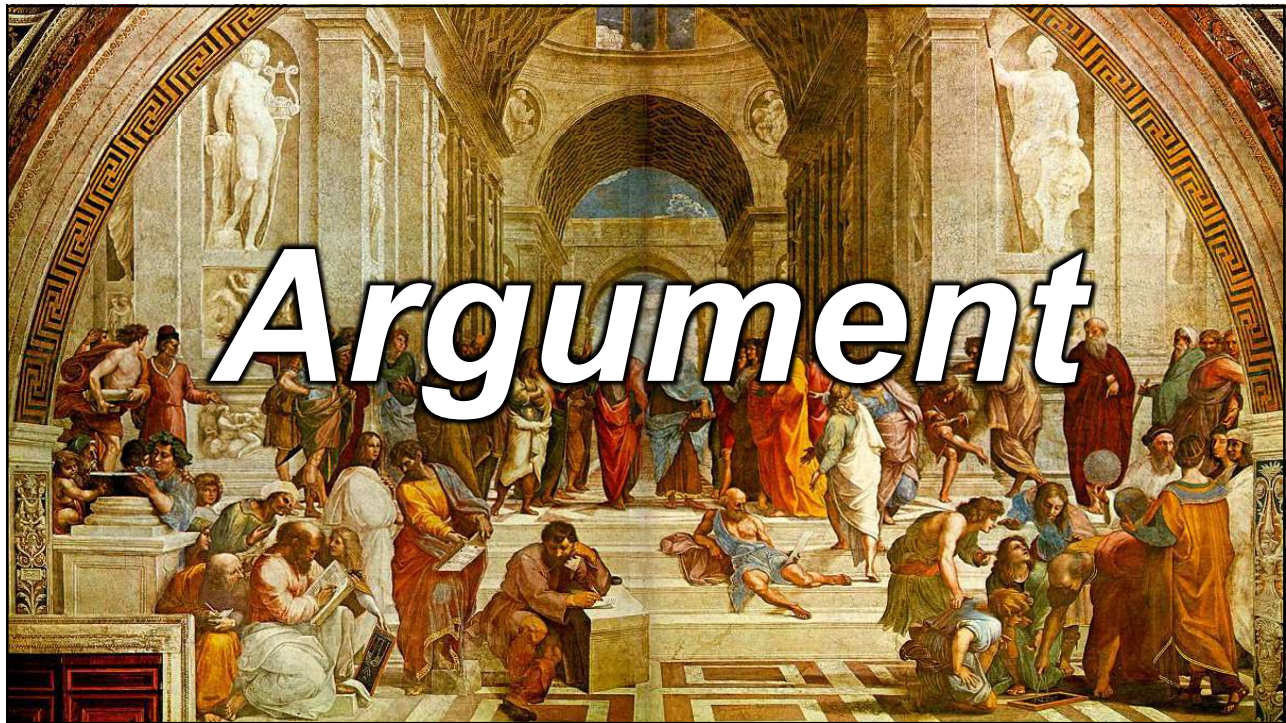
"I have written that The God Delusion made me ashamed to be an atheist and I meant it. Trying to understand how God could need no cause, Christians claim that God exists necessarily. I have taken the effort to try to understand what that means."

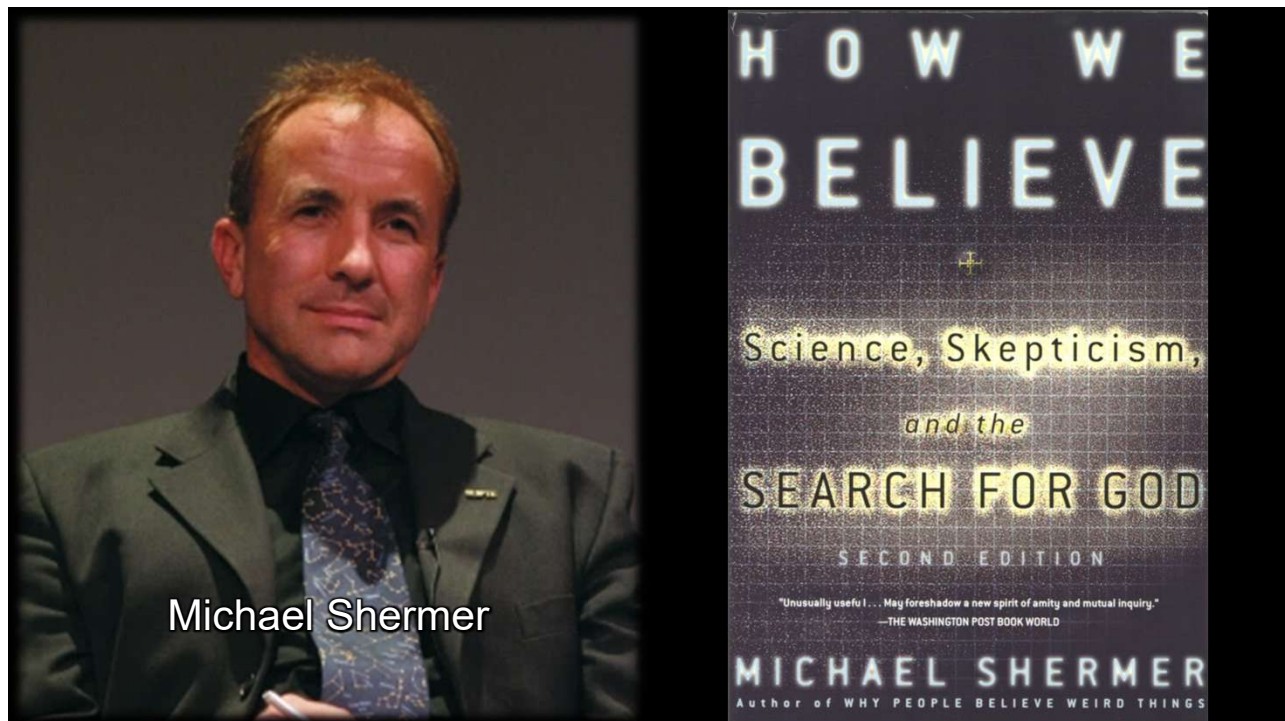
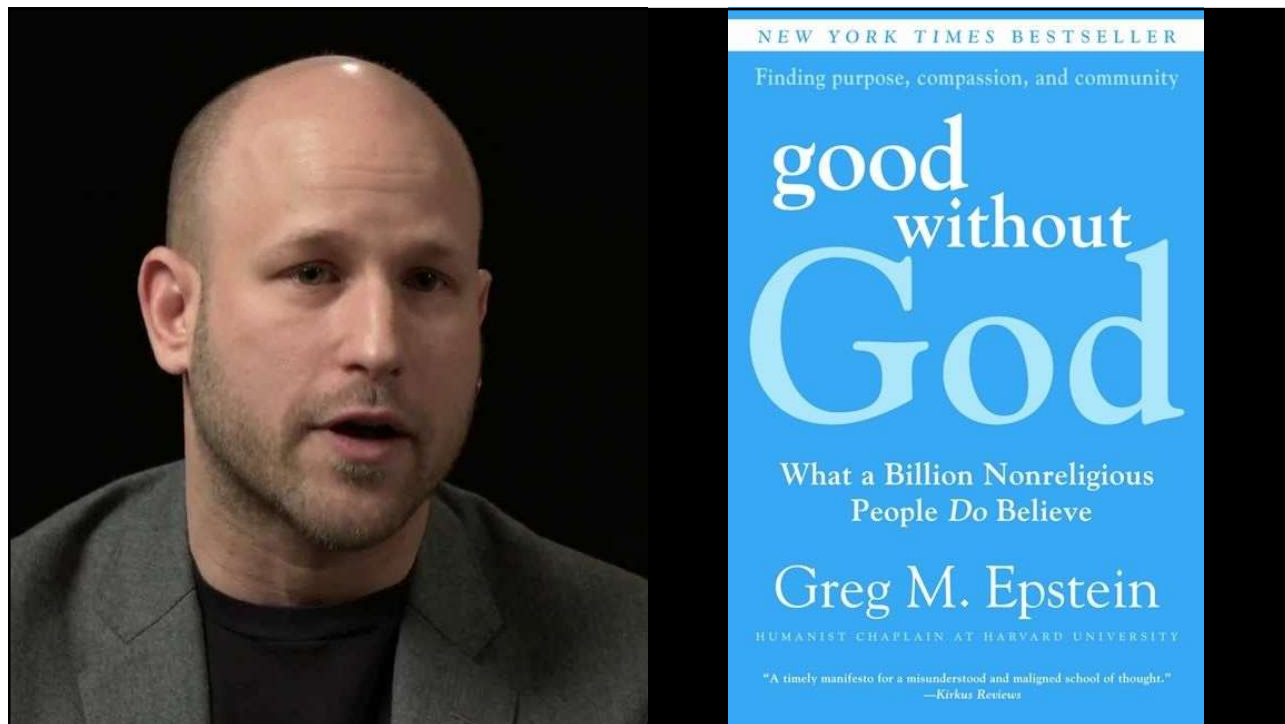



Michael Ruse

"Dawkins and company are ignorant of such claims and positively contemptuous of those who even try to understand them, let alone believe them. Thus, like a first-year undergraduate, he can happily go around asking loudly, 'What caused God?' as though he had made some momentous philosophical discovery."

[<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/nov/02/atheism-dawkins-ruse>, accessed 11/24/23]





A portrait of Michael Shermer, a man with short brown hair, wearing a dark suit, black shirt, and a patterned tie. He is looking slightly to the right with a neutral expression.

Michael Shermer

"[The moral argument says that] humans are moral beings and animals are not. Where did we get this moral drive? Through the ultimate moral being—God."

[Michael Shermer, *How We Believe: Science, Skepticism, and the Search for God*. Second Edition. (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2000), 98]

A portrait of Michael Shermer, a man with short brown hair, wearing a dark suit, black shirt, and a patterned tie. He is looking slightly to the right with a neutral expression.

Michael Shermer

"Apparently you can be good without God."

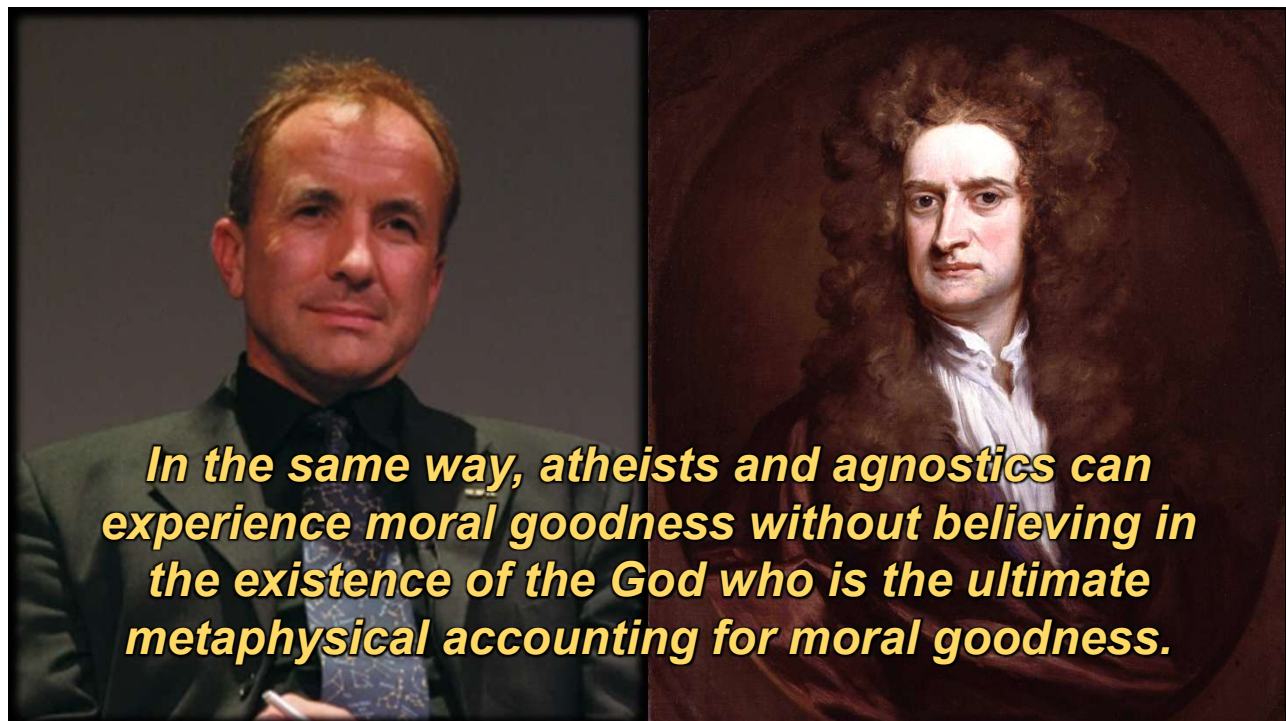
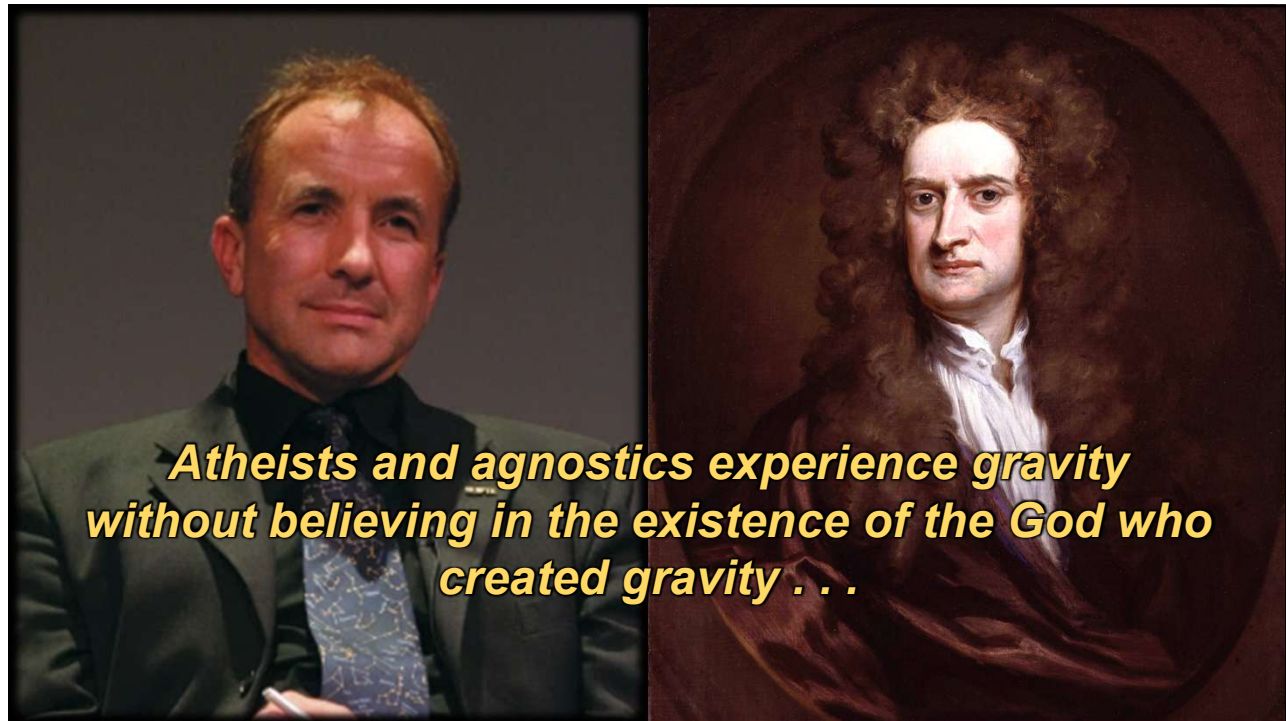
[Shermer, *How We Believe*, 98]



*The issue is not whether
an atheist or agnostic can
BE OR ACT morally good.*

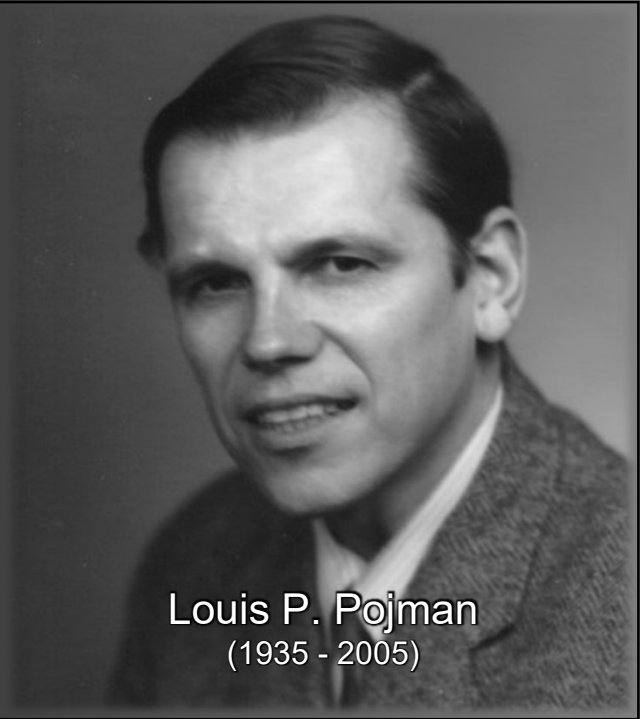
*Rather, the issue is
whether the atheist or
agnostic can
**ULTIMATELY ACCOUNT
FOR** being or acting
morally good.*





***Many atheists
and agnostics
are living off the
dividends of the
theistic world
view.***

[This sentiment was personally conveyed to me by professor Pojman.]

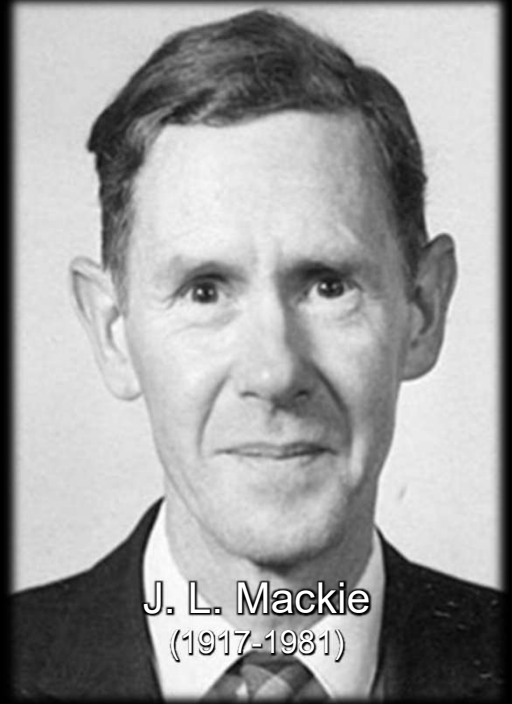


Louis P. Pojman
(1935 - 2005)

J.L. Mackie

**THE
MIRACLE
OF
THEISM**

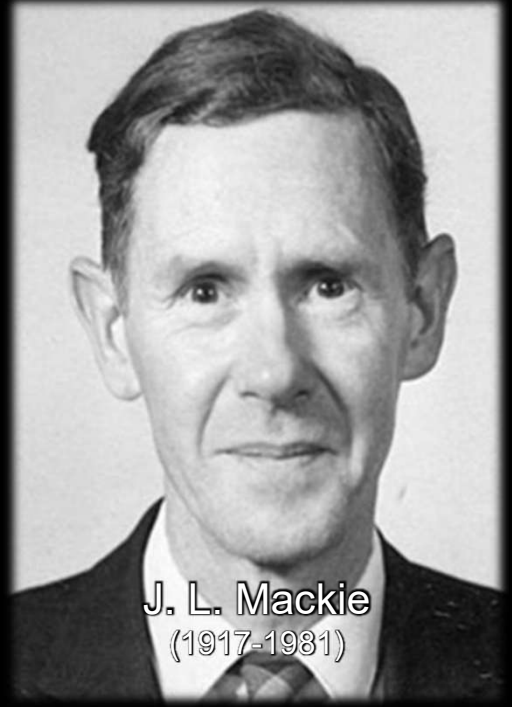
Arguments for
and against the
Existence of
God




J. L. Mackie
(1917-1981)

"Objectively intrinsically prescriptive features [i.e., moral properties], supervening upon natural ones, constitute so odd a cluster of qualities and relations that they are most unlikely to have arisen in the ordinary course of events, without an all-powerful god to create them."

[J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments For and Against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 115]

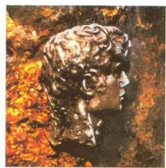


J. L. Mackie
(1917-1981)

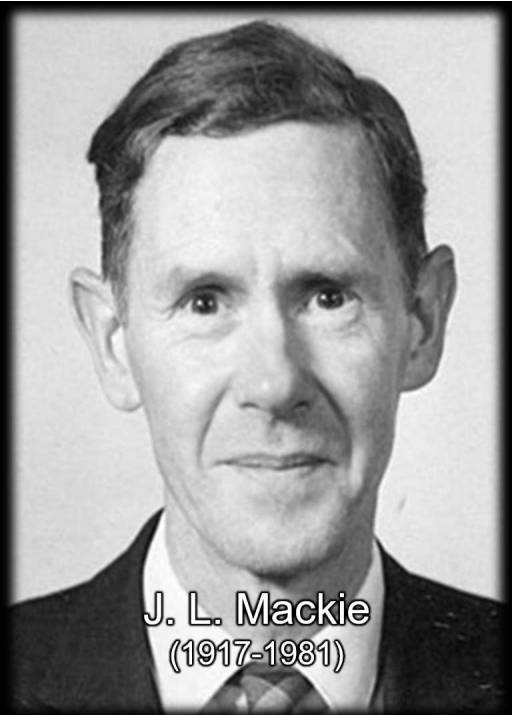


ETHICS

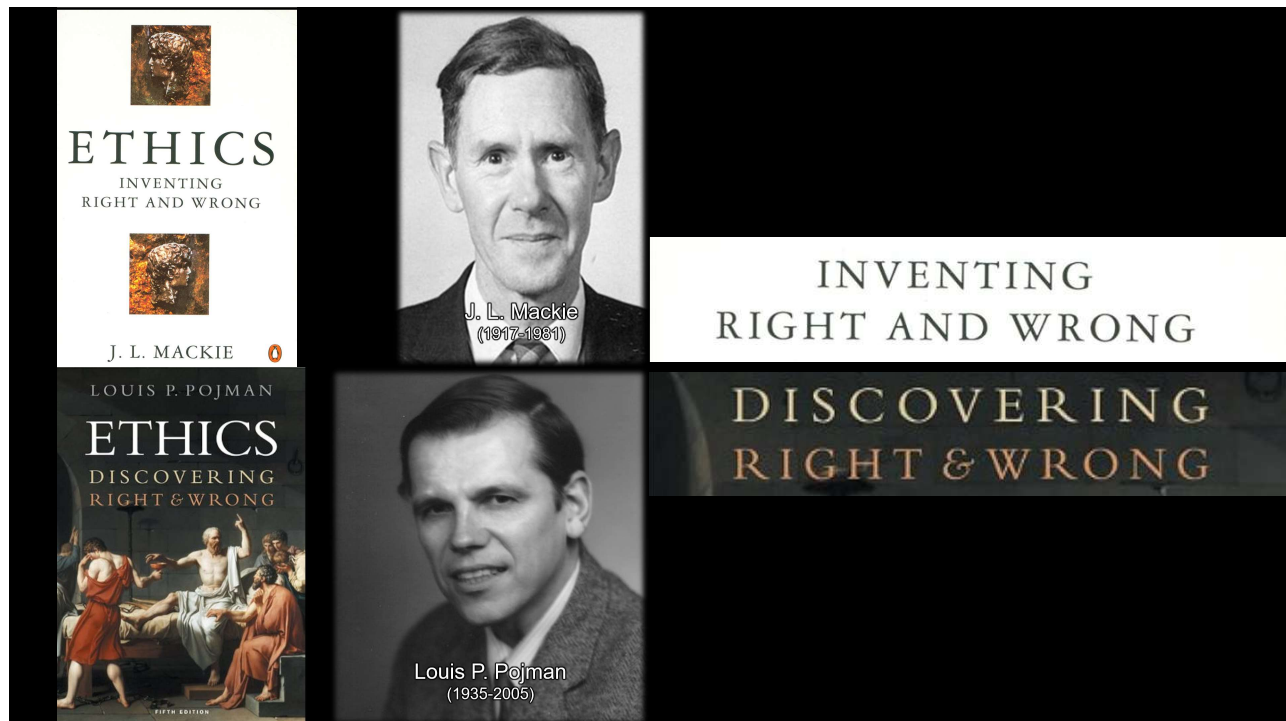
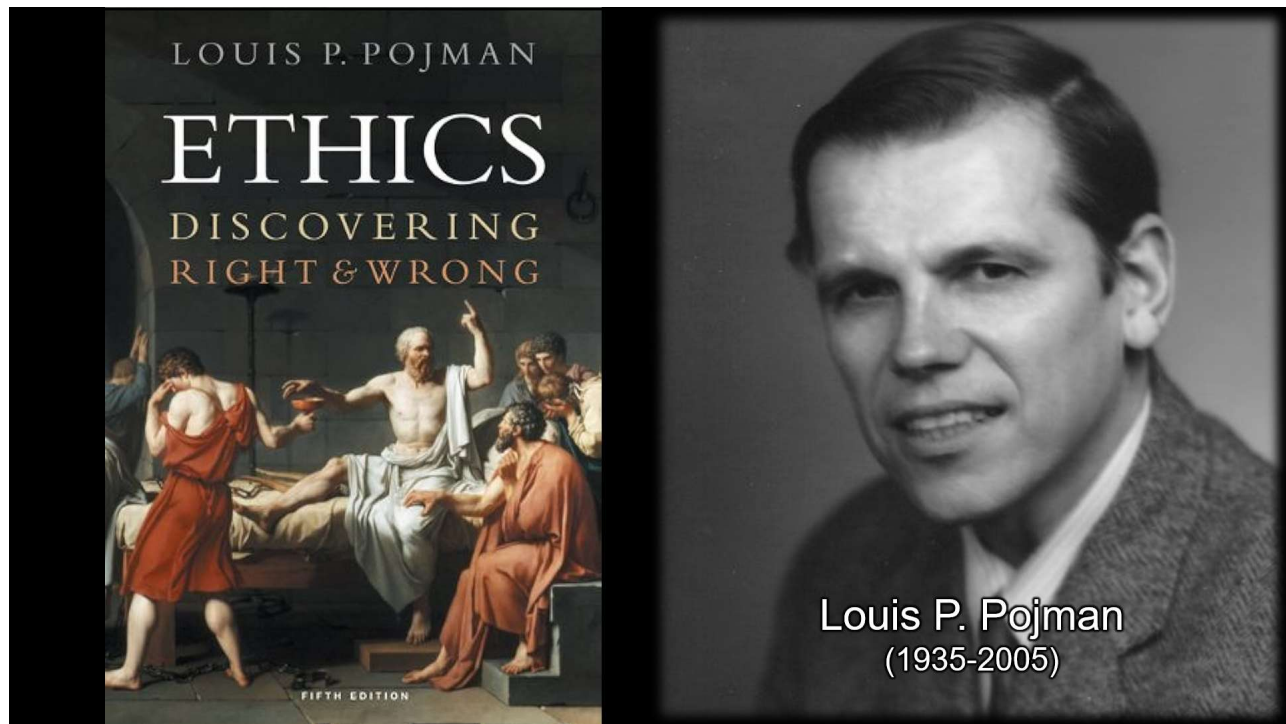
INVENTING
RIGHT AND WRONG

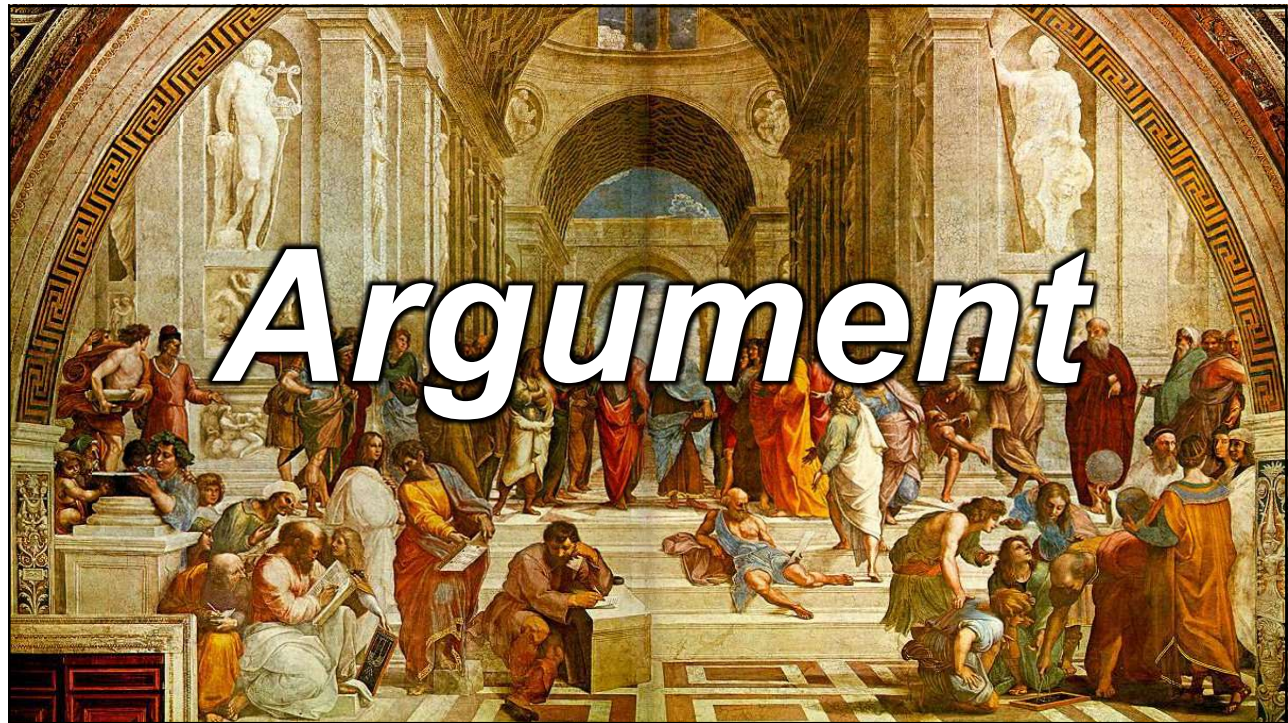


J. L. MACKIE

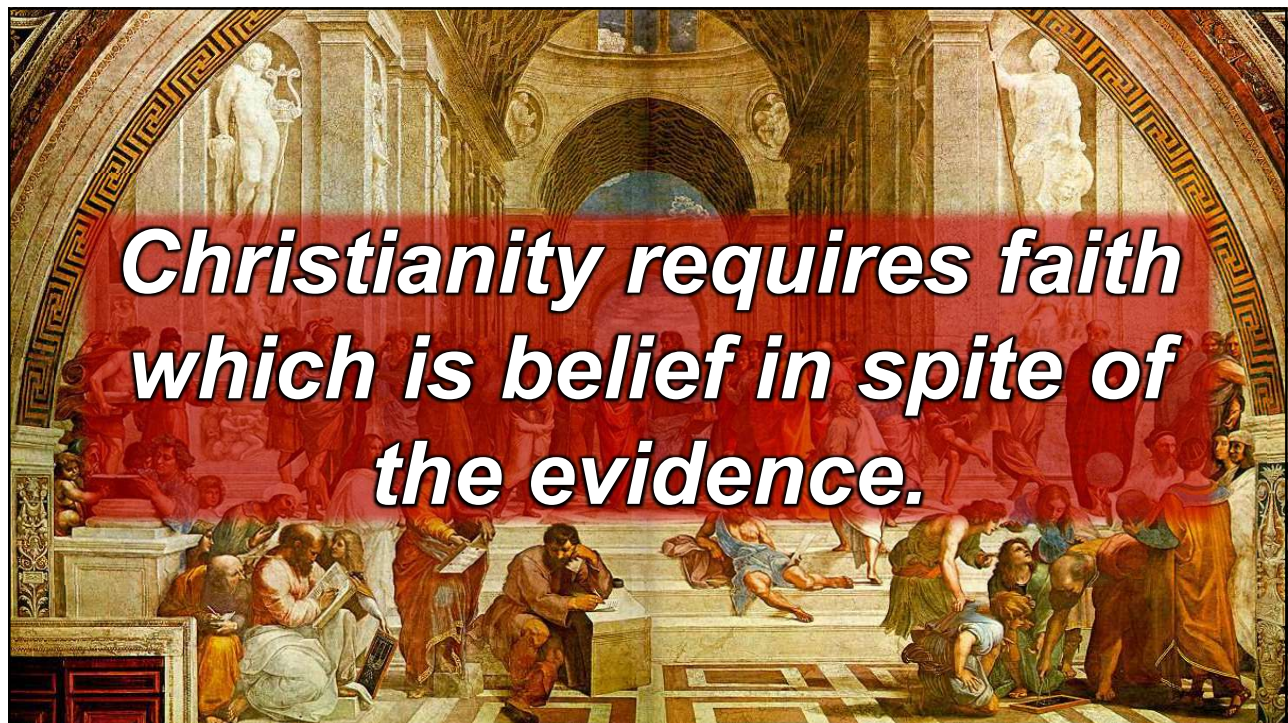


J. L. Mackie
(1917-1981)

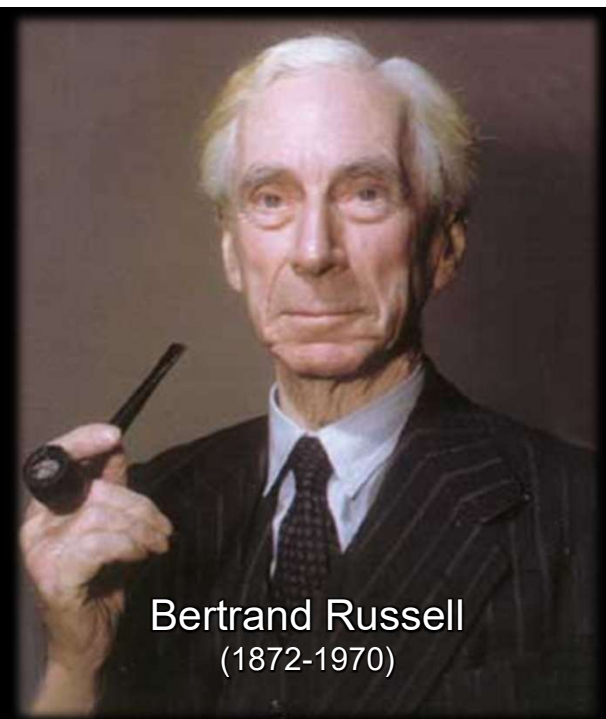
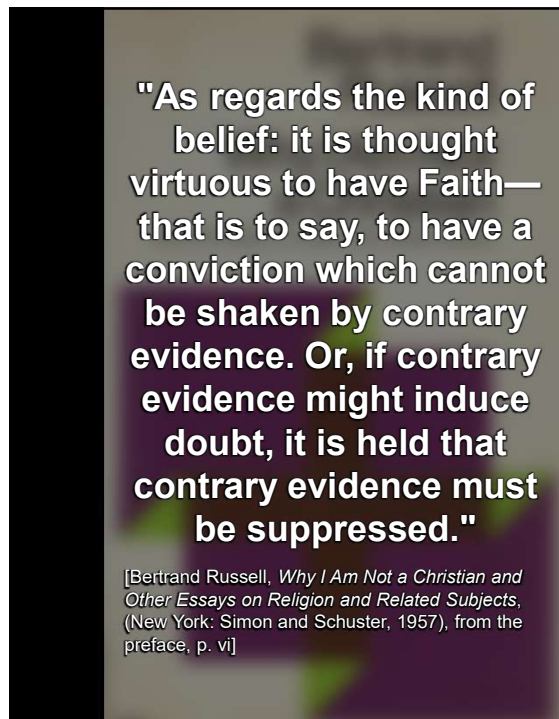
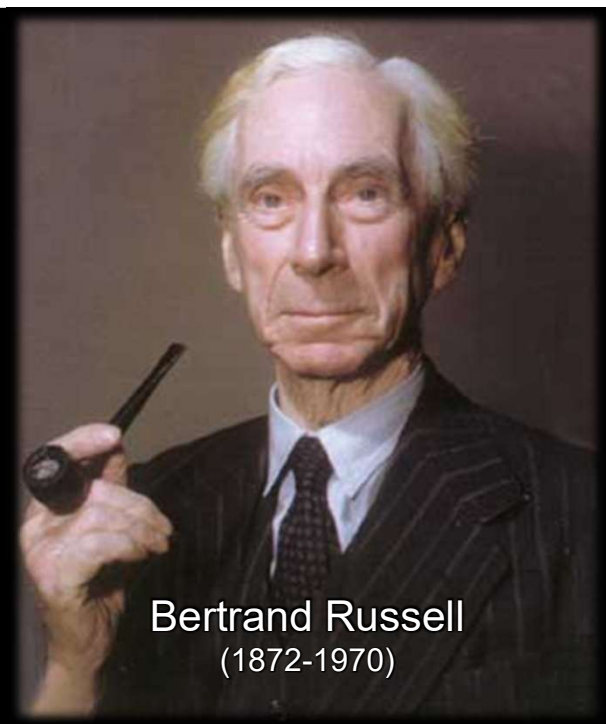
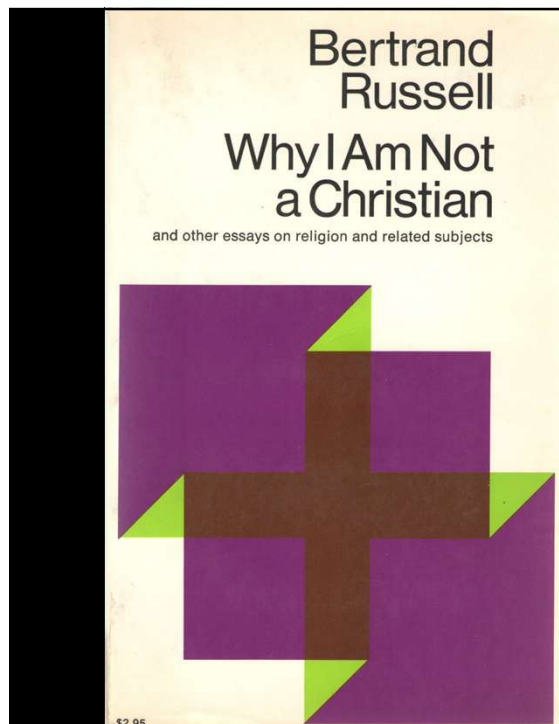


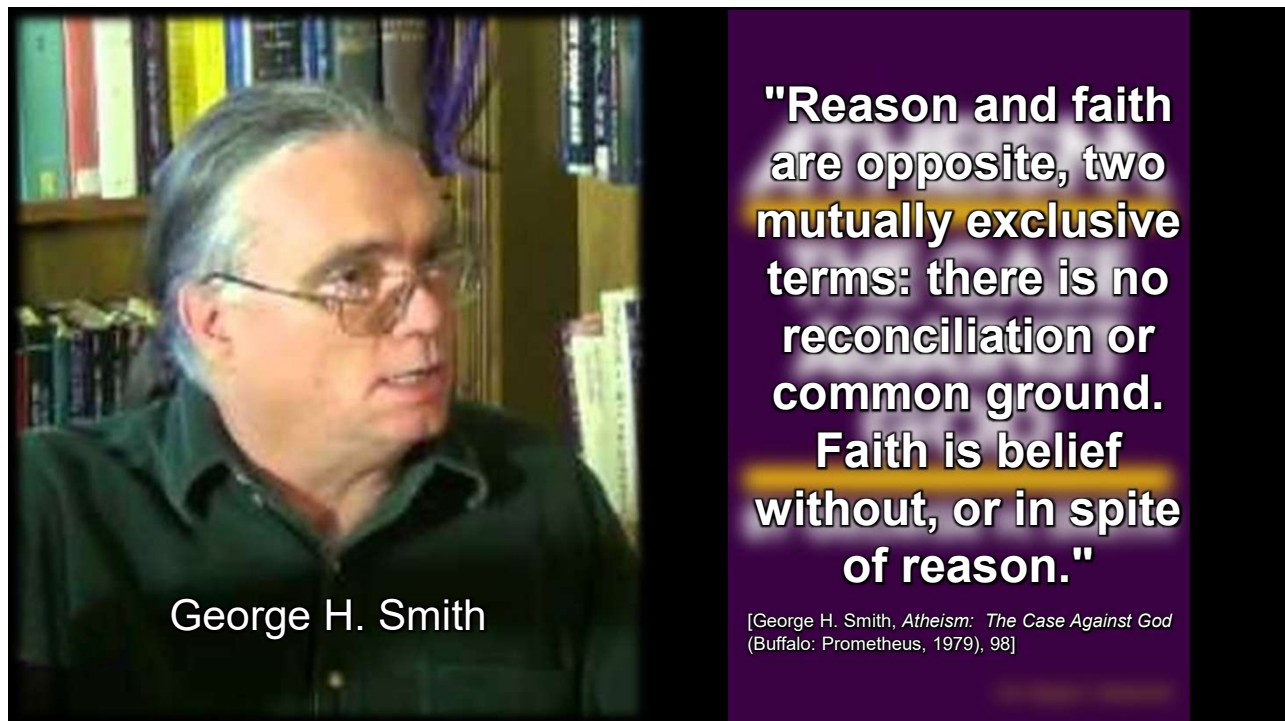
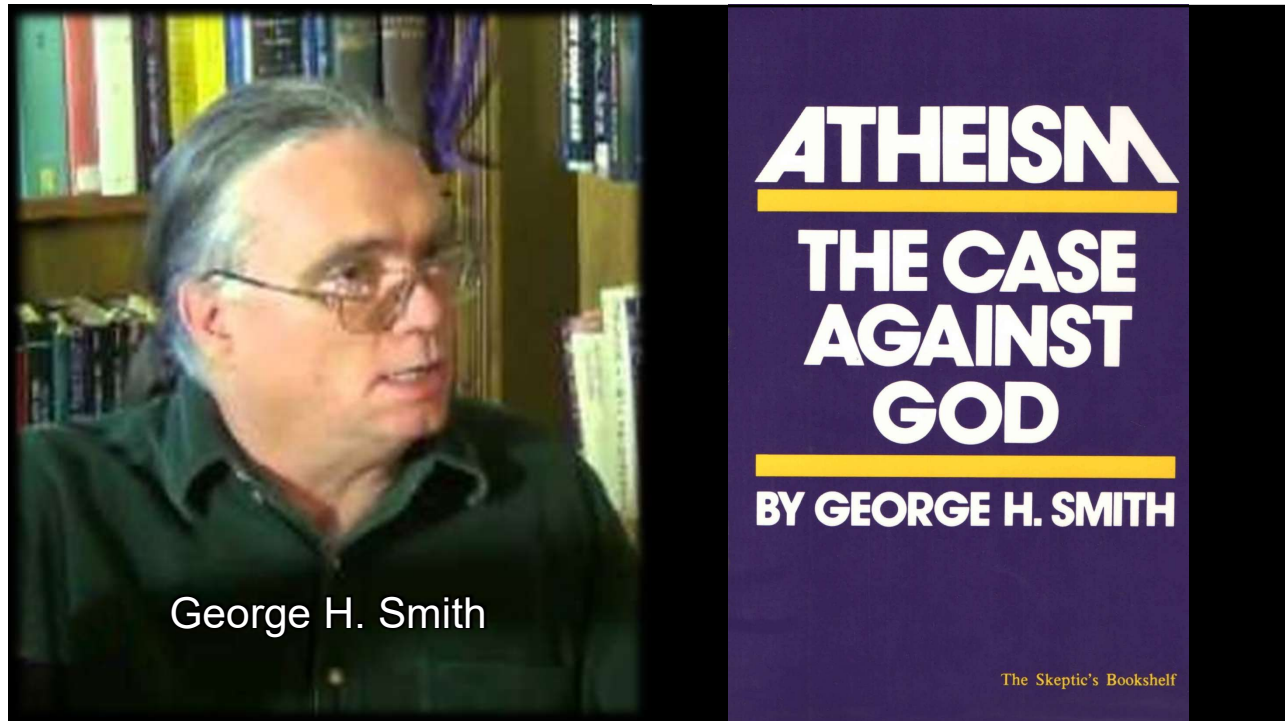


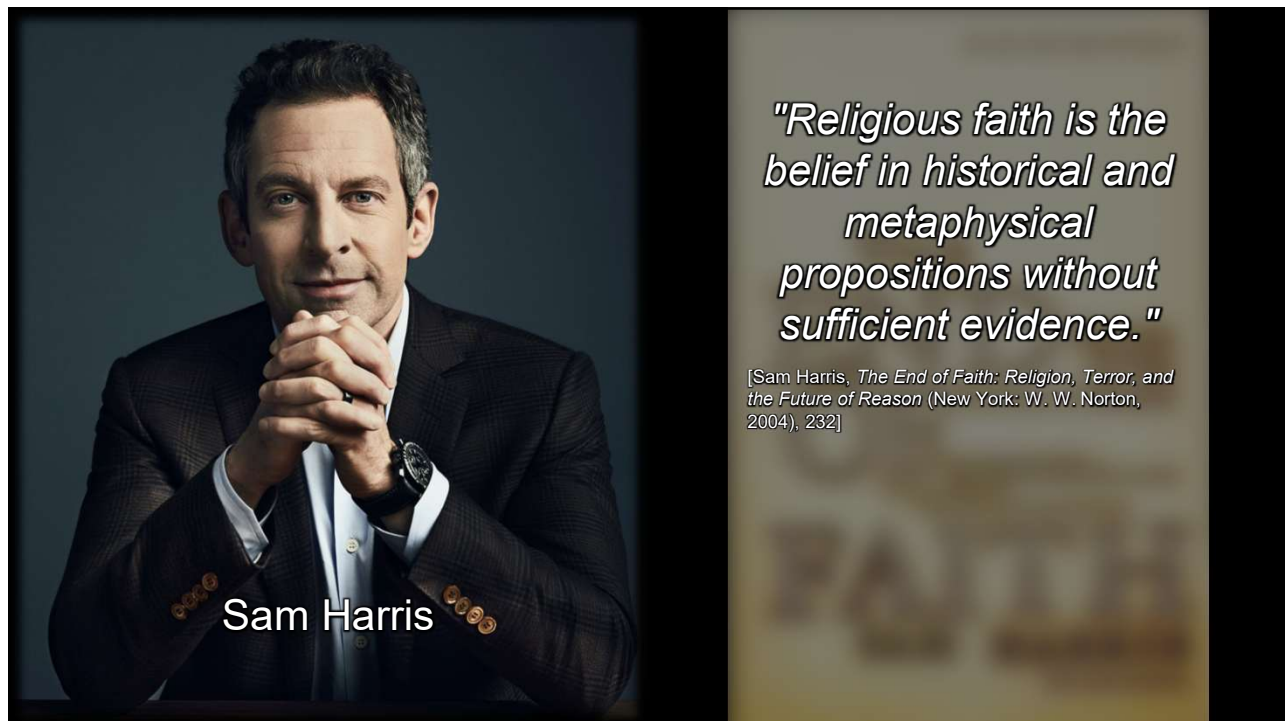
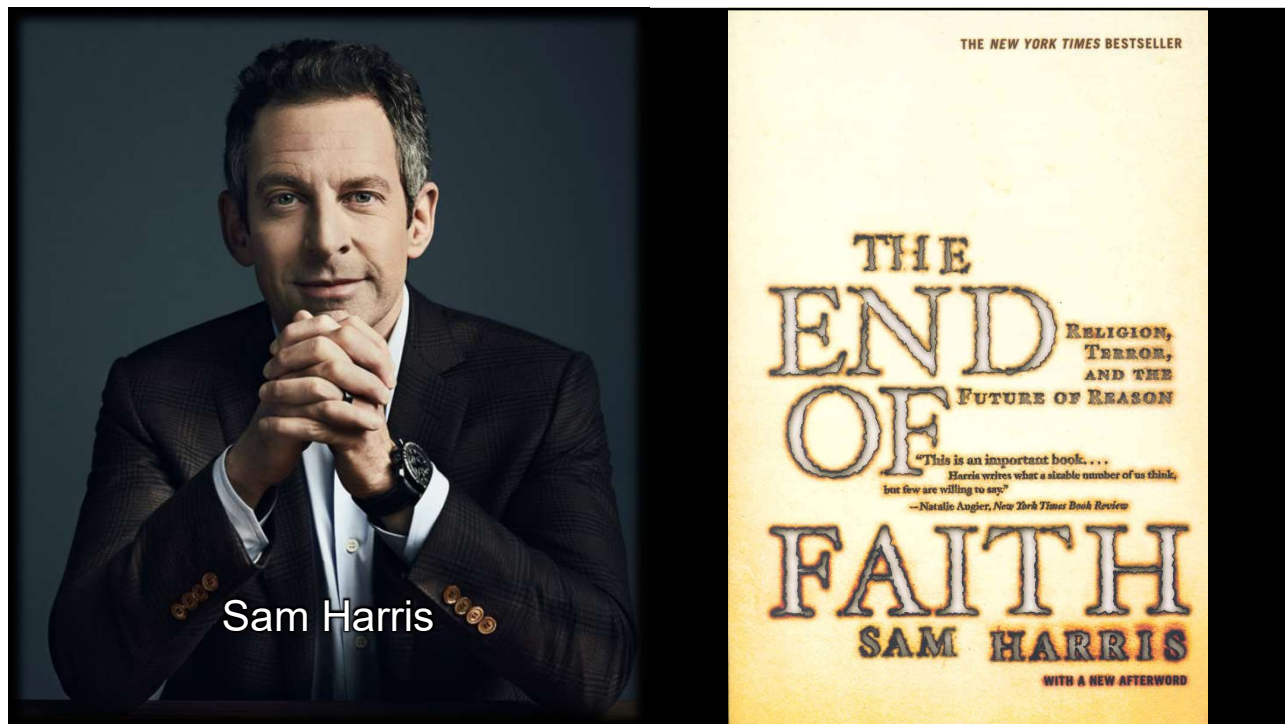
Argument

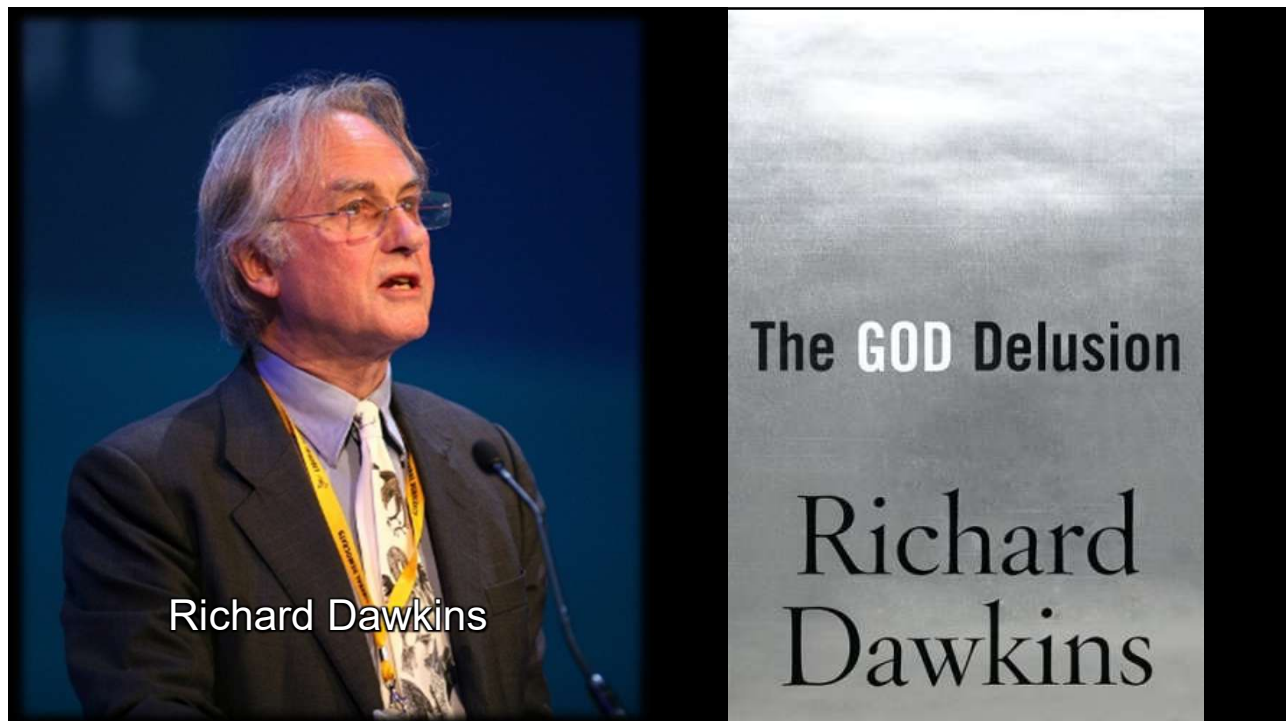
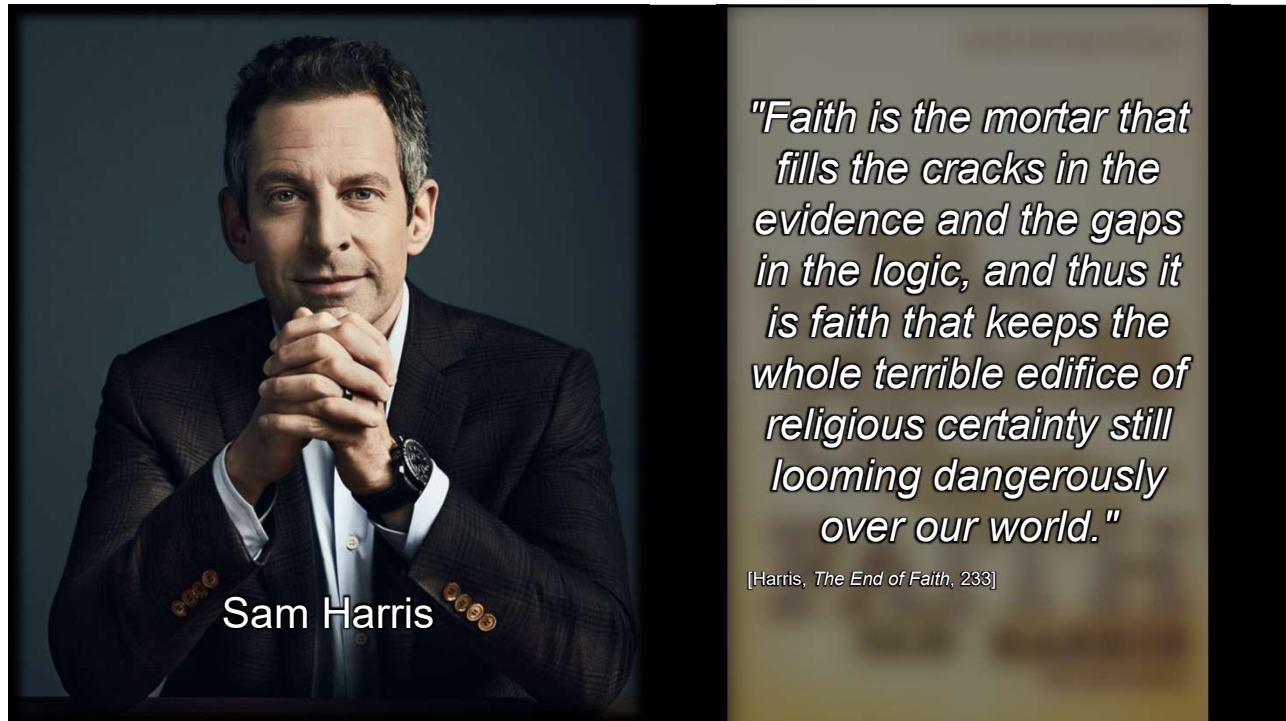


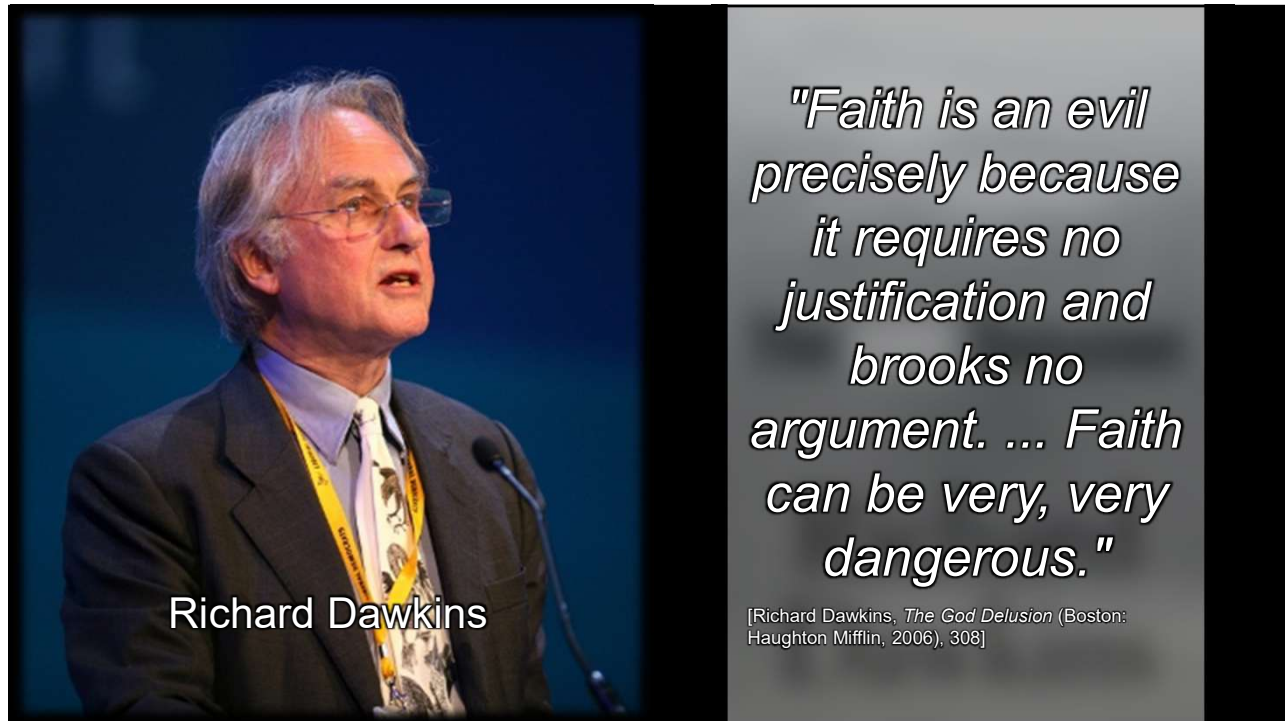
***Christianity requires faith
which is belief in spite of
the evidence.***





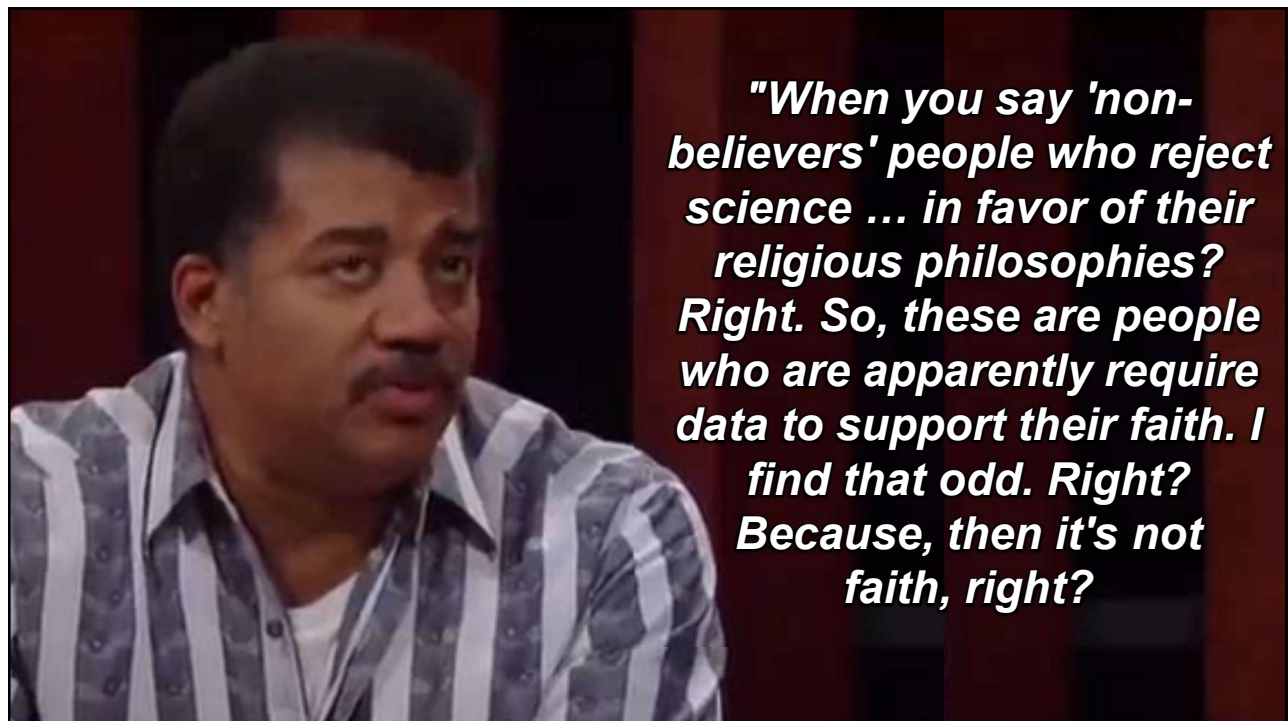
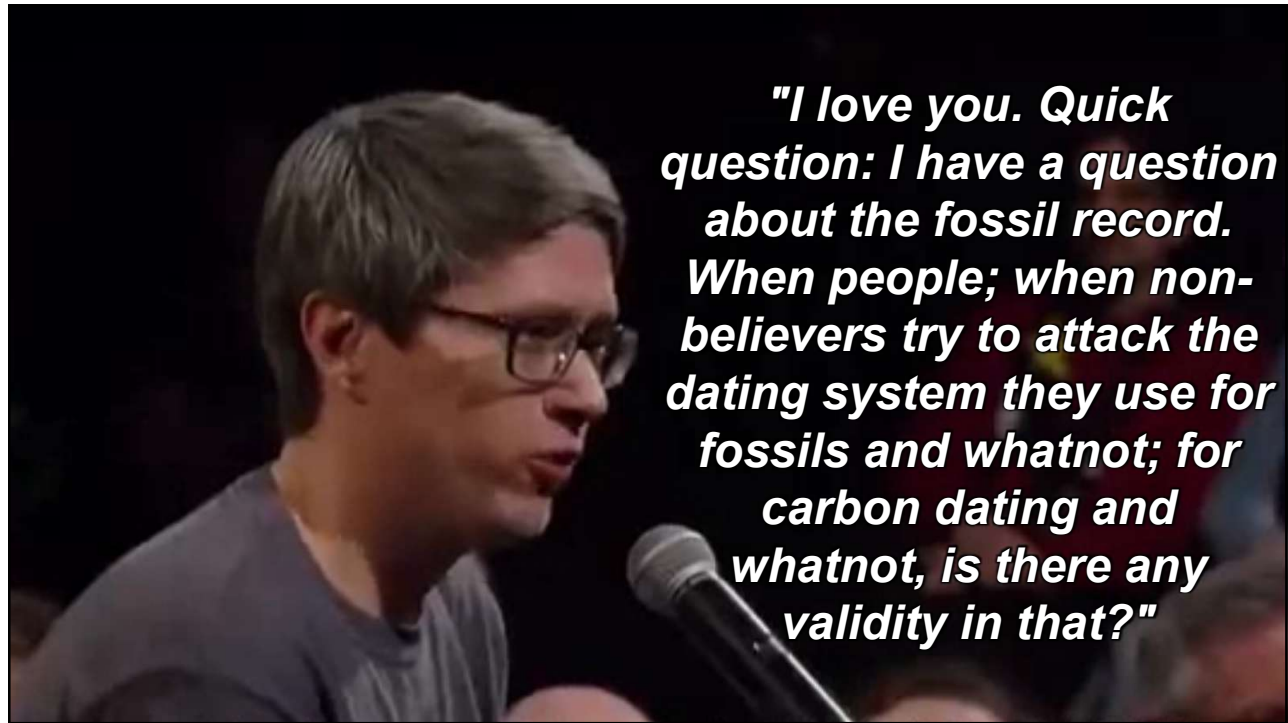


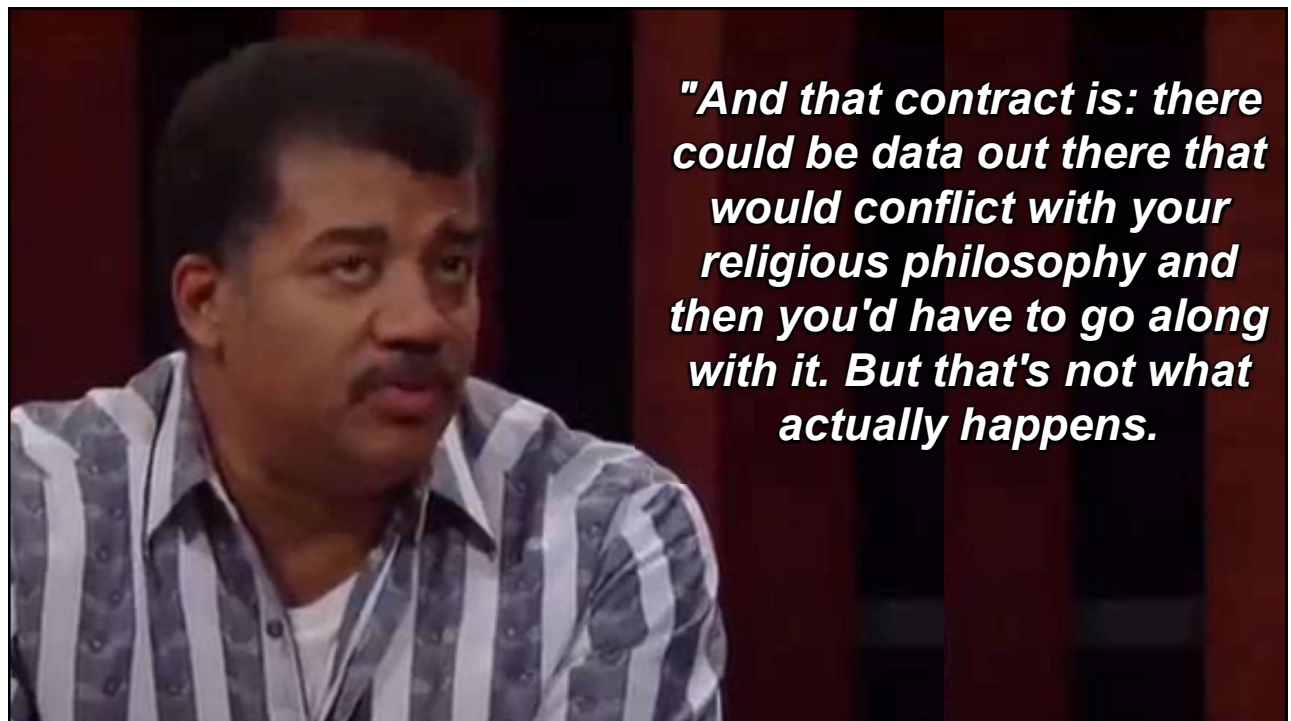
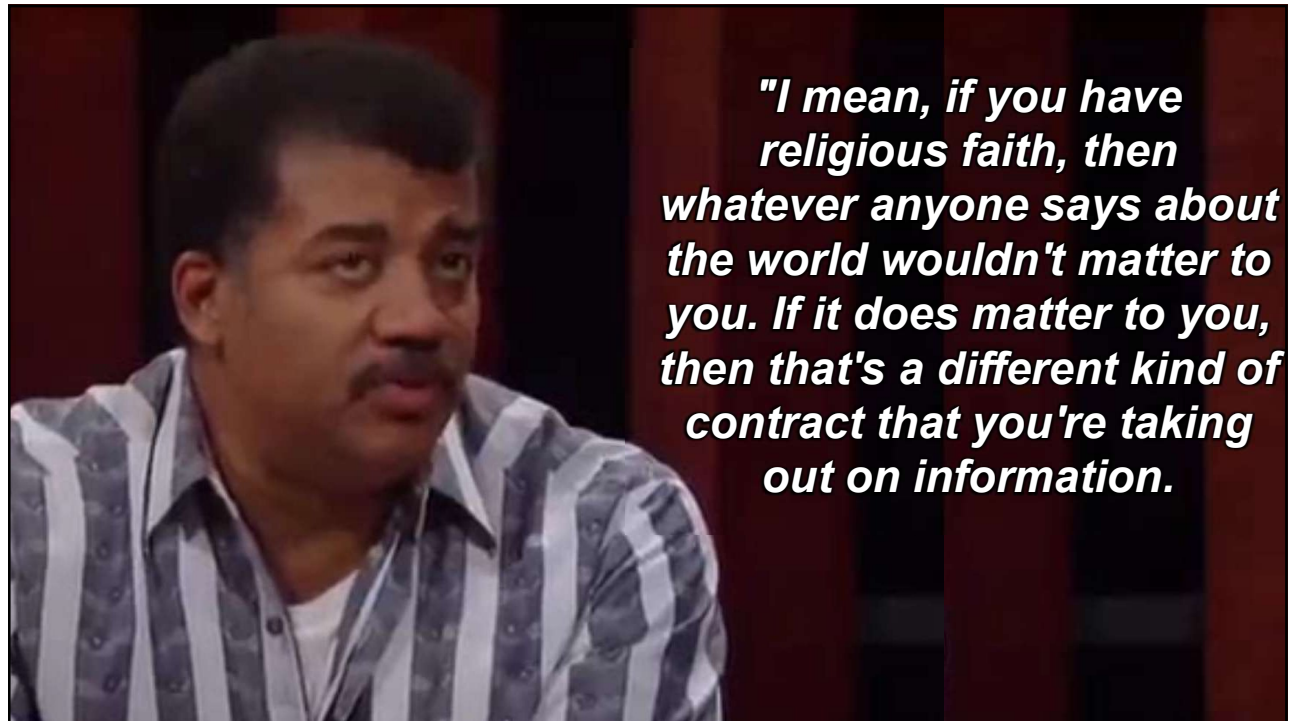


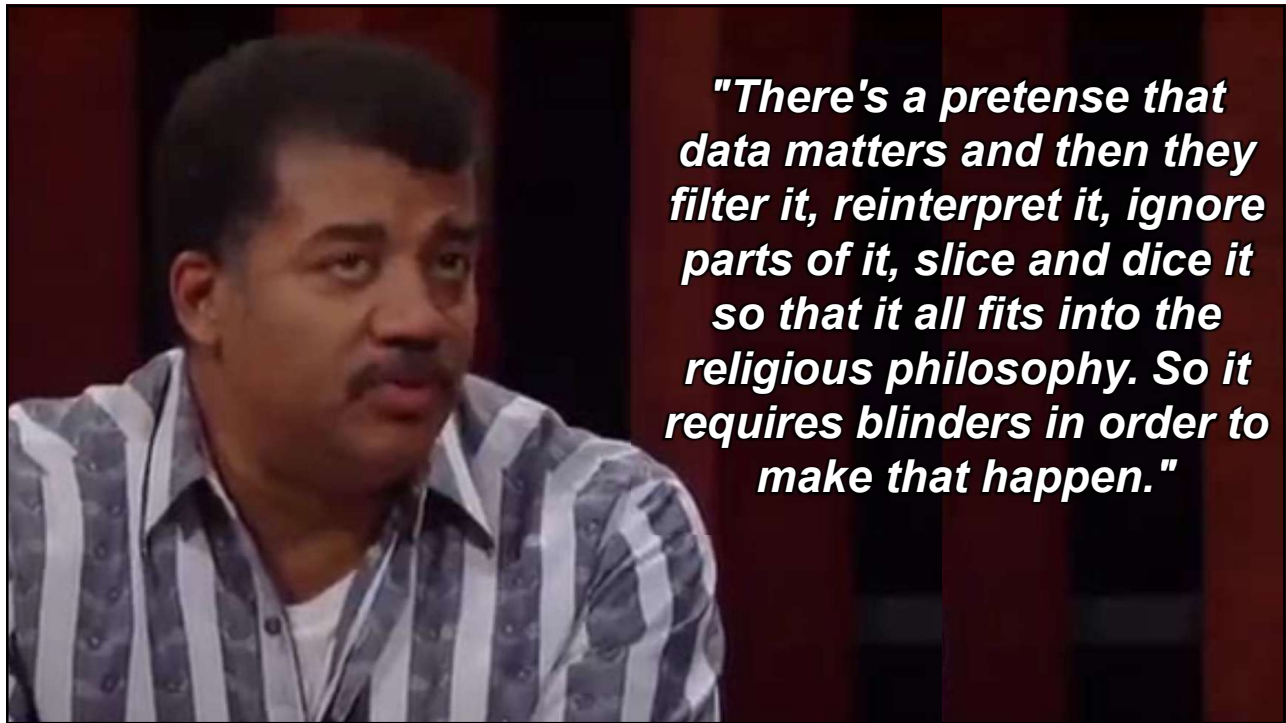




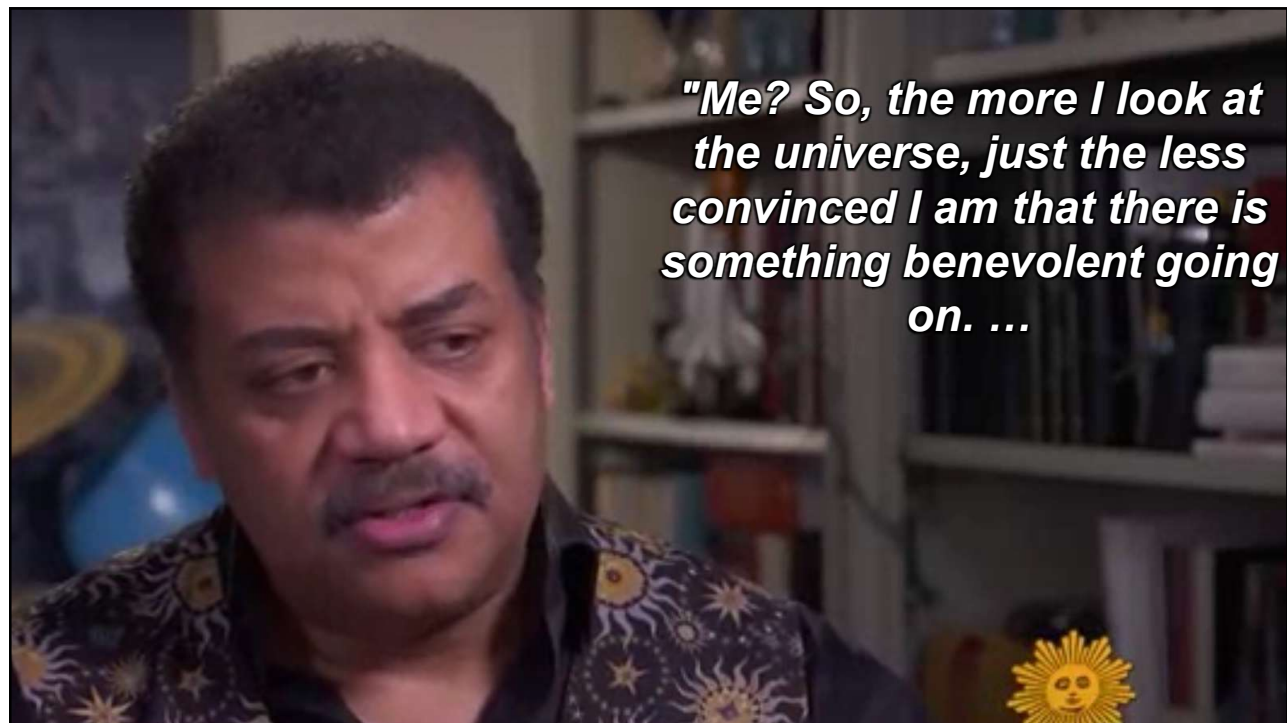
Neil deGrasse Tyson on Religion and Faith

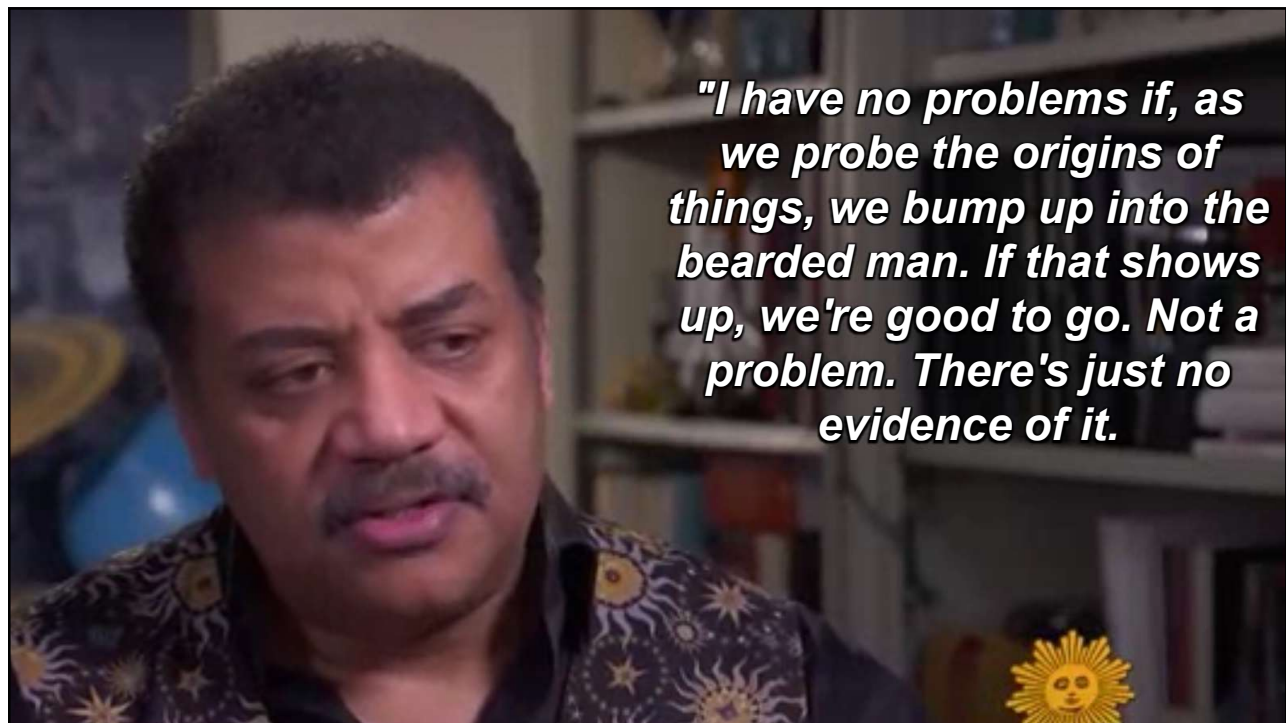
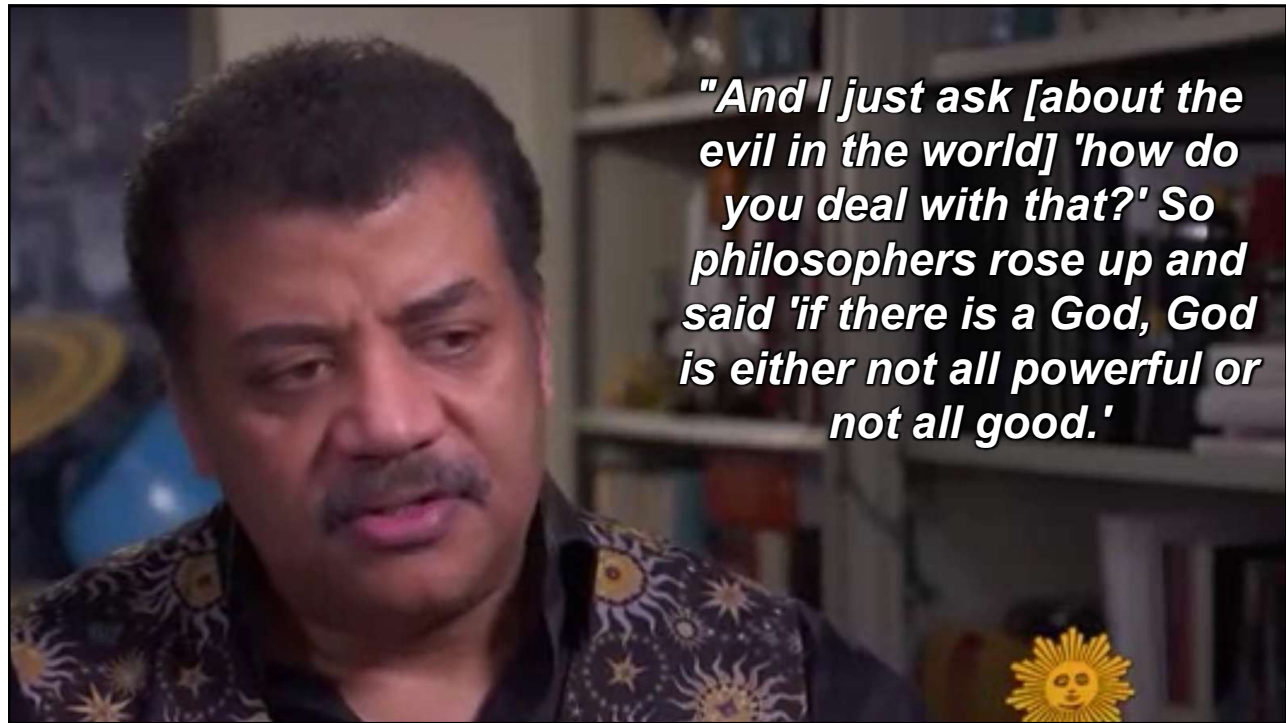


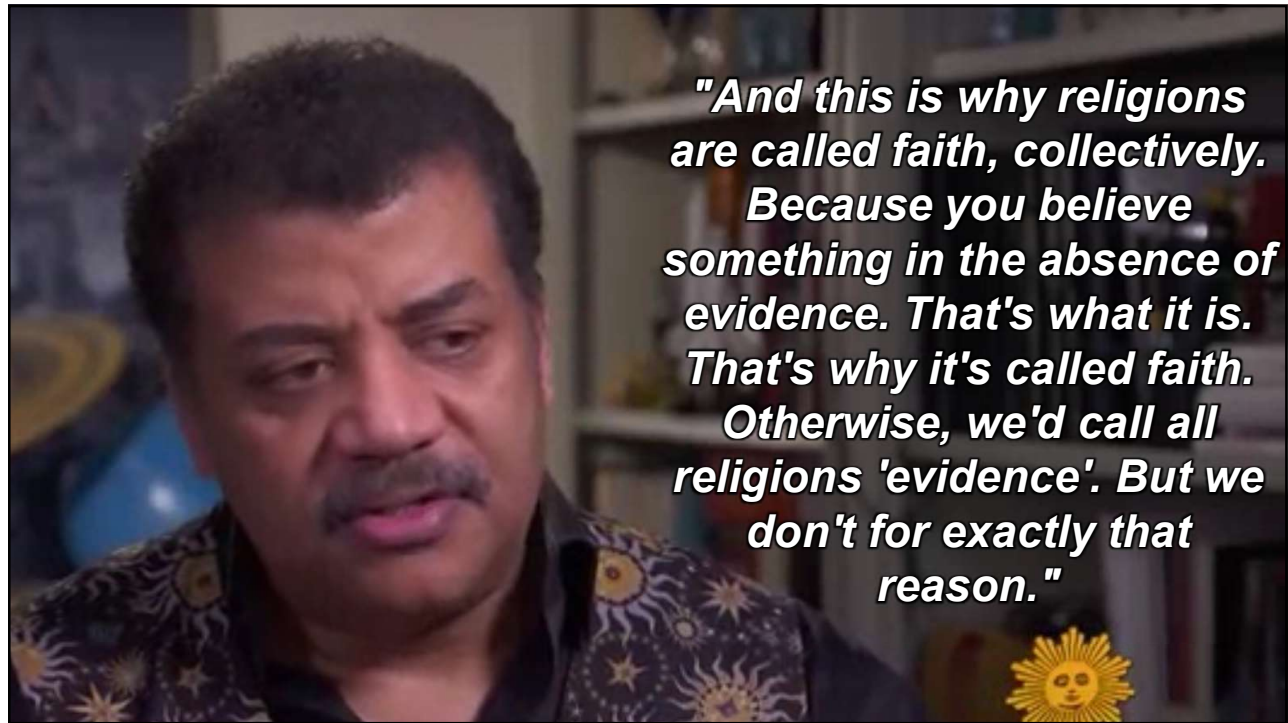


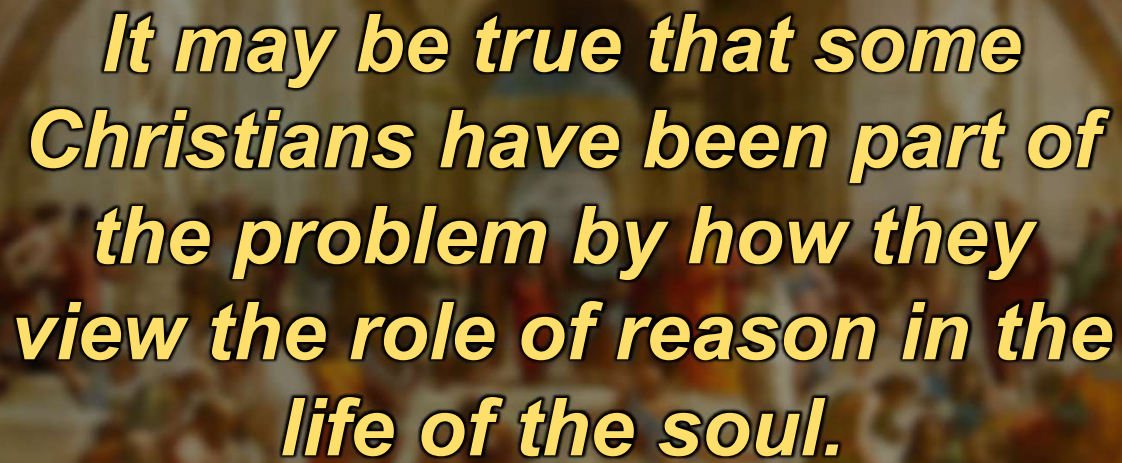


Neil deGrasse Tyson on God

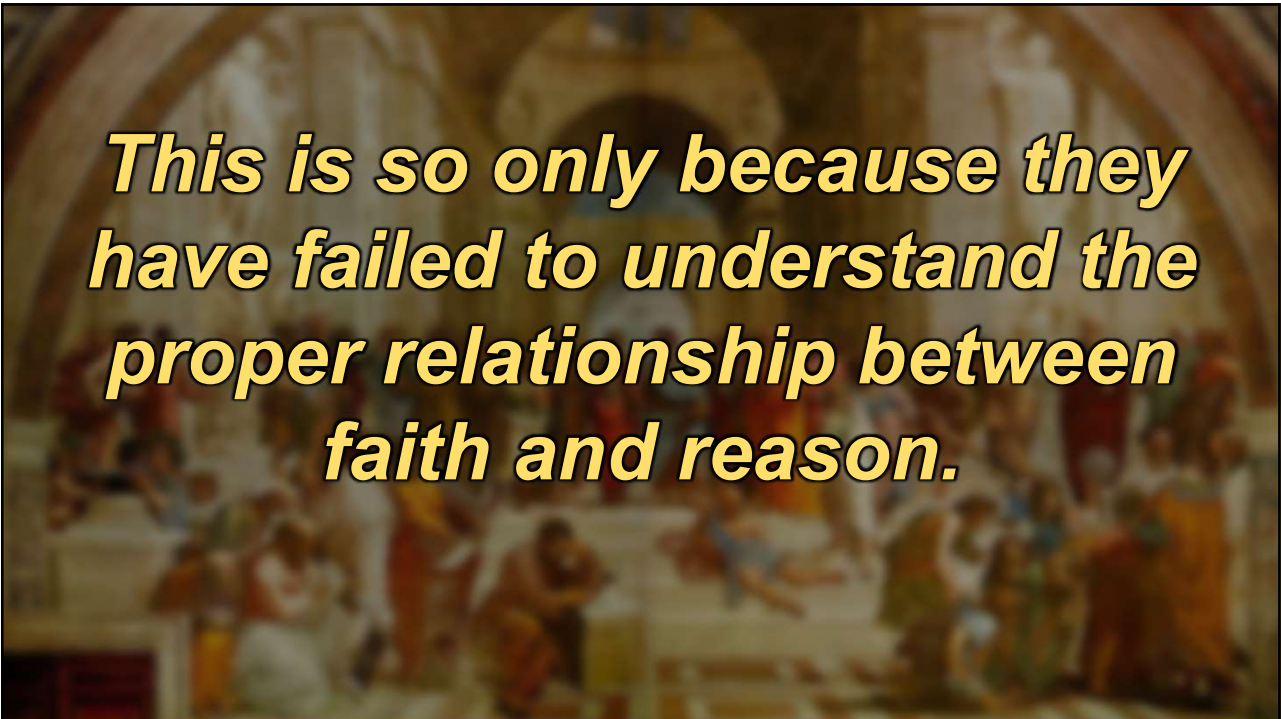








It may be true that some Christians have been part of the problem by how they view the role of reason in the life of the soul.

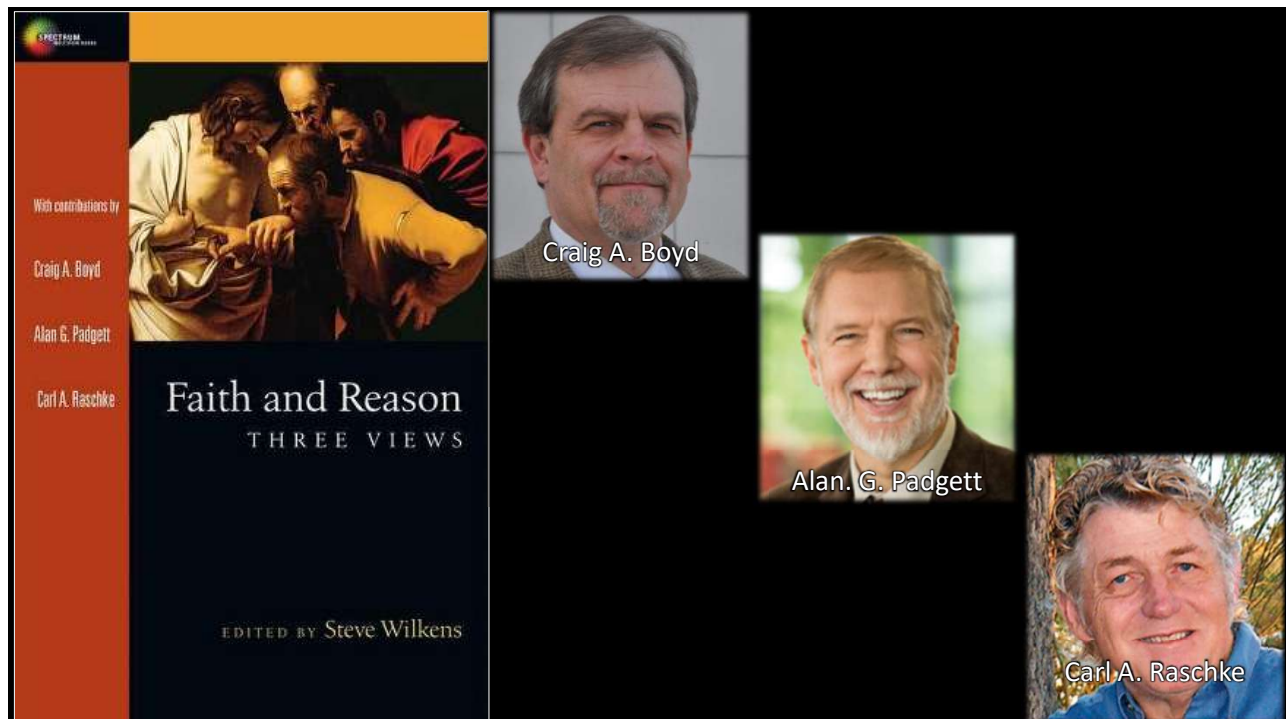
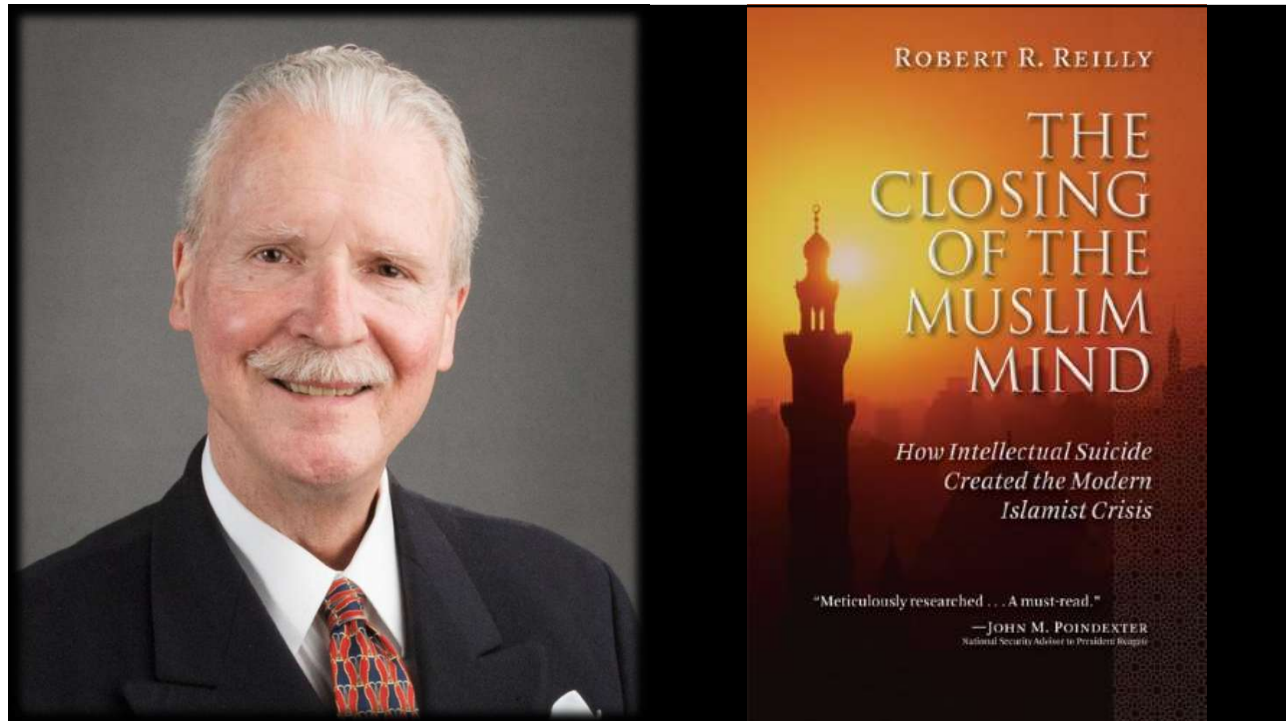


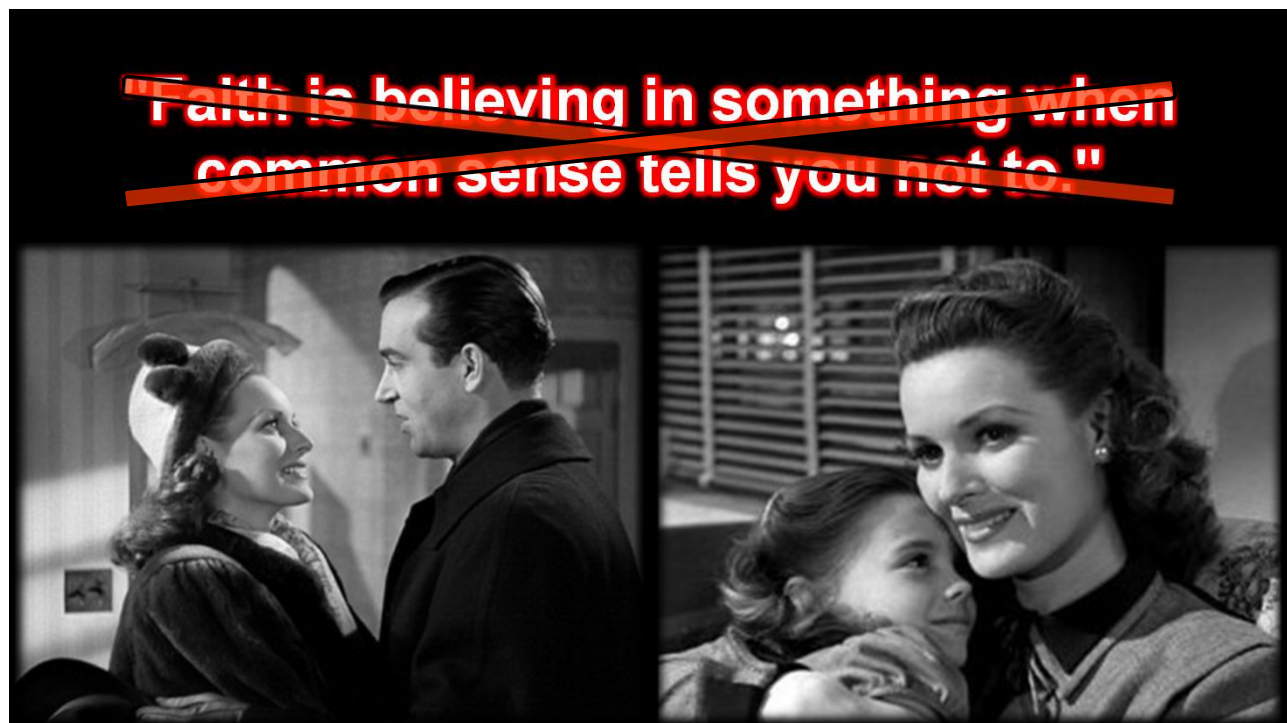
This is so only because they have failed to understand the proper relationship between faith and reason.



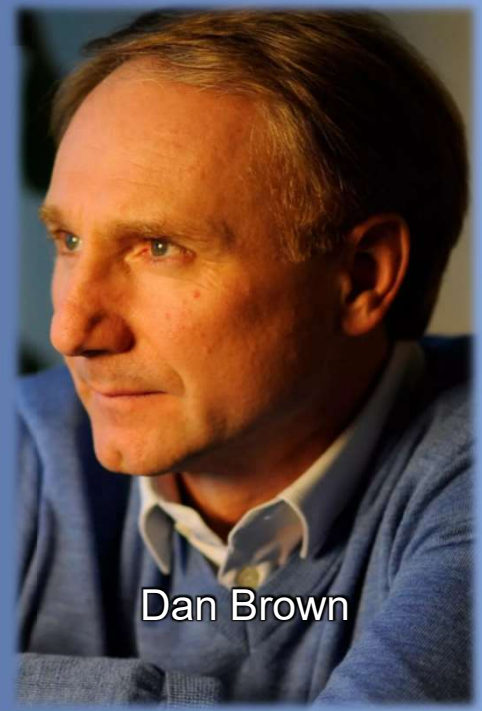
∞ Uses of the Term 'Faith' ∞

- COMMON: synonymous with the term 'religion', e.g., the Christian faith
- THEOLOGICAL: theological virtue, "... for by grace are you saved through faith ..." (Eph. 2:8)
- EPISTEMOLOGICAL: relevant to how we come to know reality and hold certain beliefs





"I really wasn't sure where to turn. Where science offered exciting proofs of its claims, whether it was photos, equations, visible evidence, **religion** was a lot more demanding. It constantly wanted me to **accept everything on faith**. As I'm sure you're aware, faith takes a fair amount of effort."



Dan Brown

"I really wasn't sure where to turn. Where science offered exciting proofs of its claims, whether it was photos, equations, visible evidence, **religion** was a lot more demanding. It constantly wanted me to **accept everything on faith**. As I'm sure you're aware, faith takes a fair amount of effort."

Do we as Christians maintain that Christianity (as a religion) wants one to "accept everything on faith"?

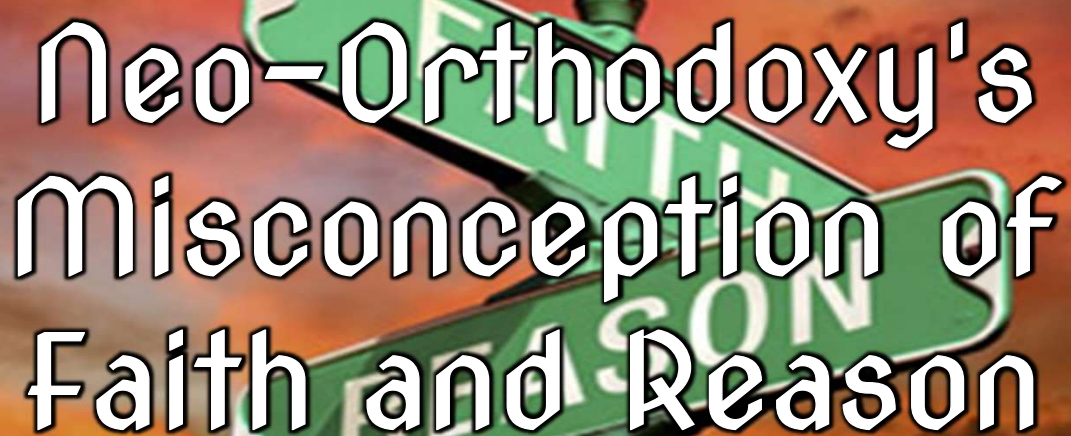
Popular Misconception

Reason

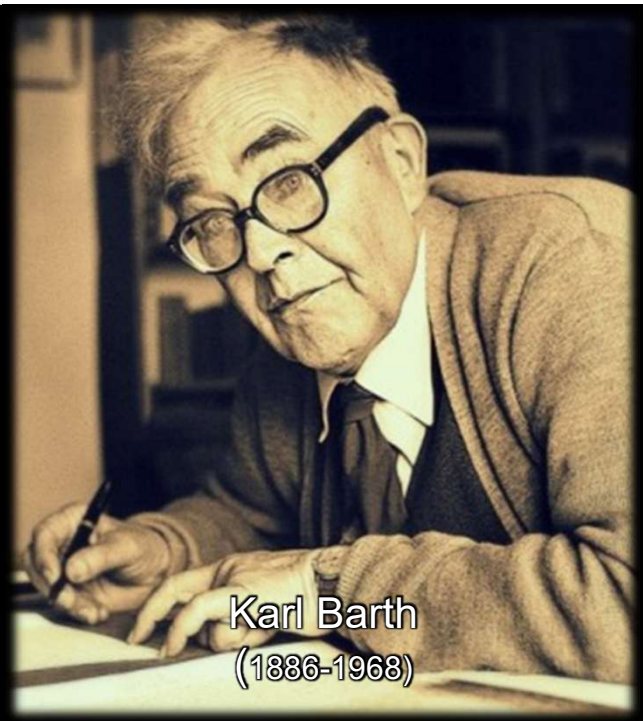
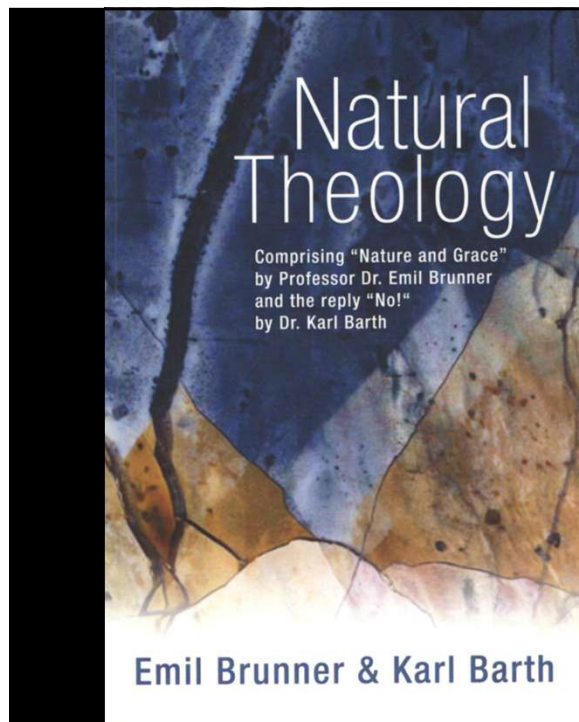
truth
facts
outer
public
rational
thoughts
objective
science
true for all

Faith

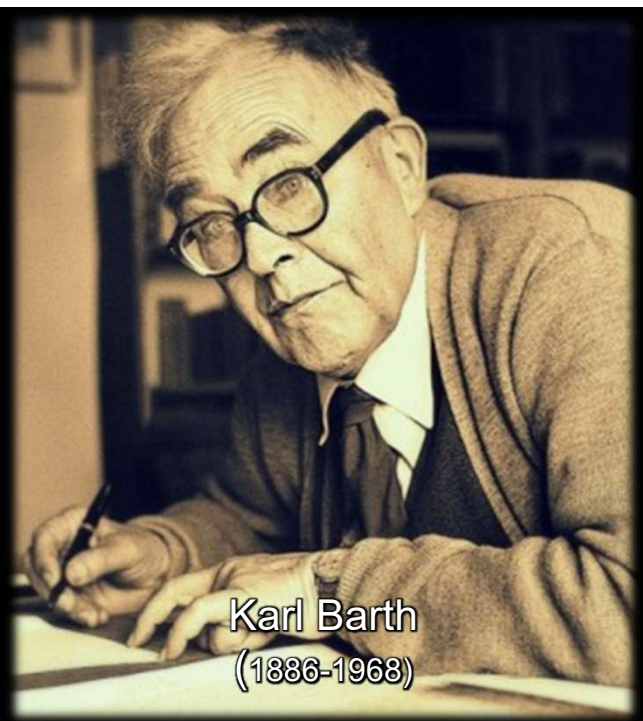
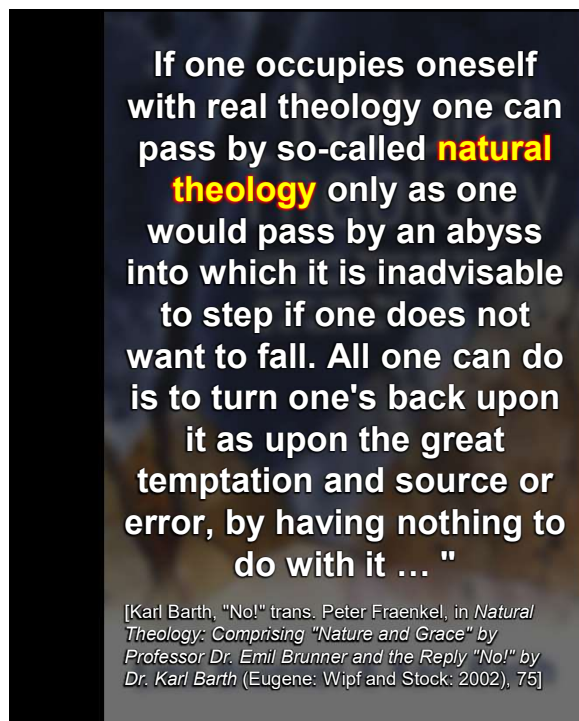
opinion
values
inner
private
emotional
feelings
subjective
religion
true for me



Neo-Orthodoxy's
Misconception of
Faith and Reason



Karl Barth
(1886-1968)



Karl Barth
(1886-1968)

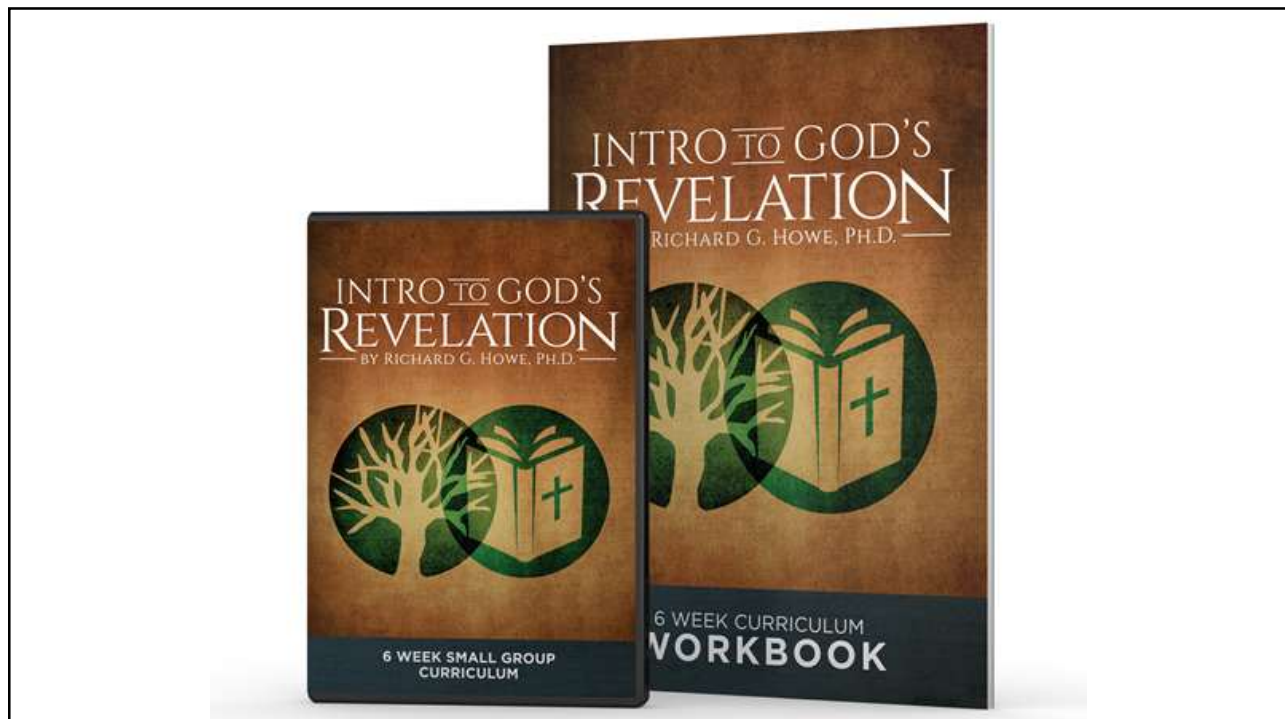
If one occupies oneself with real theology one can pass by so-called **natural theology** only as one would pass by an abyss into which it is inadvisable to step if one does not want to fall. All one can do is to turn one's back upon it as upon the great temptation and source of error, by having nothing to do with it ... "


[Karl Barth, "No!" trans. Peter Fraenkel, in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock: 2002), 75]

Natural Theology arises from God's General Revelation.

General Revelation: God's revelation of His existence and certain attributes to mankind through His creation.

Special Revelation: God's revelation of Himself through His prophets and apostles and ultimate through His taking on human nature in the Incarnation in Jesus Christ.

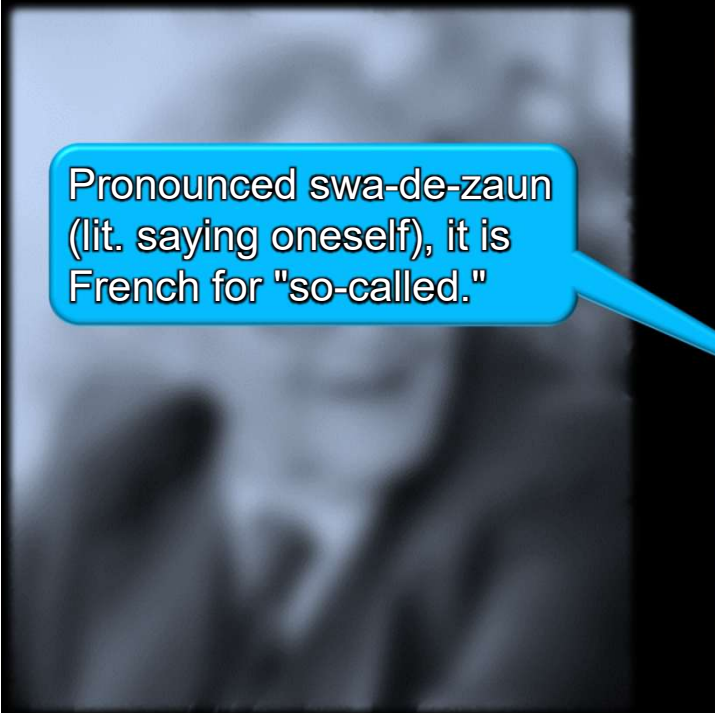




Karl Barth
(1886-1968)

"For of what use would be the purest theology based on grace and revelation to me if I dealt with the subjects of grace and revelation in the way in which natural theology usually deals with it soi-disant data derived from reason, nature and history ...? "

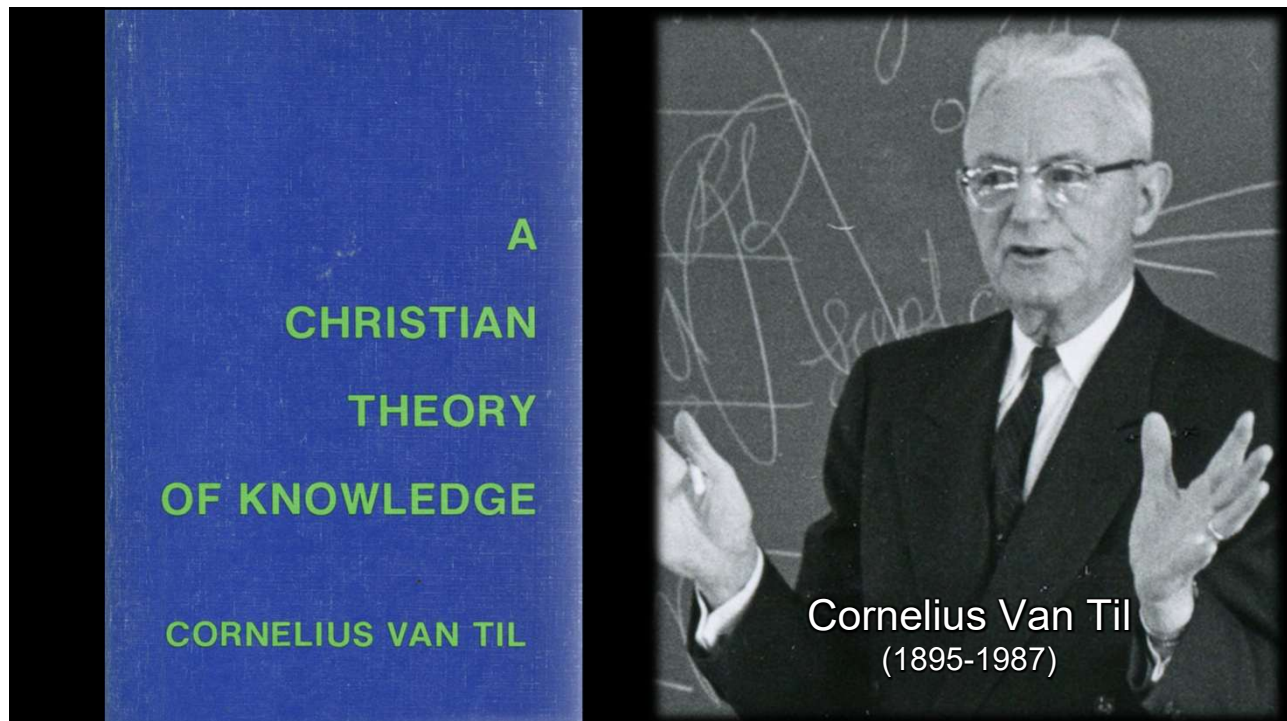
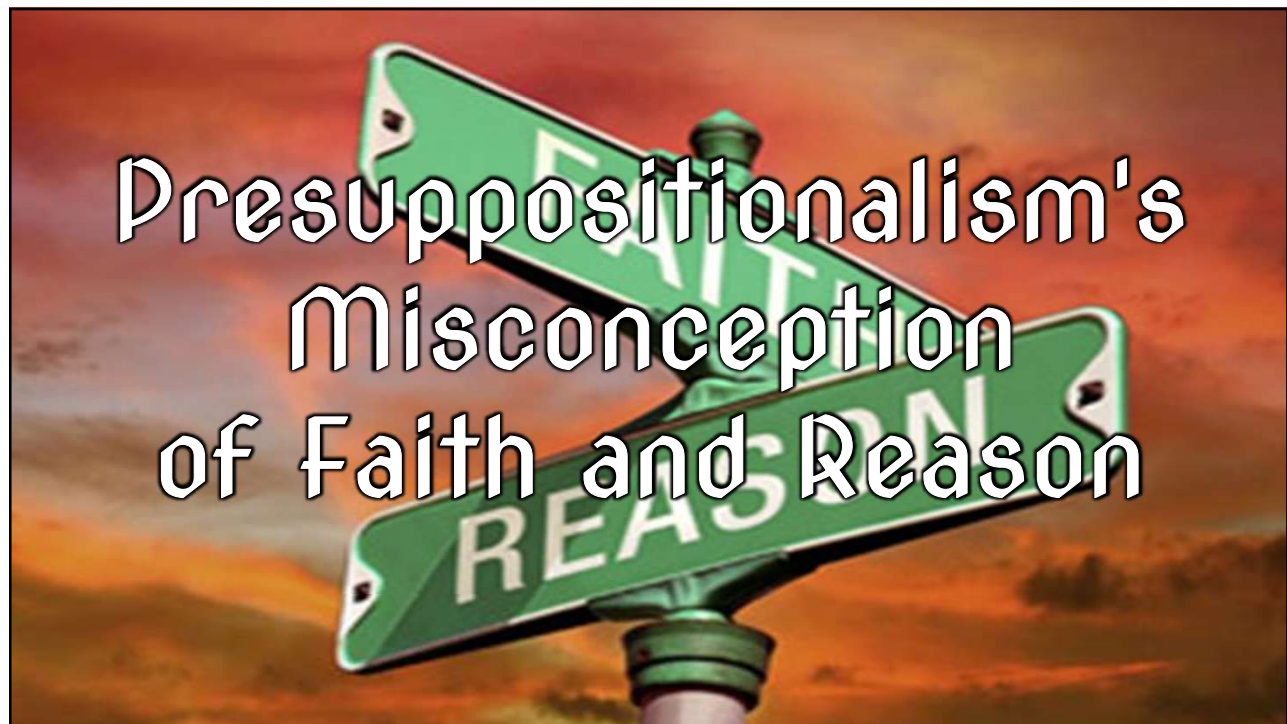
[Karl Barth, "No!" trans. Peter Fraenkel, in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock: 2002), 81]



Pronounced swa-de-zaun (lit. saying oneself), it is French for "so-called."

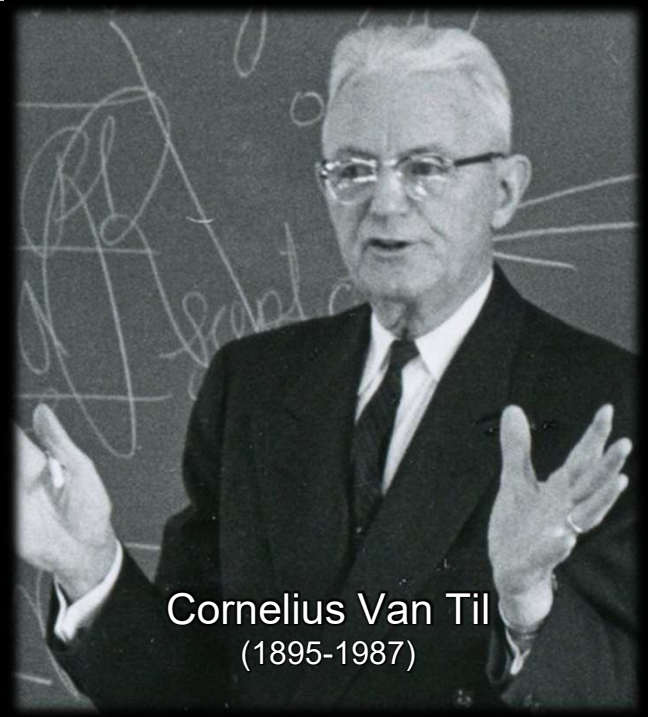
*"For of what use would be the purest theology based on grace and revelation to me if I dealt with the subjects of grace and revelation in the way in which natural theology usually deals with it **soi-disant** data derived from reason, nature and history ...? "*

[Karl Barth, "No!" trans. Peter Fraenkel, in *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock: 2002), 81]



**"Reason and fact
cannot be brought
into fruitful union
with one another
except upon the
presupposition of the
existence of God and
his control over the
universe."**

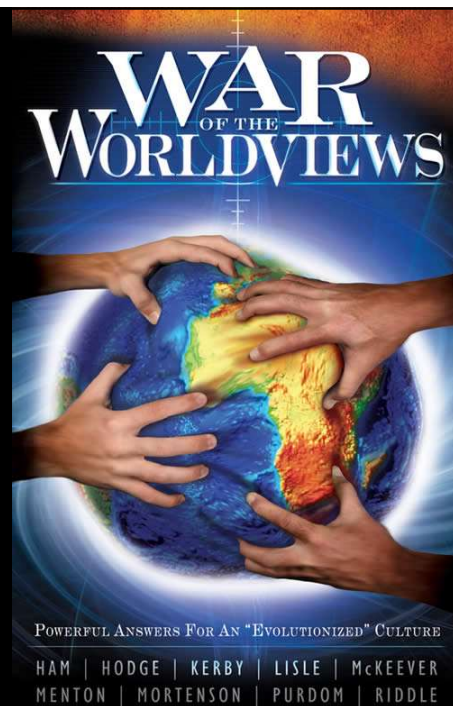
[Cornelius Van Til, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*
(Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing,
1975), 18]



Cornelius Van Til
(1895-1987)



Jason Lisle






Jason Lisle

"We all have the same evidence; but in order to draw conclusions about what the evidence means we use our worldview—our most basic beliefs about the nature of reality. ... Ultimately, biblical creationists accept the recorded history of the Bible as their starting point."

[Jason Lisle, "Can Creationists Be 'Real' Scientists?" in Gary Vaterlaus, ed., *War of the Worldviews: Powerful Answers for an "Evolutionized" Culture* (Hebron: Answers in Genesis, 2005) , 124, 125]



Jason Lisle

Answers in Genesis

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Faith vs. Reason
by Dr. Jason Lisle on October 1, 2012; last featured May 19, 2012

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Some Christians have the idea that faith and reason are in conflict, divided by some unbridgeable chasm. They think that one takes over where the other leaves off. In reality, faith and reason work together seamlessly to help us know and love our Maker.

Many Christians perceive a conflict between reason and faith. On the one hand, God tells us to reason (Isaiah 1:18). We are to have a good reason for what we believe, and we are to be always ready to share that reason with other people (1 Peter 3:15). So we attempt to show unbelievers that our belief in the Scriptures is reasonable, justified, and logically defensible. The Bible makes sense.

On the other hand, we are supposed to have faith. We are supposed to trust God and not lean on our own understanding (Proverbs 3:5). The Bible tells us that the "just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11). It seems that we are supposed to trust God regardless of whether His words make sense to our understanding.

So, which is it? Are we to live by reason or by faith? Are we supposed to rely upon our intellect, drawing rational conclusions, rejecting those things that don't make sense? Or are we to accept the teachings of Scripture without regard to logic and reason, even if it does not make any sense?

This apparent conflict troubles many people. But it stems from a critical misconception about the meaning of both faith and reason. When both terms are properly defined in their biblical context, any apparent conflict disappears. Yes, we are to have good reasons for what

THE APPARENT CONFLICT BETWEEN FAITH AND REASON TROUBLES MANY PEOPLE.



Jason Lisle

"Faith is a prerequisite for reason. In order to reason about anything we must have faith that there are laws of logic which correctly prescribe the correct chain of reasoning. Since laws of logic cannot be observed with the senses, our confidence in them is a type of faith."

[Jason Lisle, "Faith and Reason,"
<https://answersingenesis.org/apologetics/faith-vs-reason/>, accessed 11/24/23]



Jason Lisle

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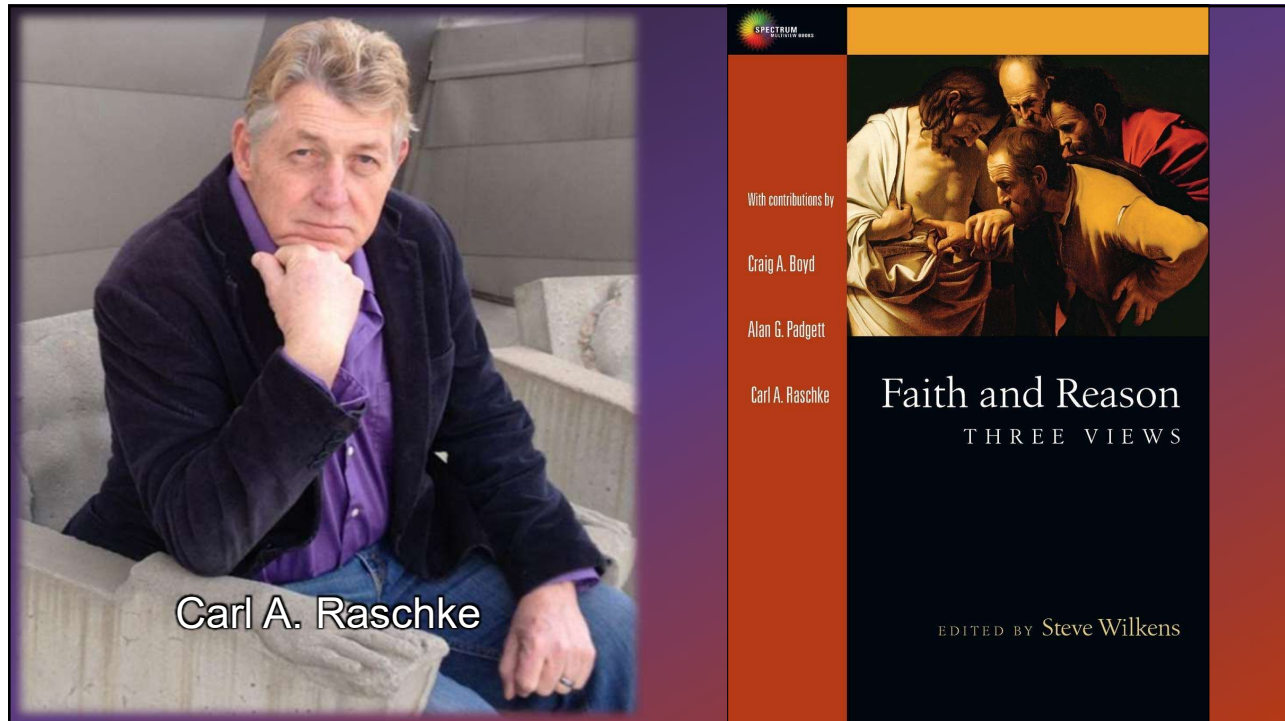
[Jason Lisle, "Faith and Reason,"
<https://answersingenesis.org/apologetics/faith-vs-reason/>, accessed 11/24/23]

Lisle is confusing having faith that X is true with X being self-evidently or undeniably true.

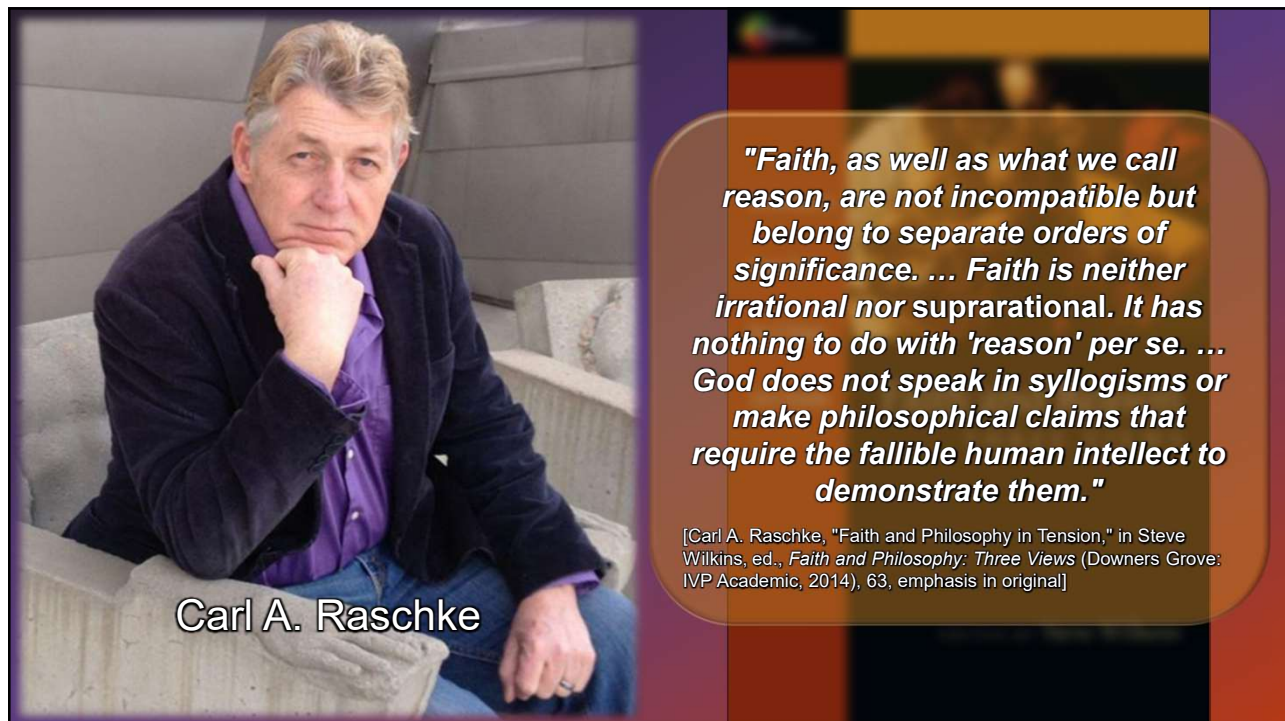
*"Faith is a prerequisite for reason. In order to reason about anything we must have **faith that there are laws of logic** which correctly prescribe the correct chain of reasoning. **Since laws of logic cannot be observed with the senses, our confidence in them is a type of faith.**"*

[Jason Lisle, "Faith and Reason," <https://answersingenesis.org/apologetics/faith-vs-reason/>, accessed 11/24/23]


Postmodernism's
Misconception of
Faith and Reason



Carl A. Raschke




Carl A. Raschke



Carl A. Raschke

"Meaning is ultimately determined by how the intricate structures of communication work together in an overarching manner, and it is up to the interpreter to provide a new framework of discourse in which what was first written or spoken can be fleshed out. The 'truth' of a text can be discerned in its deployability within a particular set of life circumstances."

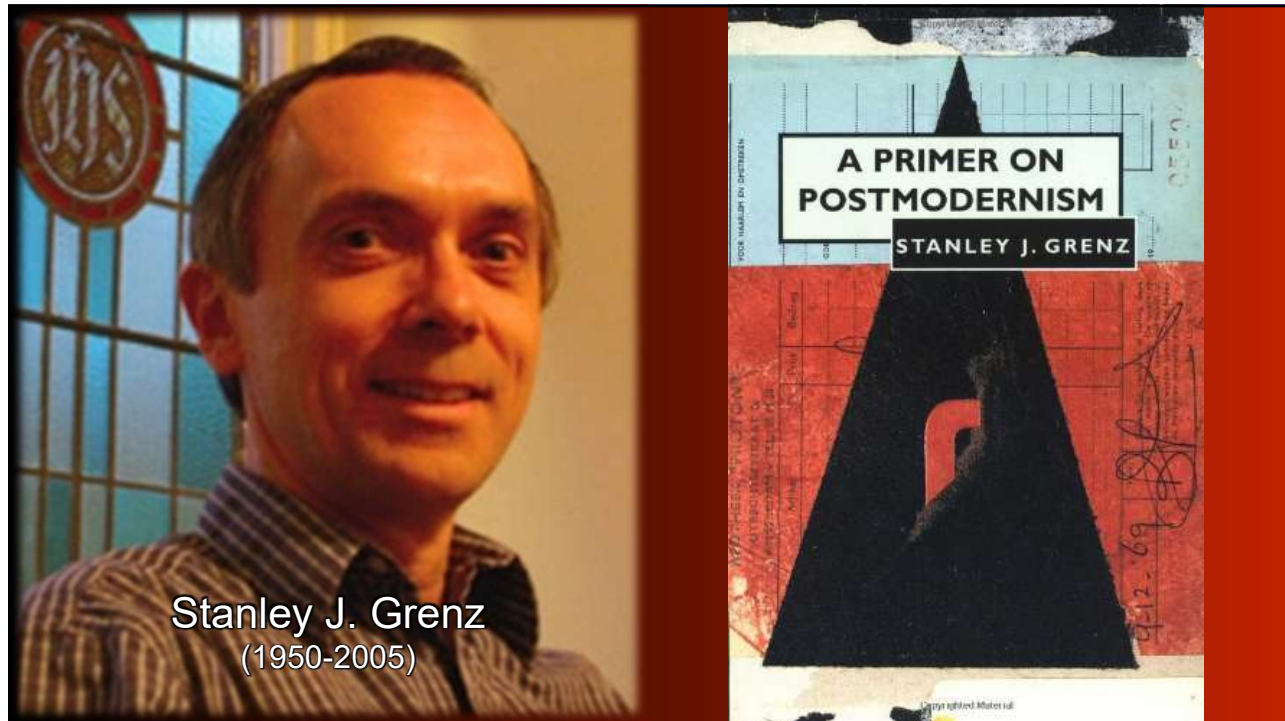
[Carl A. Raschke, "Faith and Philosophy in Tension," in Steve Wilkins, ed., *Faith and Philosophy: Three Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 61, emphasis in original]

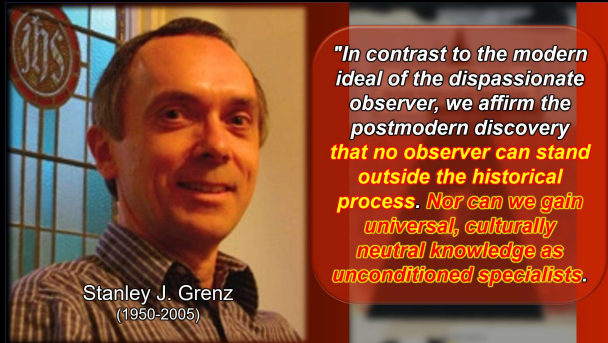


Carl A. Raschke

"Propositional logic, whether exercised for the clarification of terms in a formal argument or to prove the validity of some simple assertion, is inadequate to make sense out of the 'revealed' truth of Scripture for one compelling reason: it speaks to the disinterested intellect, whereas God through his Word speaks to the whole person, including the human heart and what in both ancient Greek and later Christian philosophy is known as synderesis, or 'conscience.'"

[Carl A. Raschke, "Faith and Philosophy in Tension," in Steve Wilkins, ed., *Faith and Philosophy: Three Views* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 61, emphasis in original]





If what Grenz says is true, then his own statement itself does not come from an observer who stands "outside the historical process" and, thus, the statement is not itself "neutral knowledge" coming from an "unconditioned specialist."



If what Grenz says is true, then his own statement itself does not come from an observer who stands "outside the historical process" and, thus, the statement is not itself "neutral knowledge" coming from an "unconditioned specialist."


Since this is the case, why should we believe that it is objectively true?



Stanley J. Grenz
(1950-2005)

"On the contrary, we are participants in our historical and cultural context, and **all our intellectual endeavors** are unavoidably conditioned by that participation."

[Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 166]



Stanley J. Grenz
(1950-2005)

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[Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 166]

If "all our intellectual endeavors" are "unavoidably conditioned" then Grenz's own statement is itself "unavoidably conditioned."

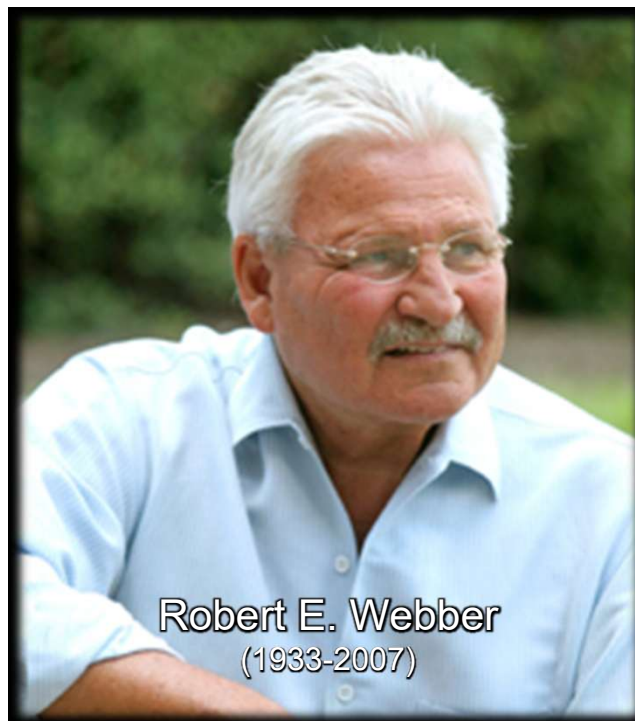
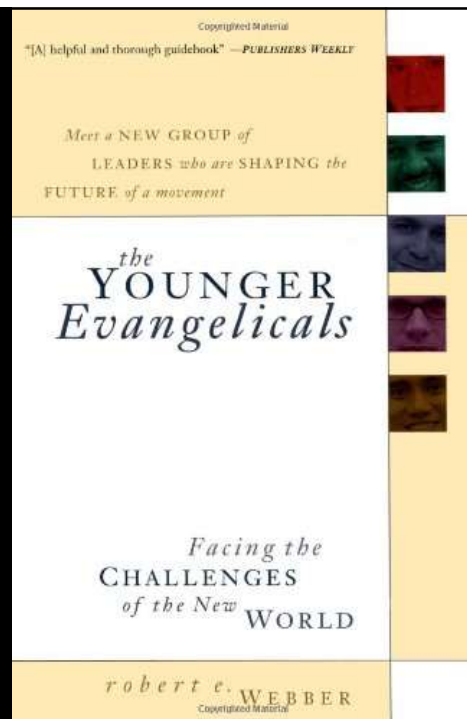
But if his statement is "unavoidably conditioned," then why should we take it as objectively true?

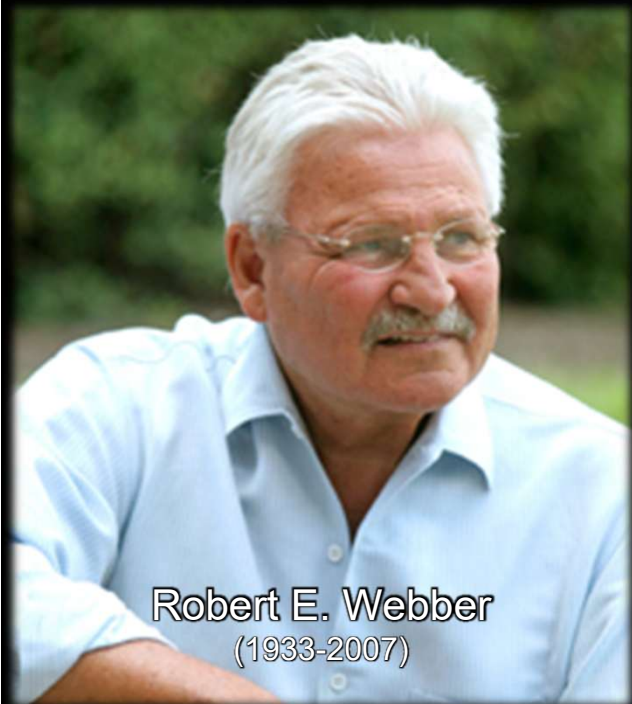


Dan McGee

*"Postmodernism stresses the distinction between objectivity of facts, versus objectivity of knowledge or people. It accepts the possible existence of facts outside human context, but argues that **all knowledge is mediated** by an individual and that the experiences, **biases**, beliefs, and identity of that individual **necessarily influence how they mediate any knowledge.**"*

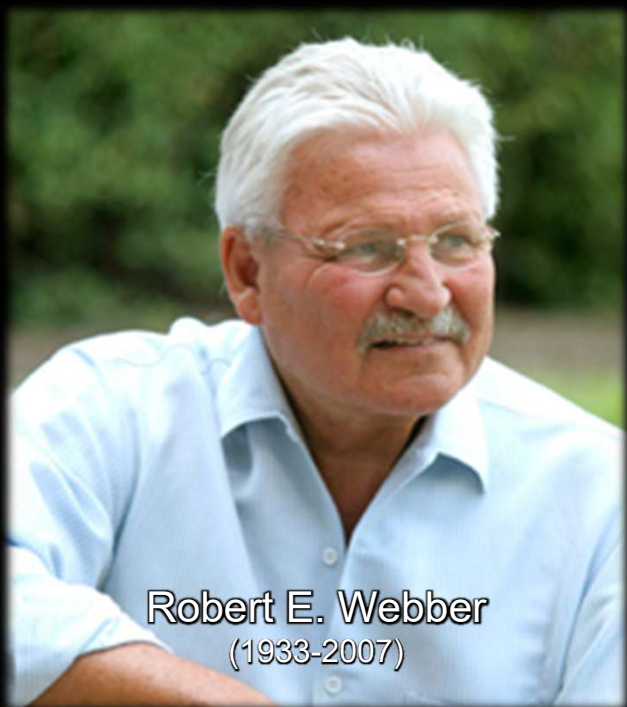
[Dan McGee, "Truth and Postmodernism" downloaded from <https://medium.com/@danmcgee/truth-and-postmodernism-816ea9b3007a>, 11/24/23]

Robert E. Webber
(1933-2007)



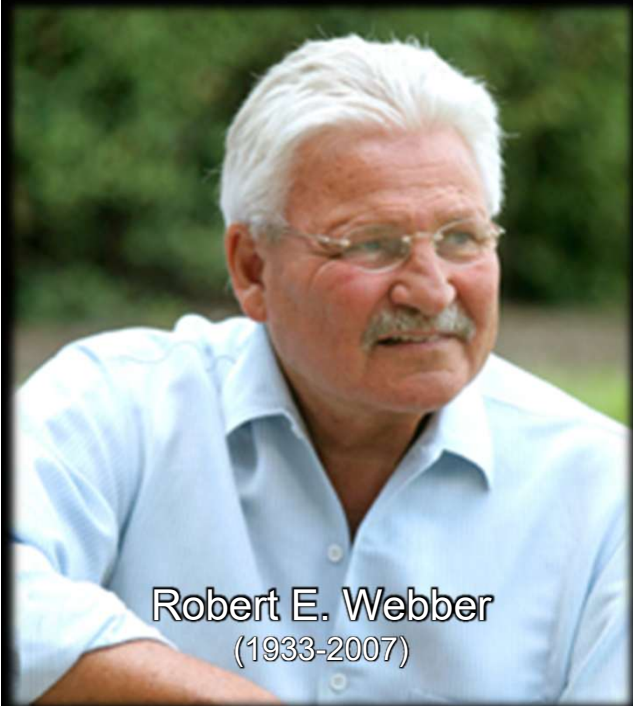
Robert E. Webber
(1933-2007)

"In the twenty-first century world ... the new attitude ... is that the use of reason and science to prove or disprove a fact is questionable. ..."



Robert E. Webber
(1933-2007)

"This ... points ... to the postmodern conclusion that we deal with 'interpreted facts.' ..."



"In the postmodern world, both believers and nonbelievers are people of faith."

[Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 84]

Robert E. Webber
(1933-2007)

Saturday, 10 March 2018

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Home

HOMILETICS INTERVIEW: Robert E. Webber

What Younger Evangelicals Want—and Are Getting!

Robert E. Webber is the William R. and Geraldyn B. Myers Professor of Ministry at Northern Seminary in Lombard, Illinois, one of the only seminaries in the country that offers a Master's and a Doctorate in worship and which has intentional studies that integrate worship and spirituality into the program. He is also the President of the Institute For Worship Studies which offers a MWS (Masters of Worship Studies) and a DWS (Doctor of Worship Studies). He is also Professor of Theology Emeritus at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois.

Dr. Webber has lectured on worship in nearly every denomination and fellowship, and has authored or edited more than 40 books on worship including the eight-volume work, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*. His most recent books include: *Planning Blended Worship* (Abingdon, 1998), *Ancient-Future Faith* (Baker, 1999), and *Journey to Jesus* (Abingdon, 2001).

His latest book, *The Younger Evangelical* (Baker, 2002), is attracting broad attention and interest because of its incisive look at a new emerging leadership in the church, while at the same time pausing to look at the leadership models of the 20th-century church.

Dr. Webber was scheduled to speak at a conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on Radical Orthodoxy, where Homiletics was to meet up with him for this interview. But he called a few days before the conference to say that he had had back surgery and wouldn't be there. So we met with him in his home in Wheaton, where in the kitchen, and in a straight-back chair, he gladly and graciously discussed his observations about a church that is in the midst of change and the Younger Evangelicals who are leading the way.

Homiletics: To start, we should probably clarify the categories you develop for evangelicals in the 20th century and the early 21st century. You identify traditional, pragmatic and Younger Evangelicals. What defines these groups?

Webber: The underlying idea of these three groups is that evangelicalism seems to follow the curvature of culture and reflects culture. And if you look back over the last 50-60 years, culture has actually gone through three very distinct groupings: Boomers, Gen-Xers and now Millennials. It seems to me that as evangelicalism encounters each cultural shift that each cultural shift as they integrate with it gives a different shape and form, not so much to the message, but to the way in which the message itself is



Robert E. Webber

Other Homiletics Interviews:

Preaching Is an Incarnational Event — **Richard Ward**

Jesus and the Consumerist Culture — **Tyler Wigg Stevenson**

Taking God to Work — **David Miller**

Why Things Are the Way They Are — **Paul Shepherd**

Let's Try to Keep the China on the Table — **N.T. Wright**

Stitching Together the Patchwork Family — **Barbara Carnal**

Homiletics: So then, the Traditional Evangelicals function within a modern worldview that is rationalistic, and propositional.

Webber: "That probably is the most distinguishing feature of the Traditionalists. They've been shaped by the **Enlightenment**. So they work with **modern philosophy**, a modern understanding of science, history, sociology. They're **modernist**, and so they interpret the Christian faith through these **modern categories**."

Webber: "And what's very interesting about Traditional Evangelicals is that the categories through which they interpret the Christian faith are almost regarded as sacred, almost as sacred as the Christian faith itself. So if you say, 'Well, I don't believe in evidential apologetics,' there's something wrong with you."

[<http://www.homileticsonline.com/subscriber/interviews/webber.asp>, accessed 09/05/20. This interview apparently has been deleted by Homiletics Online.]



The Classical View of Faith and Reason

Classical View of Faith and Reason

Reason

*Believing
something on
the basis of
demonstration.*

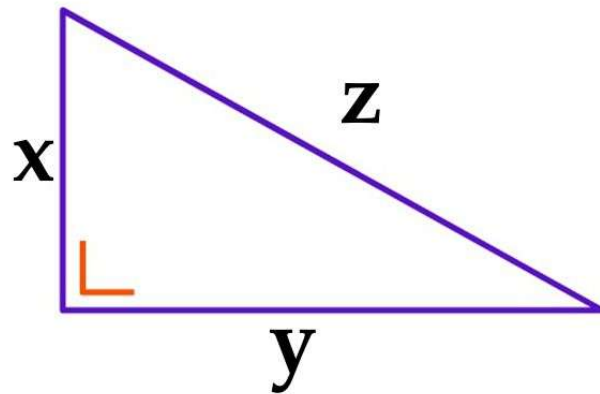
Faith

*Believing
something on
the basis of
authority.*

***Consider
Fermat's
Last Theorem.***

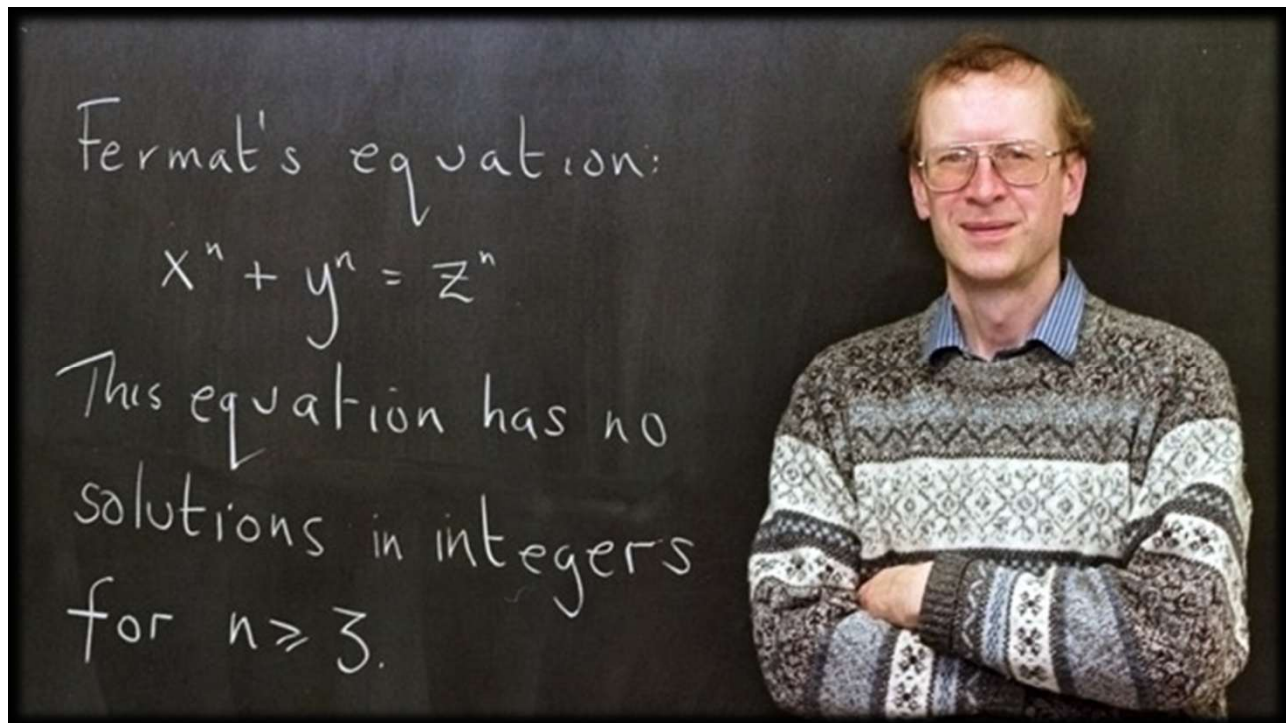


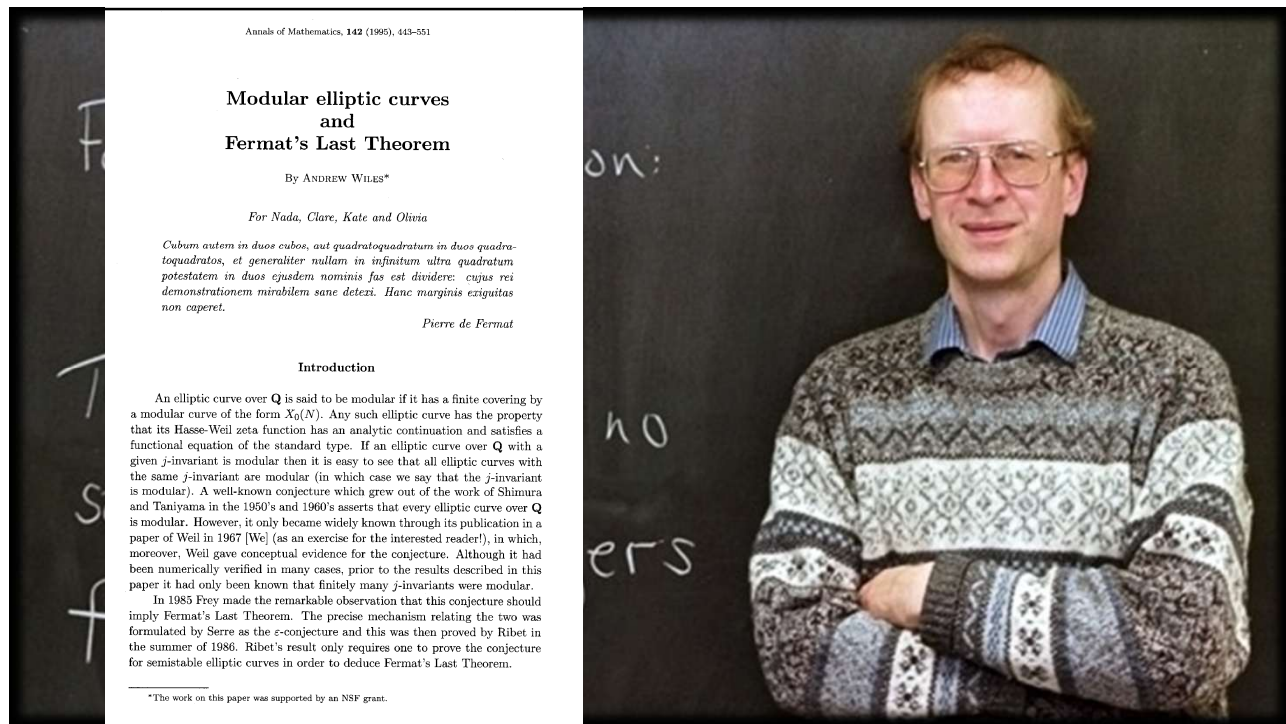
Pierre de Fermat
(1601-1665)



Pythagorean Theorem

$$x^2 + y^2 = z^2$$





Classical View of Faith and Reason

Reason

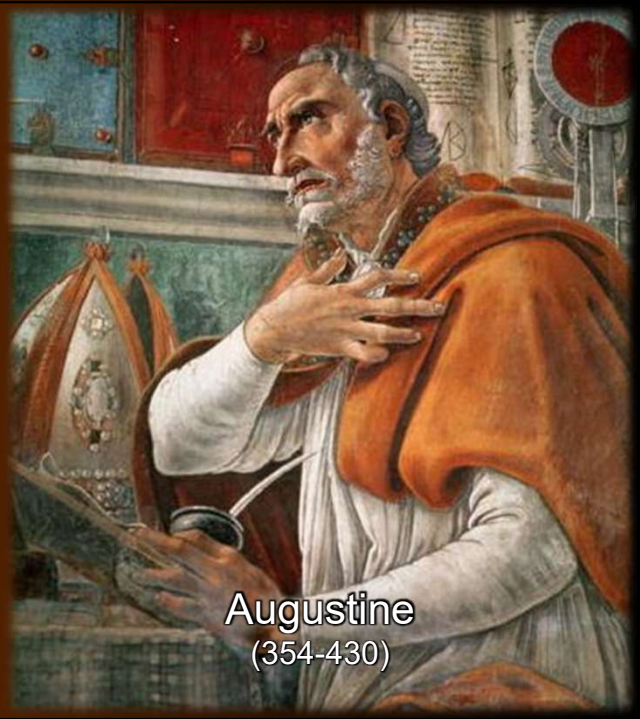
*Believing
something on
the basis of
demonstration.*

Faith

*Believing
something on
the basis of
Divine authority.*

"For who cannot see that thinking [reason] is prior to believing [faith]? For no one believes anything unless he has first thought that it is to be believed."

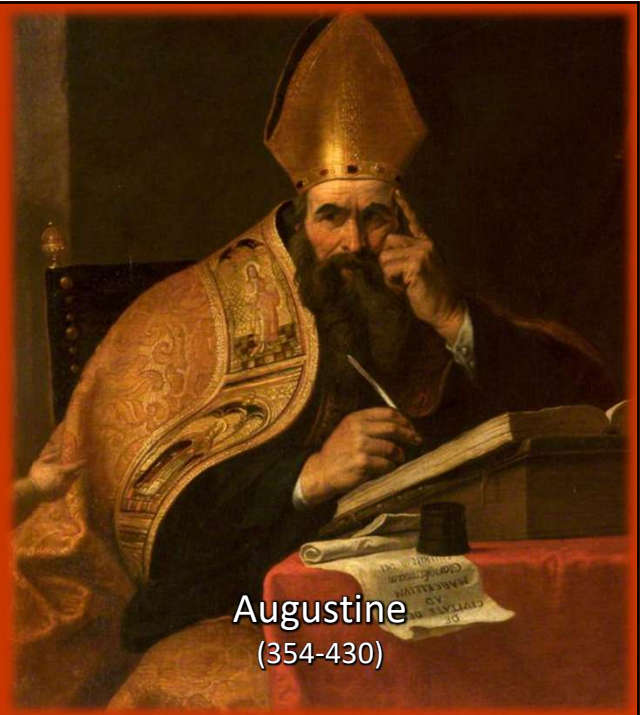
[On the Predestination of the Saints, 5, as cited in Norman L. Geisler, ed. What Augustine Says (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 13]



Augustine
(354-430)

"Heaven forbid, after all, that God should hate in us that by which he made us more excellent than the other animals. Heaven forbid, I say, that we should believe in such a way that we do not accept or seek a rational account, since we could not even believe if we did not have rational souls."

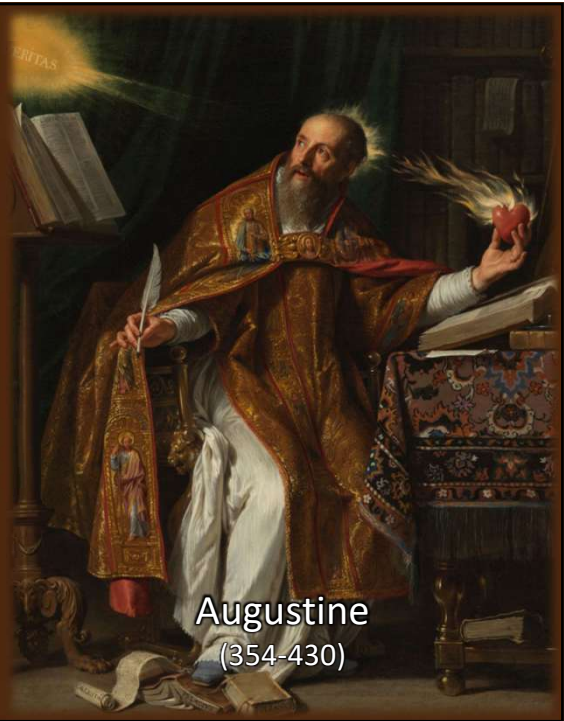
[Letter 120, in Letters 100-155 (Vol. II/2), trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park: New City Press), p. 131]



Augustine
(354-430)

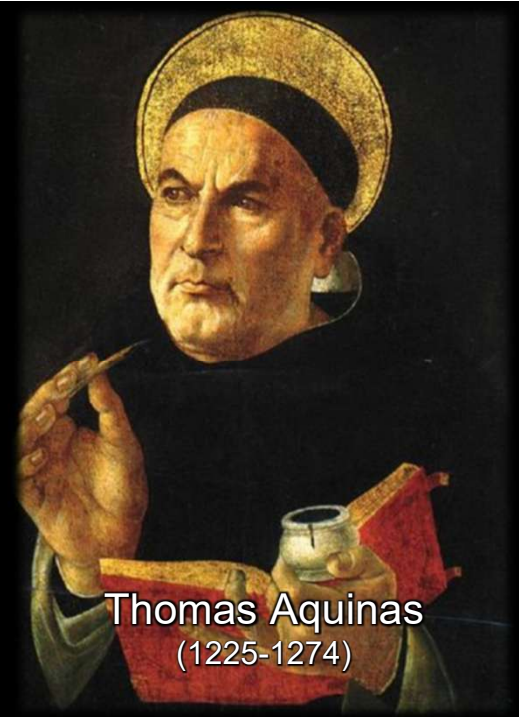
"In certain matters, therefore, pertaining to the teaching of salvation, which we cannot grasp by reason, but which we will be able to at some point, faith precedes reason so that the heart may be purified in order that it may receive and sustain the light of the great reason, which is, of course, a demand of reason!"

[Letter 120, Teske, p. 131]



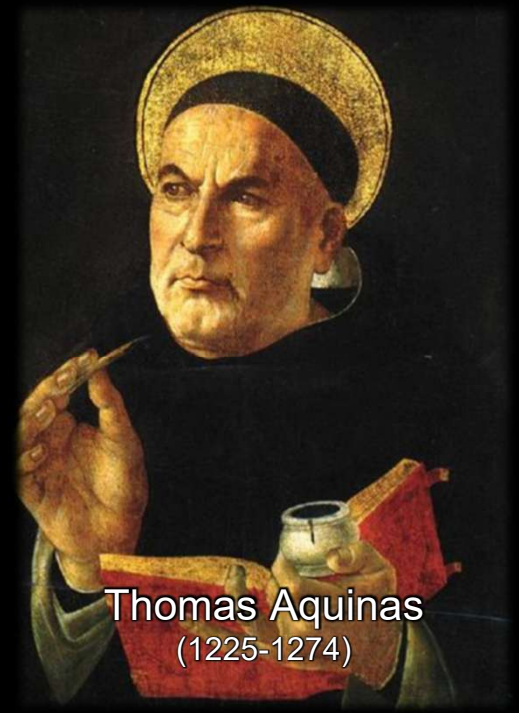
Augustine
(354-430)

"Those things are said to be present to the understanding which do not exceed its capacity so that the gaze of understanding may be fixed on them. For a person gives assent to such things because of the witness of his own understanding and not because of someone else's testimony."



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

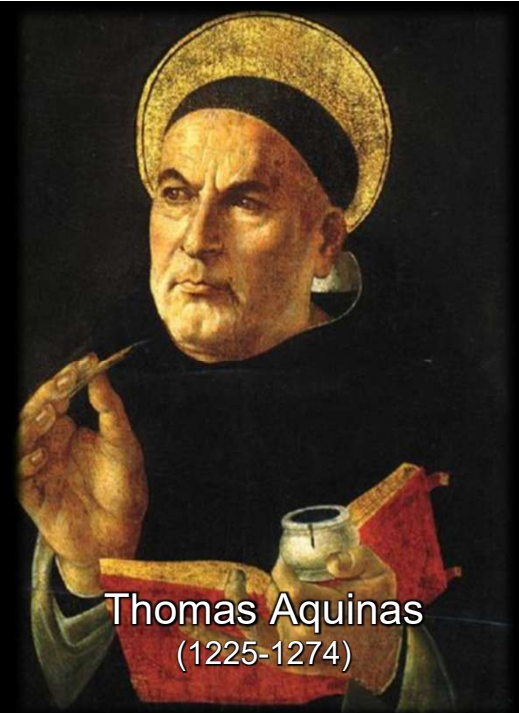
"Those things, however, which are beyond the power of our understanding are said to be absent from the senses of the mind. Hence, our understanding cannot be fixed on them."



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"As a result, we cannot assent to them on our own witness, but on that of someone else. These things are properly called the objects of faith."

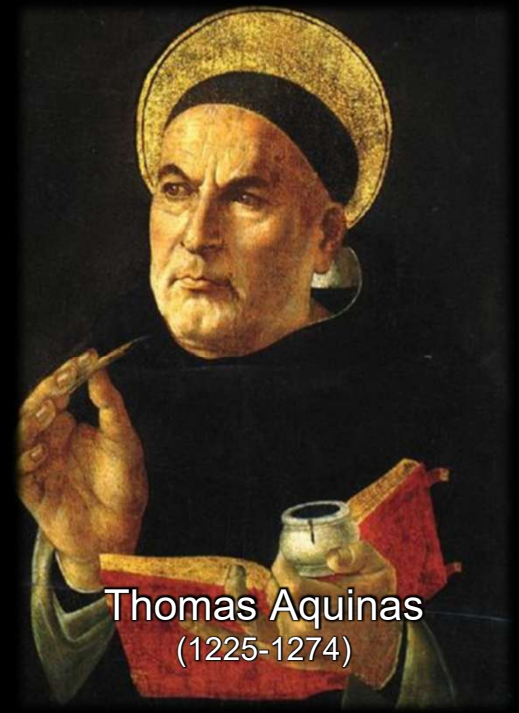
[*Truth*, QXIV, Art. 9, reply, trans. James V. McGlynn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 249-250]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

***"One who believes
[i.e., has faith] gives
assent to things that
are proposed to him
by another person,
and which he himself
does not see."***

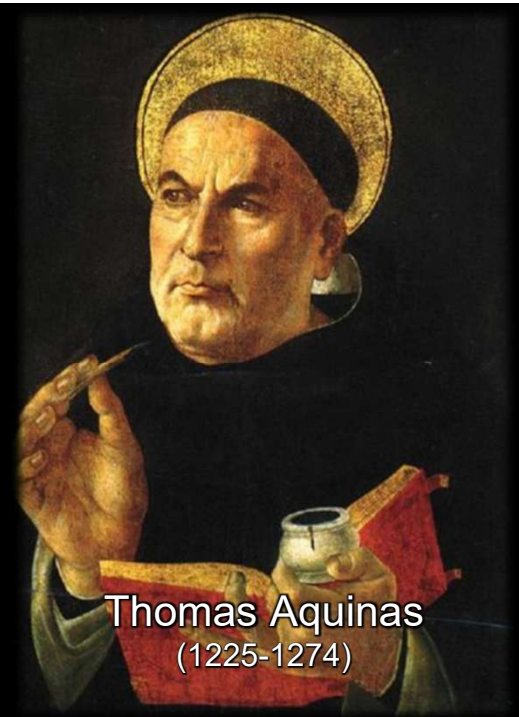
[Truth, QXIV, Art. 9, reply, trans. James V. McGlynn (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 249-250]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

***"Since man can only know the
things that he does not see
himself by taking them from
another who does see them, and
since faith is among the things
we do not see, the knowledge of
the objects of faith must be
handed on by one who sees them
himself. Now, this one is God,
Who perfectly comprehends
Himself, and naturally sees His
essence."***

[SCG, 3, 154 [1], trans. Vernon J. Bourke, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), 239]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"There are some intelligible truths to which the efficacy of the agent intellect extends, like the principles we naturally know and the conclusions we deduce from them. In order to know them we do not need a new intellectual light; the light endowed by nature suffices. There are some truths, however, which do not come within the range of these principles, like the truths of faith, which transcend the faculty of reason, also future contingents and other matters of this sort. The human mind cannot know these without being divinely illumined by a new light supplementing the natural light."

[Faith, Reason and Theology: Questions I-IV of His Commentary on the De Trinitate of Boethius, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987), 17]

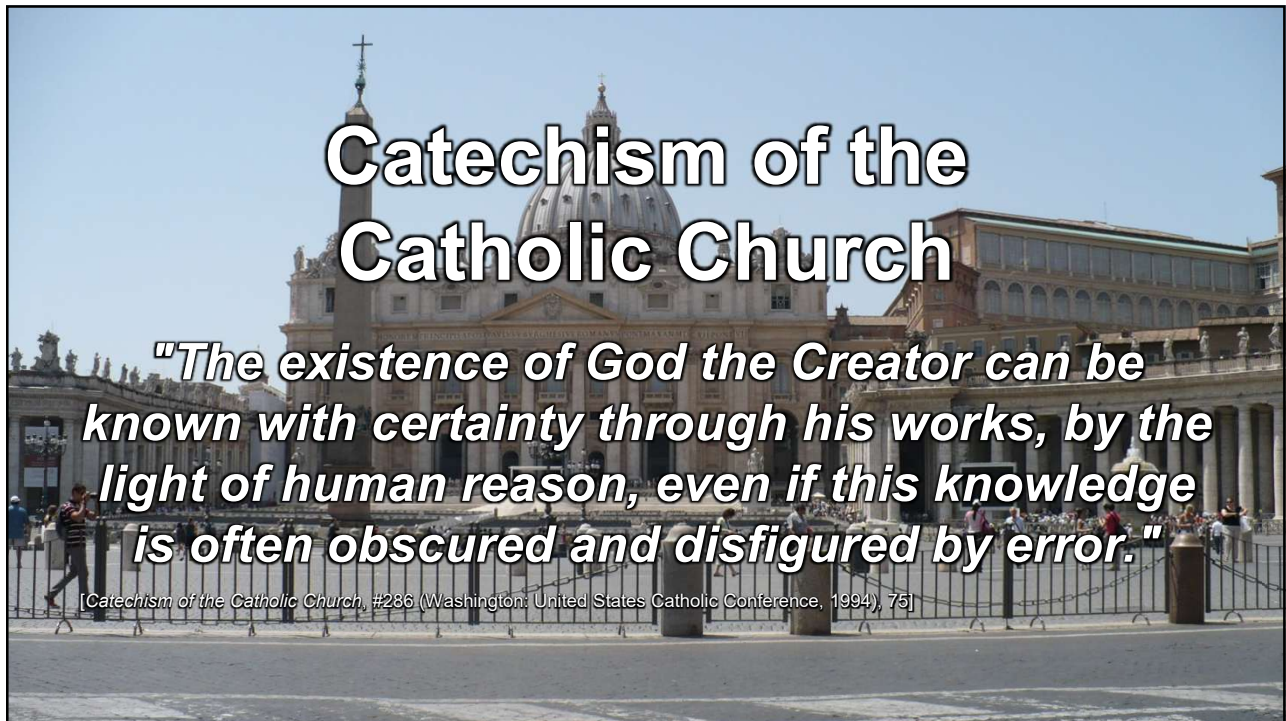


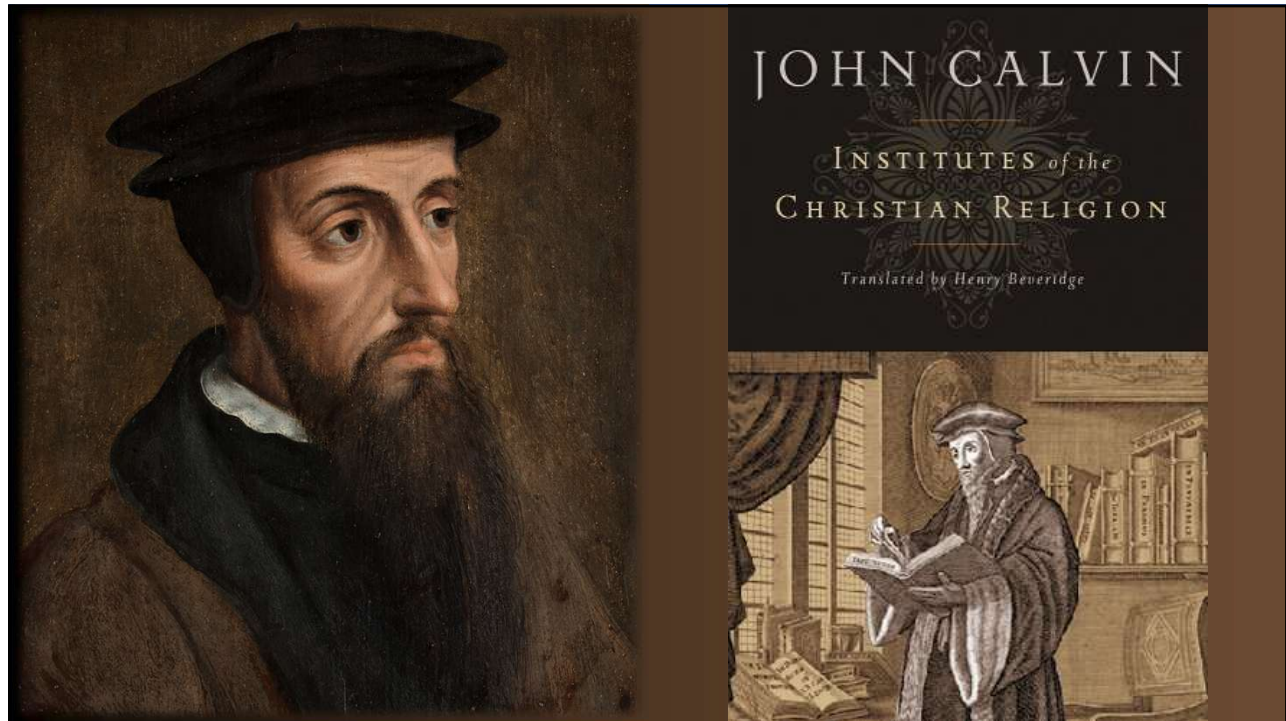
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

Catechism of the Catholic Church

"The existence of God the Creator can be known with certainty through his works, by the light of human reason, even if this knowledge is often obscured and disfigured by error."

[Catechism of the Catholic Church, #286 (Washington: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), 75]

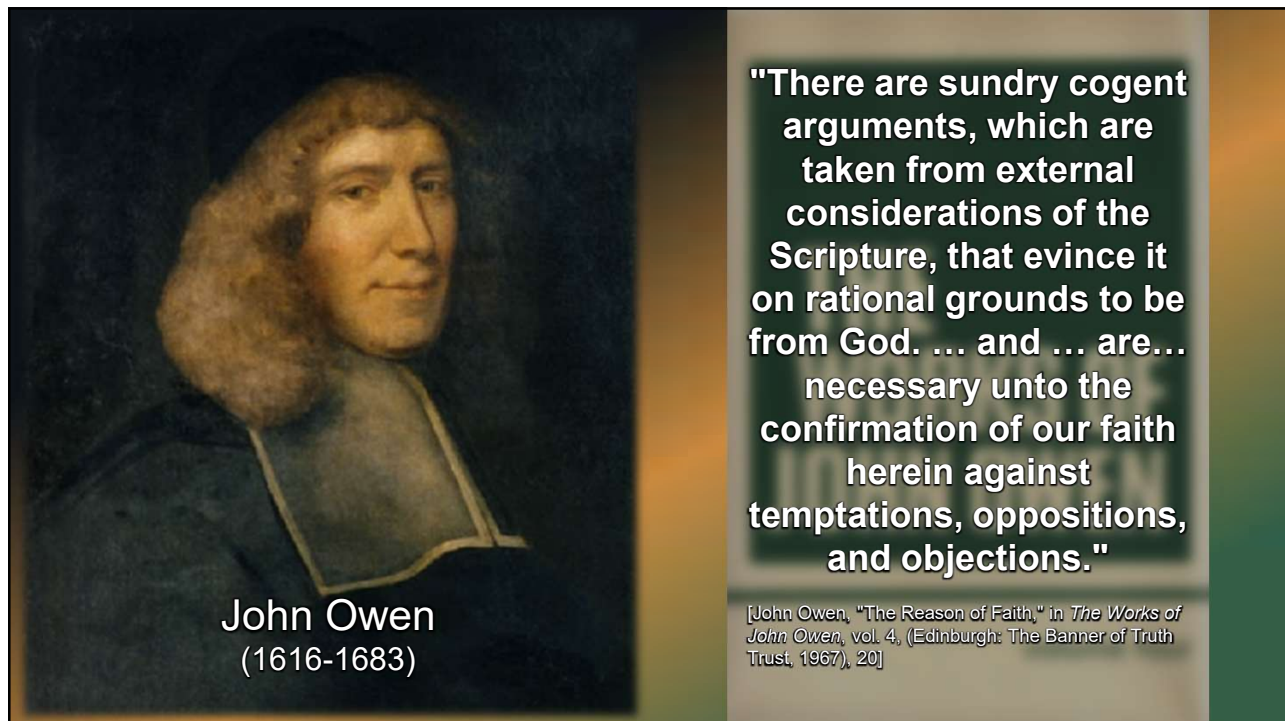
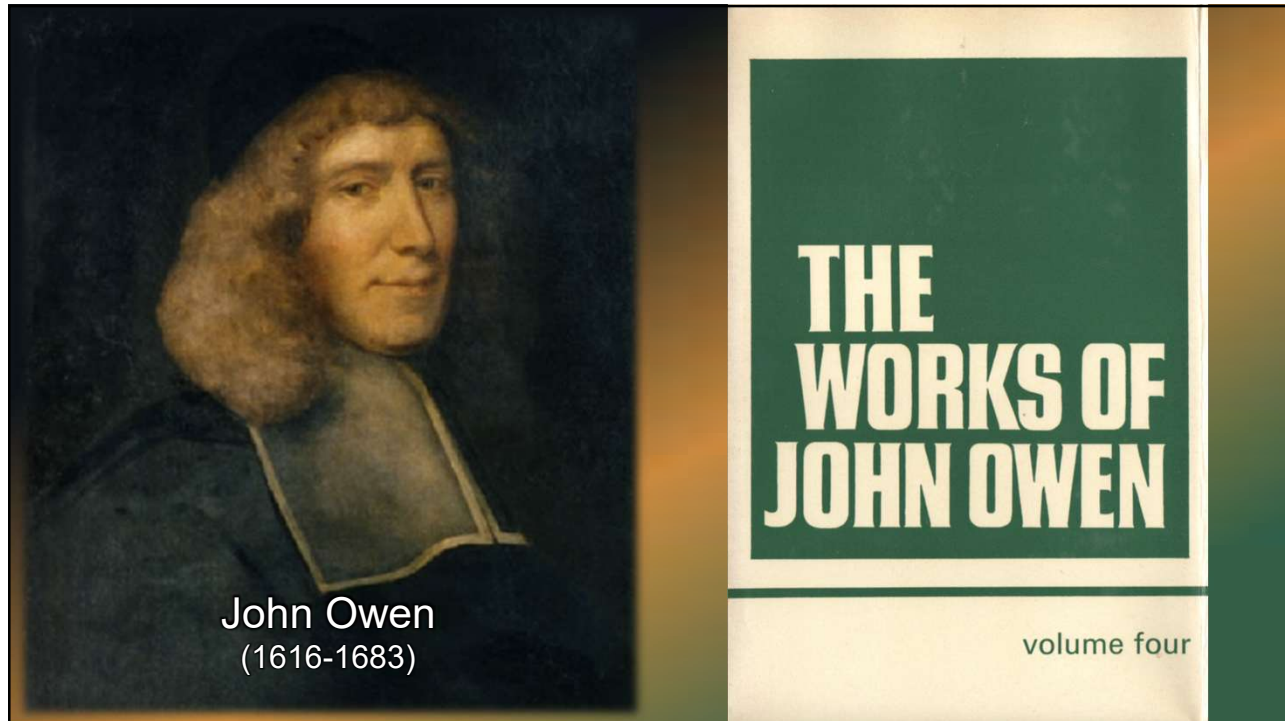


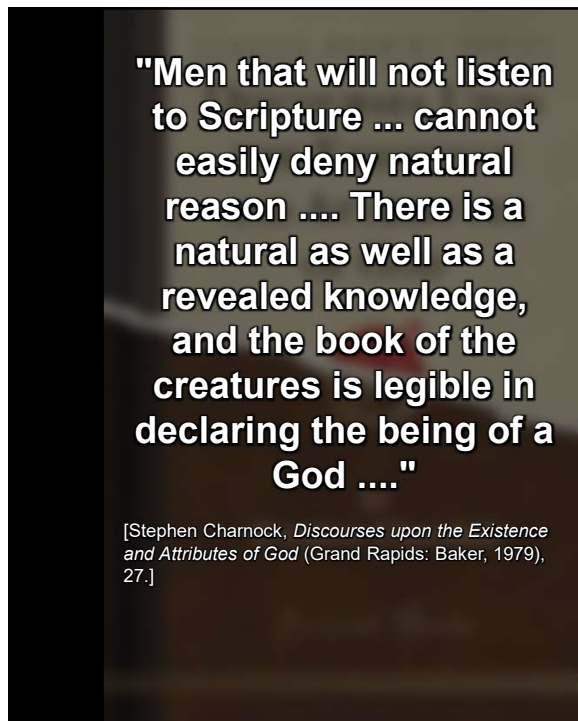
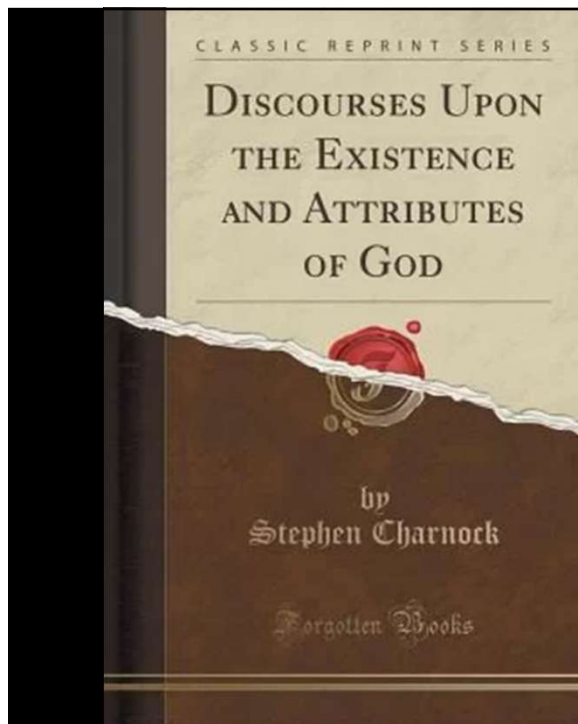



John Calvin
(1509-1564)

"Therefore in reading the profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator."

[Institutes of the Christian Religion 2.2.15, trans. Henry Beveridge, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans), 236]





"God in regard of his existence is not only the discovery of faith, but of reason. God hath revealed not only his being, but some sparks of his eternal power and godhead in his works, as well as in his word. ... It is a discovery of our reason ... and an object of our faith ... it is an article of our faith and an article of our reason."

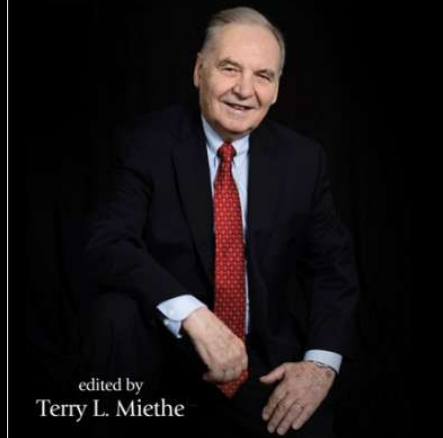
[Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 27.]



Stephen Charnock
(1628-1680)

I Am Put Here for the Defense of the Gospel

Dr. Norman L. Geisler: A Festschrift in His Honor



edited by
Terry L. Miethe

CHAPTER 12

Defending the Handmaid

How Theology Needs Philosophy

by Richard G. Howe

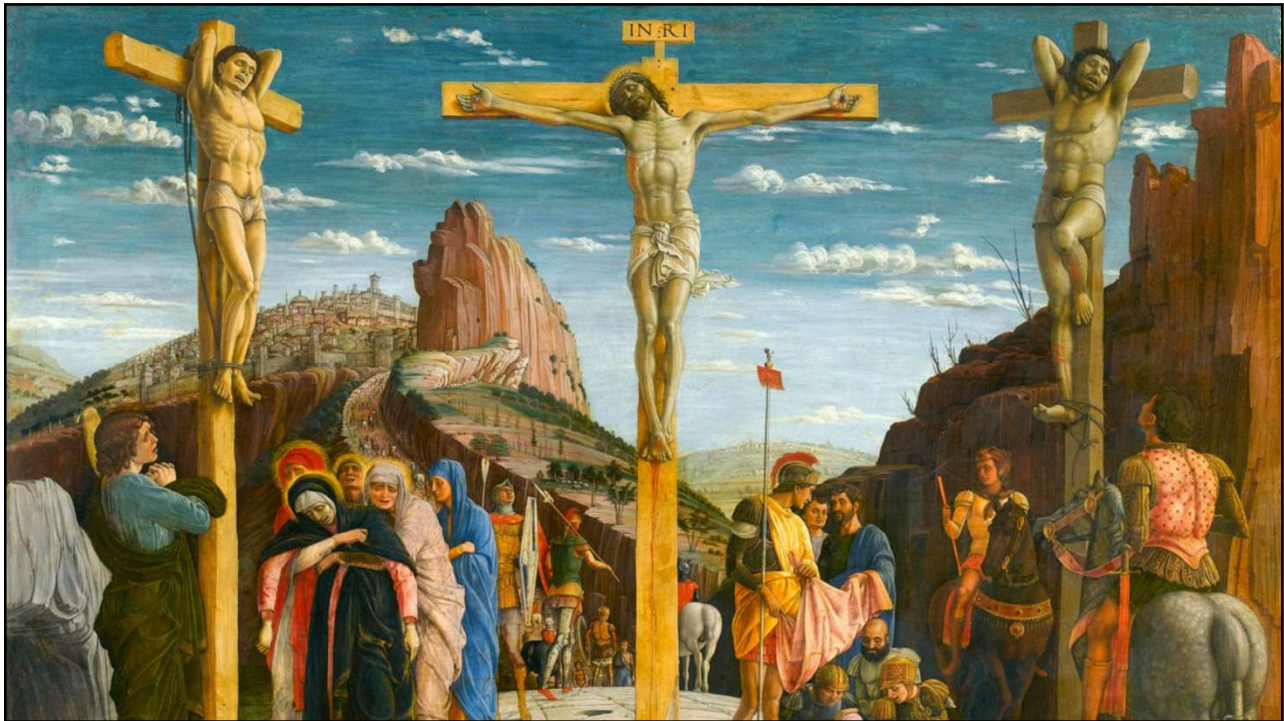
Prolegomena

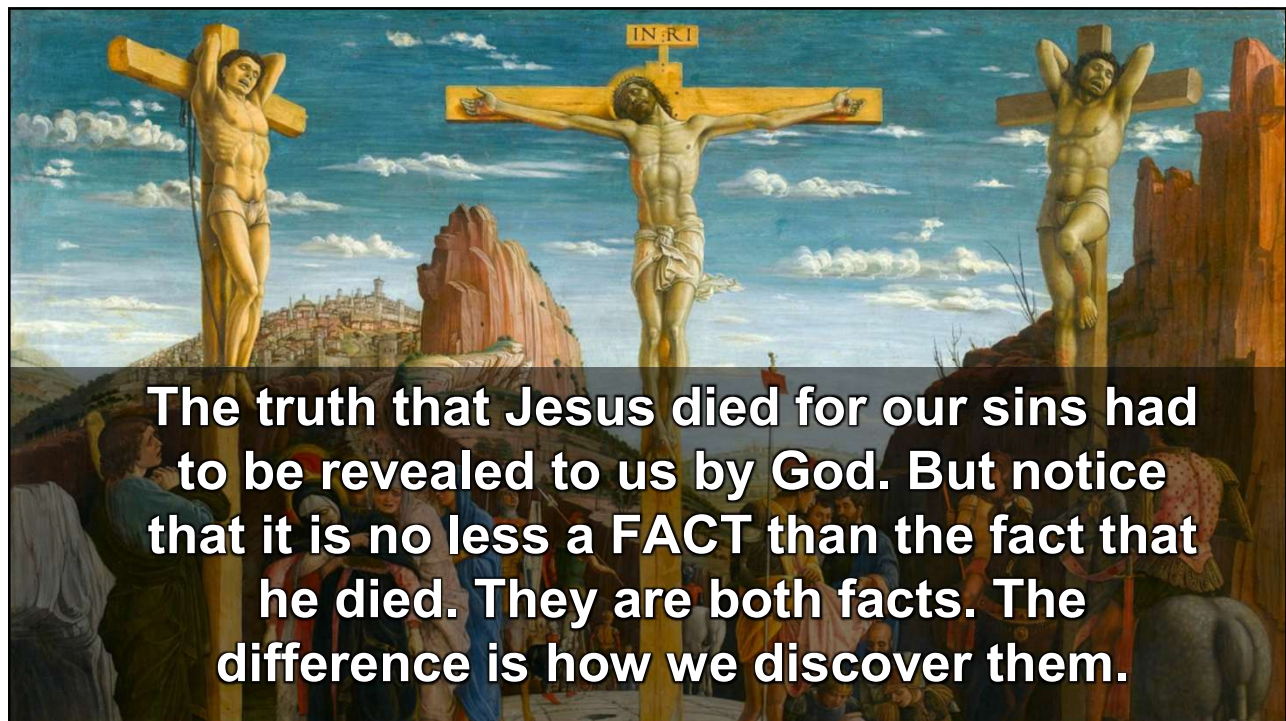
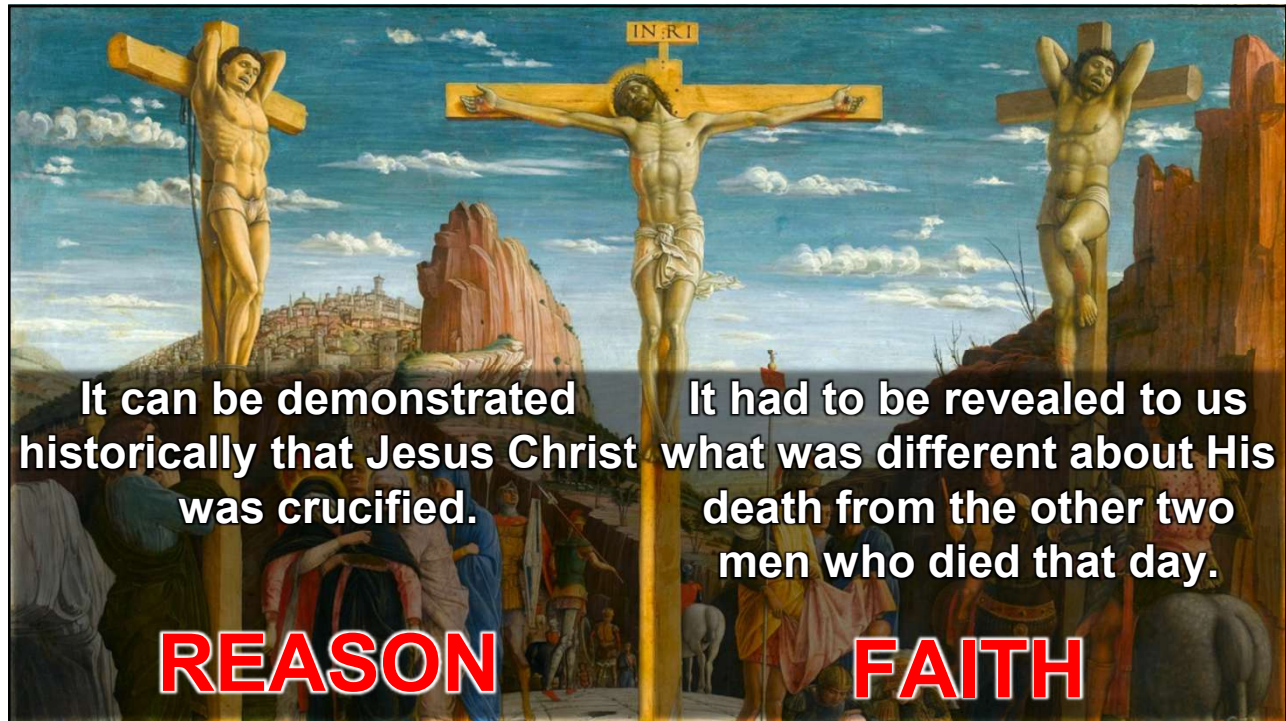
How Norman Geisler Helped Me in the Direction of My Life

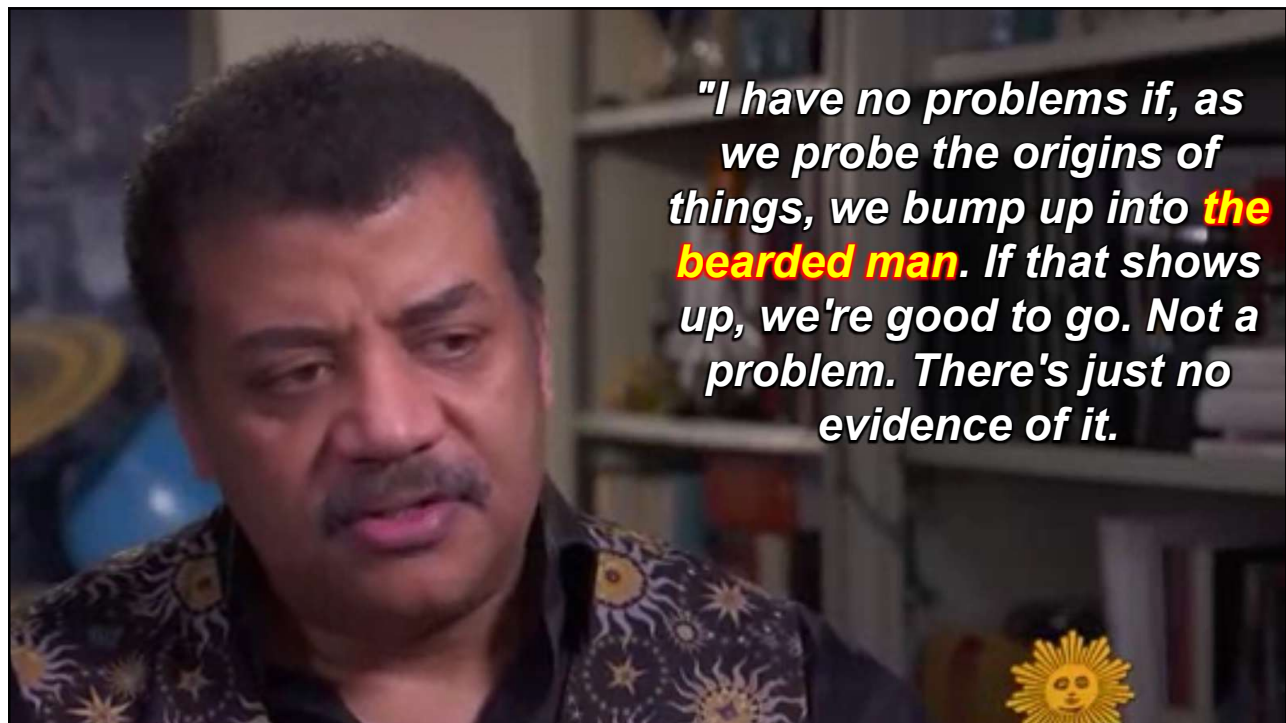
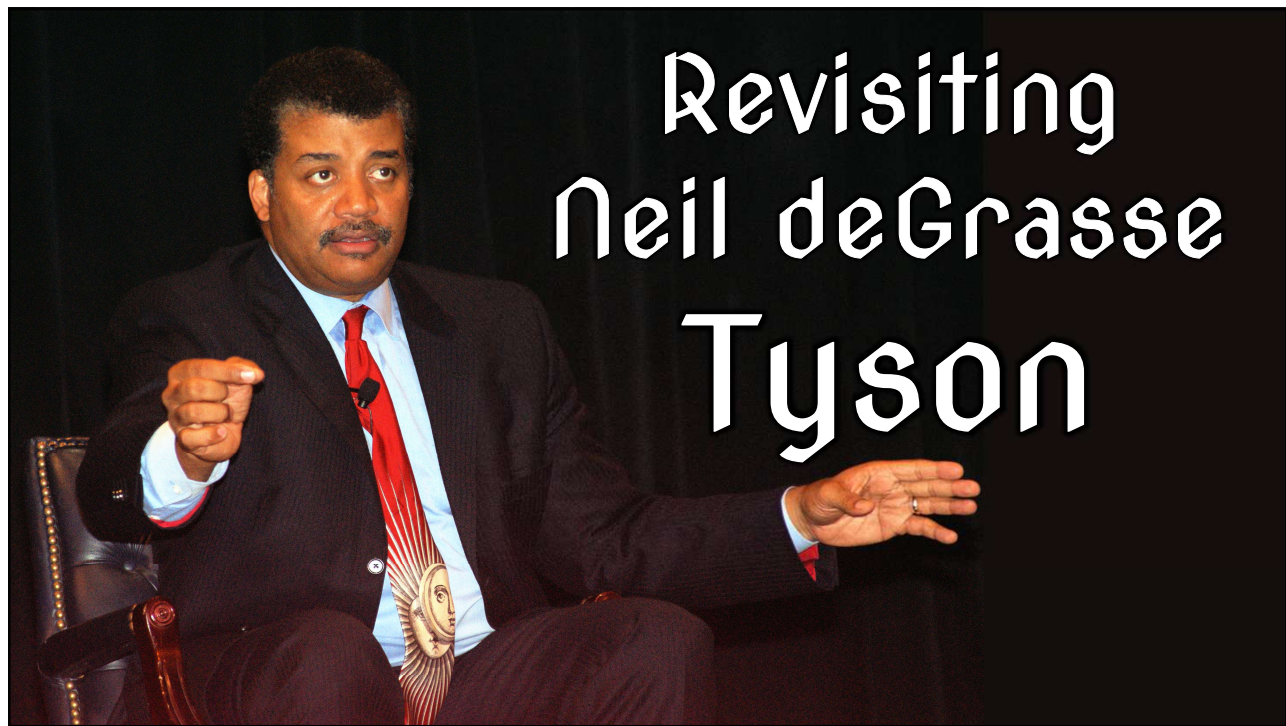
I WAS LED to Christ in high school by Christian friends of mine. I grew spiritually about as much as one might expect a teenager to grow, becoming involved with my youth group at church and pursuing my interesting in drumming. After graduation, I headed to the community college to study music. I tell people that I learned enough music to annoy everyone around me. When it came time to consider senior college, Christian friends of mine told me that one could go to college and study the Bible. This sounded like a tremendous prospect to me, so off I went. I attended my denomination's flagship Christian college in my state. It was my first encounter with theological liberalism. My church had not prepared me to wrestle with issues like Higher Criticism. As a result, I intellectually lost my faith in college. Looking back on that experience, I saw a range of responses among my friends who were confronted with the same intellectual challenges. Some of my friends with whom I had prayed in high school mockingly "asked Jesus to come out of their hearts" and repudiated their Christianity altogether. Others embraced the skepticism of the critical methods and settled for a more mainstream liberal Christianity. Neither of these options seemed possible for me. I was not capable of completely abandoning my faith, as shipwrecked as it was. But neither was I comfortable with any sort of liberal theology. Others of my friends tried to amputate their intellect from their faith and reject any attempt to come to terms with the challenges and questions posed by critical thinking. That, too, was not appealing to me. I knew that I could not embrace a faith that would not stand up to reason. With this, I lived in dissonance for over a year.

The short version of the story has me being intellectually rescued by a handful of apologists. Through their books and lectures, God brought into my life people like Josh McDowell, R. C. Sproul, and Norman Geisler. To this mix were added the insights and maturity of older brothers who had since come to the Lord. Being back on track, I began to consider the continued direction of my education. A short stint at a local

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Notice the ad hominem / straw man fallacy. The argument Christian apologists are making has nothing to do with the existence of any "bearded man."

Imagine how offended Tyson would be if a Christian tried to refute evolution with the silly argument "if humans evolved from monkeys, why are there still monkeys!?"

Christians no more contend for the existence of a "bearded man" than evolutionists contend that humans evolved from monkeys.

*"I have no problems if, as we probe the origins of things, we bump up into **the bearded man**. If that shows up, we're good to go. Not a problem. There's just no evidence of it."*

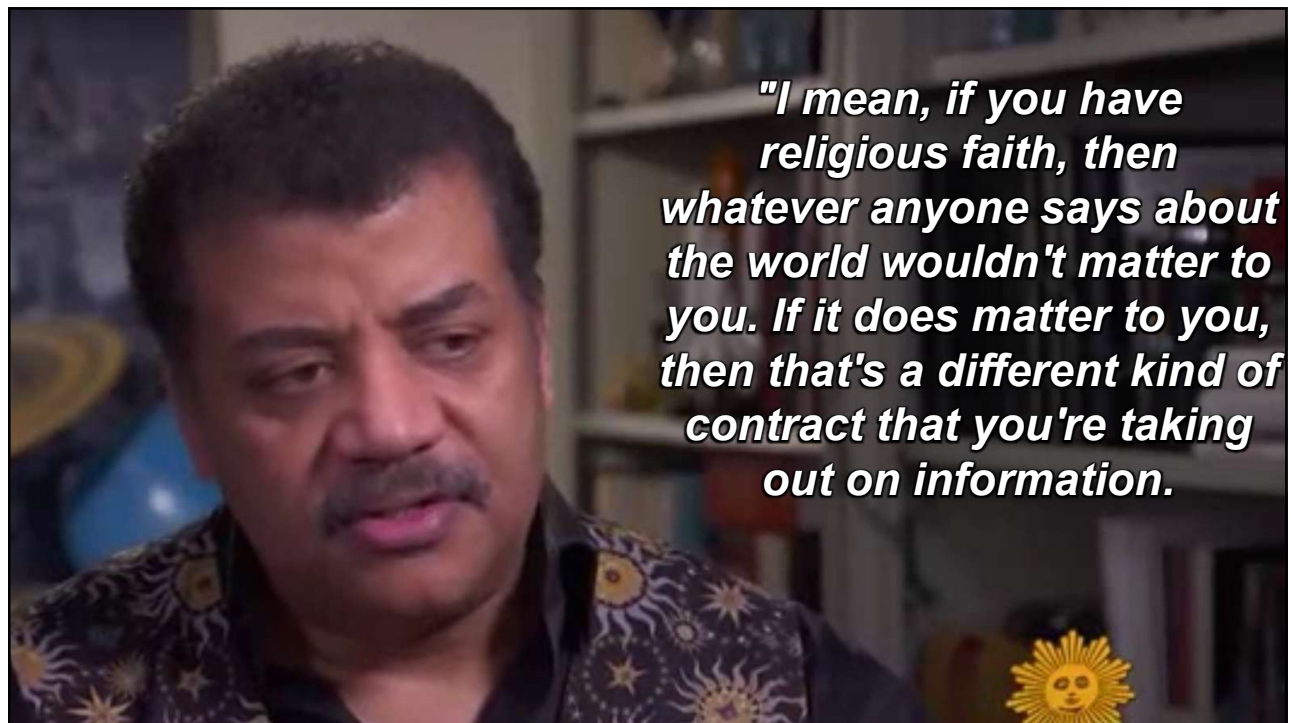
*"And this is why religions are called faith, collectively. Because **you believe something in the absence of evidence**. That's what it is. That's why it's called faith. Otherwise, we'd call all religions 'evidence'. But we don't for exactly that reason."*

Granted Tyson may very well have engaged Christians who have the view that the Christian notion of 'faith' means believing in something in the absence of evidence.

I hope to show that the classical / traditional view of faith says no such thing.

As a scholar, Tyson should have taken the time to try to understand the best and strongest version of the Christian notion of faith before he tried to give any critique.

*"And this is why religions are called faith, collectively. Because **you believe something in the absence of evidence**. That's what it is. That's why it's called faith. Otherwise, we'd call all religions 'evidence'. But we don't for exactly that reason."*



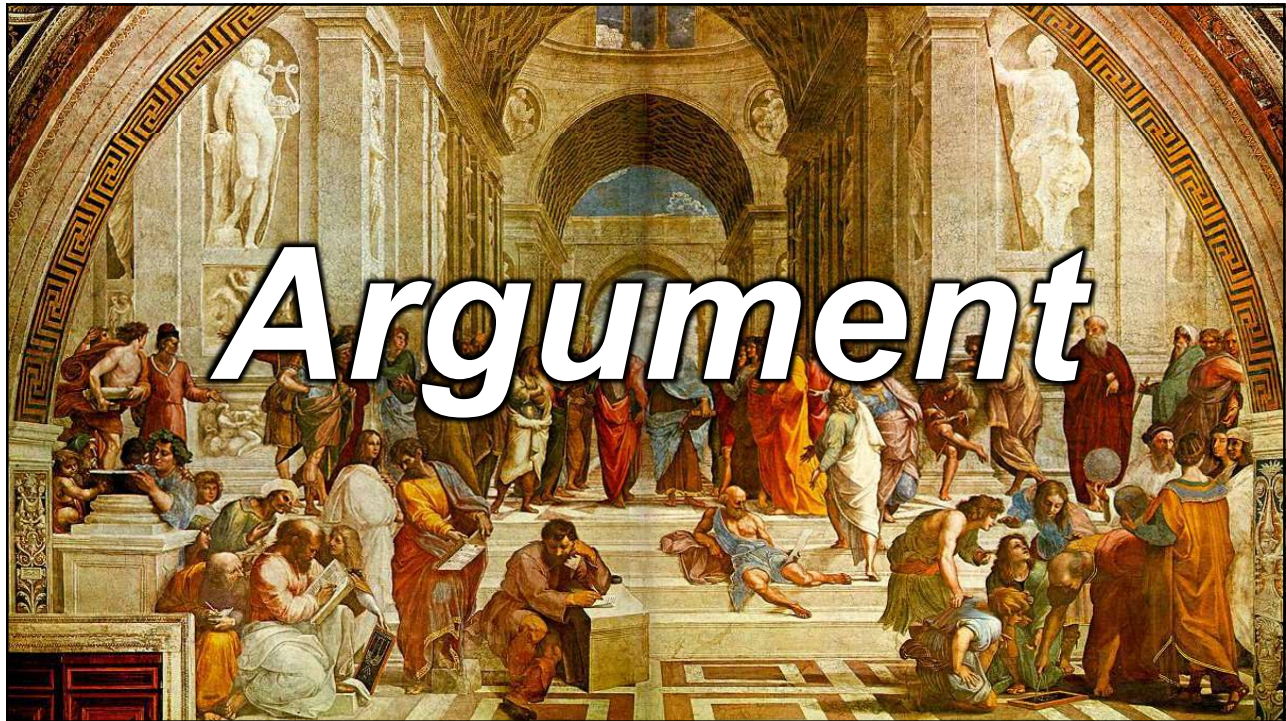
"I mean, if you have religious faith, then whatever anyone says about the world wouldn't matter to you. If it does matter to you, then that's a different kind of contract that you're taking out on information."

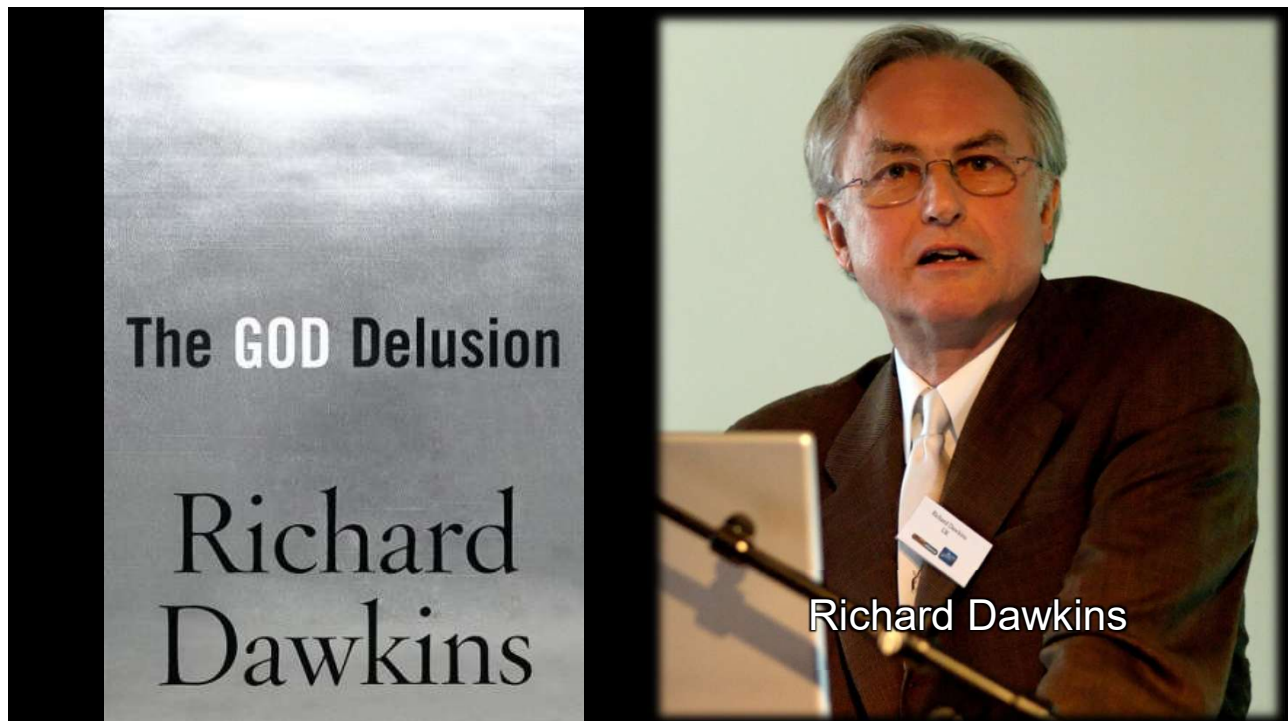
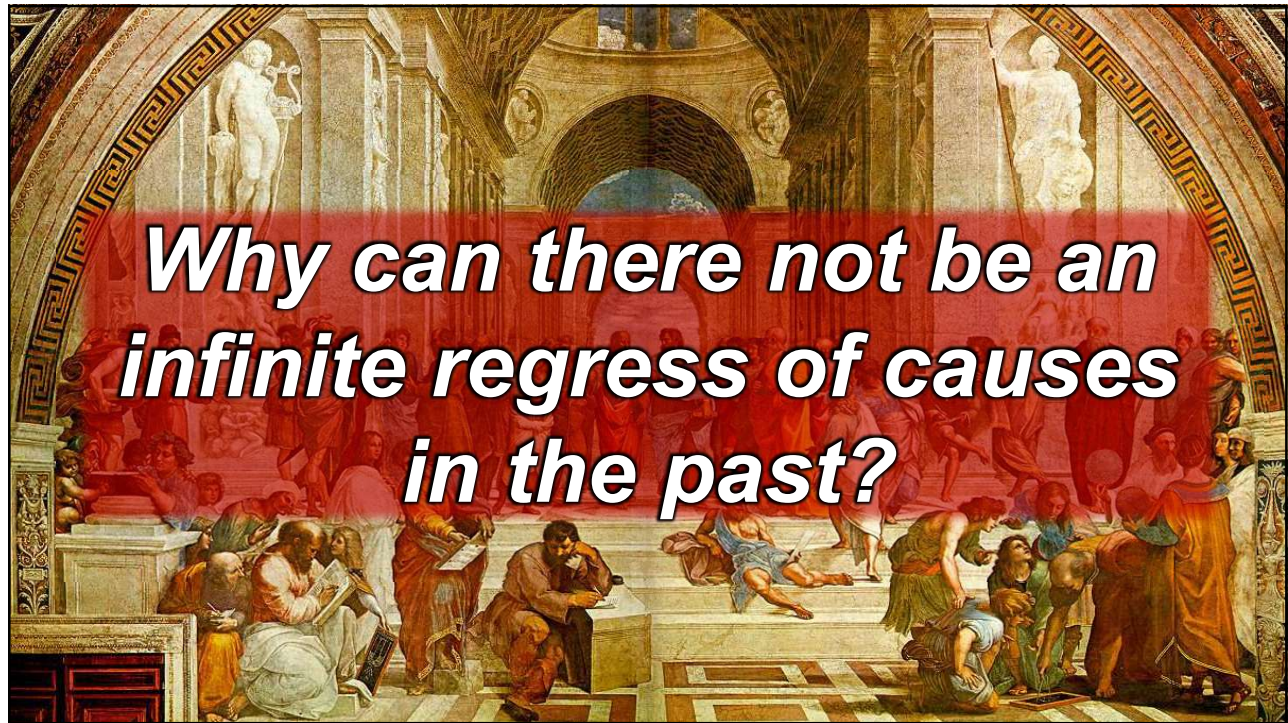
Again, it may very well have been the case that Tyson has encountered religious people who have this kind of disregard for what anyone might say about the world.

What is more, it may very well have been that these religious people characterize their disregard as "faith."

But I hope it is clear that this attitude of disregard does not comport with what the best Christian thinkers have maintained about faith and its relationship to reason.

"I mean, if you have religious faith, then whatever anyone says about the world wouldn't matter to you. If it does matter to you, then that's a different kind of contract that you're taking out on information."





"Thomas Aquinas's Proofs: The Uncaused Cause. Nothing is caused by itself. Every effect has a prior cause, and again we are pushed back into regress. This has to be terminated by a first cause, which we call God."

[Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 77]



Richard Dawkins

"All three of these arguments [by Aquinas] rely upon the idea of a regress and invoke God to terminate it. They make the entirely unwarranted assumption that God himself is immune to the regress."

[Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 77]



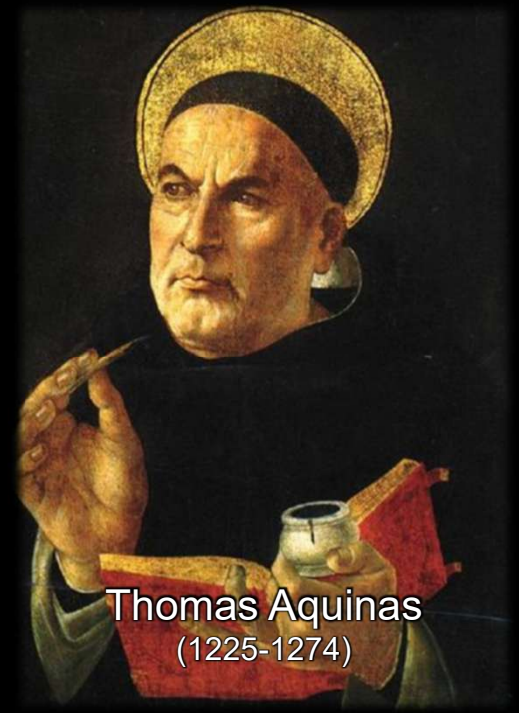
Richard Dawkins



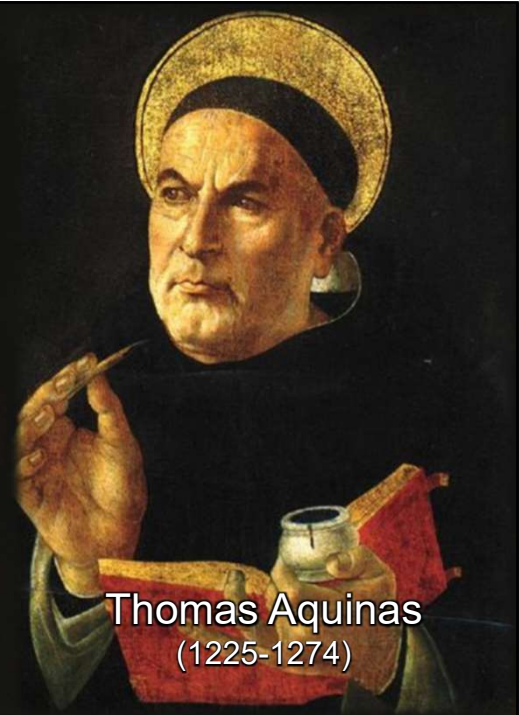
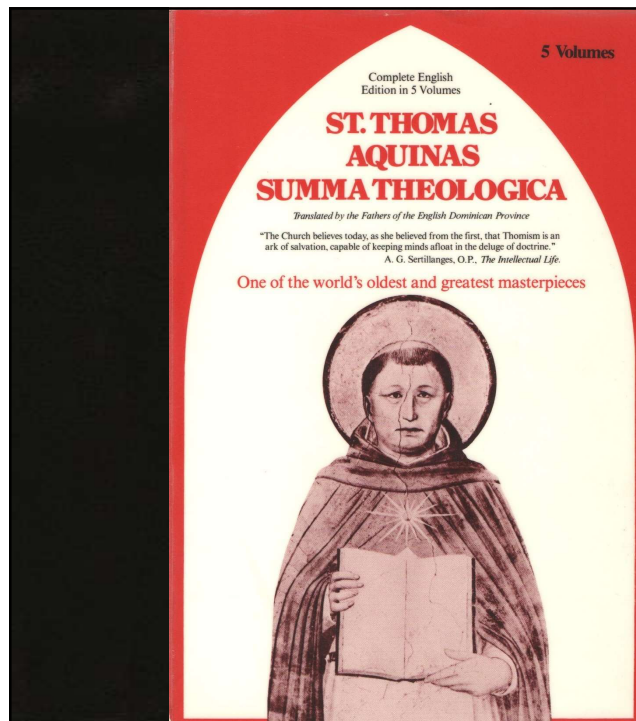
While it is true that Aquinas uses the expression "this cannot go on to infinity" in his famous arguments for God's existence ...

"... There must be a reality that is the cause of being for all other things, because it is pure being. If this were not so, we would go on to infinity in causes, for everything that is not pure being has a cause of its being, as has been said."

On Being and Essence, IV, §7, trans. Maurer, 56-57



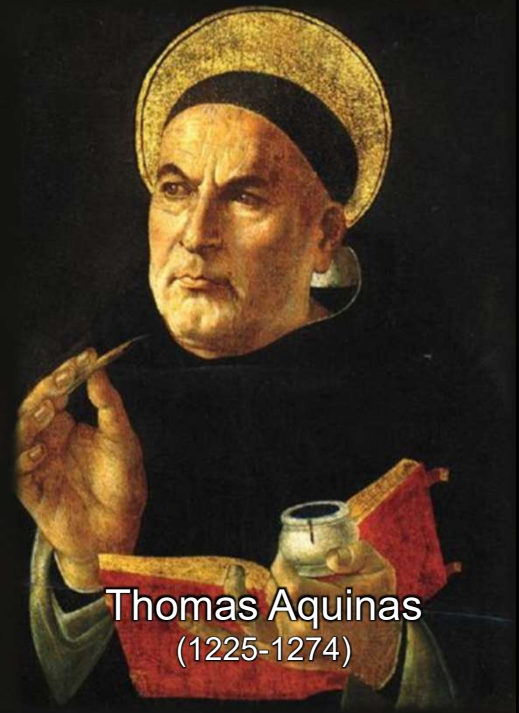
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

Thomas Aquinas's "Five Ways"

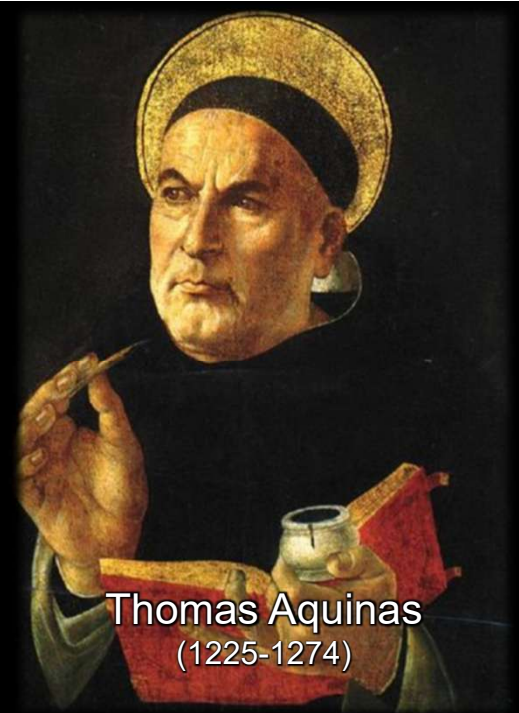
- *Argument from motion*
- *Argument from efficient causality*
- *Argument from necessary being*
- *Argument from degrees of perfection*
- *Argument from final causality*



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

❧ First Way ❧

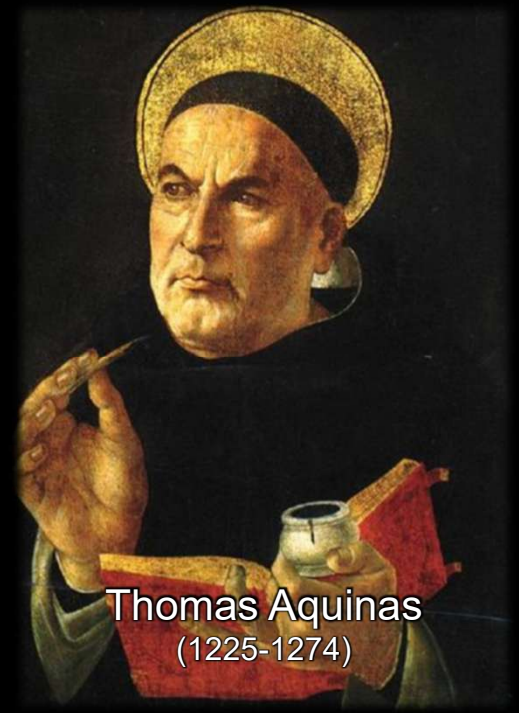
"If that by which it is put in motion be itself put in motion, then this also must needs be put in motion by another, and that by another again. **But this cannot go on to infinity**, because then there would be no first mover ..."



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

☞ Second Way ☞

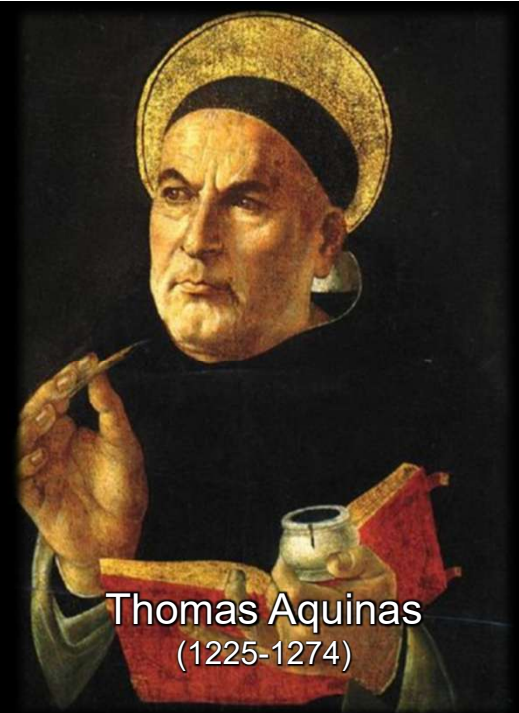
"Now in efficient causes, **it is not possible to go on to infinity**, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause."



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

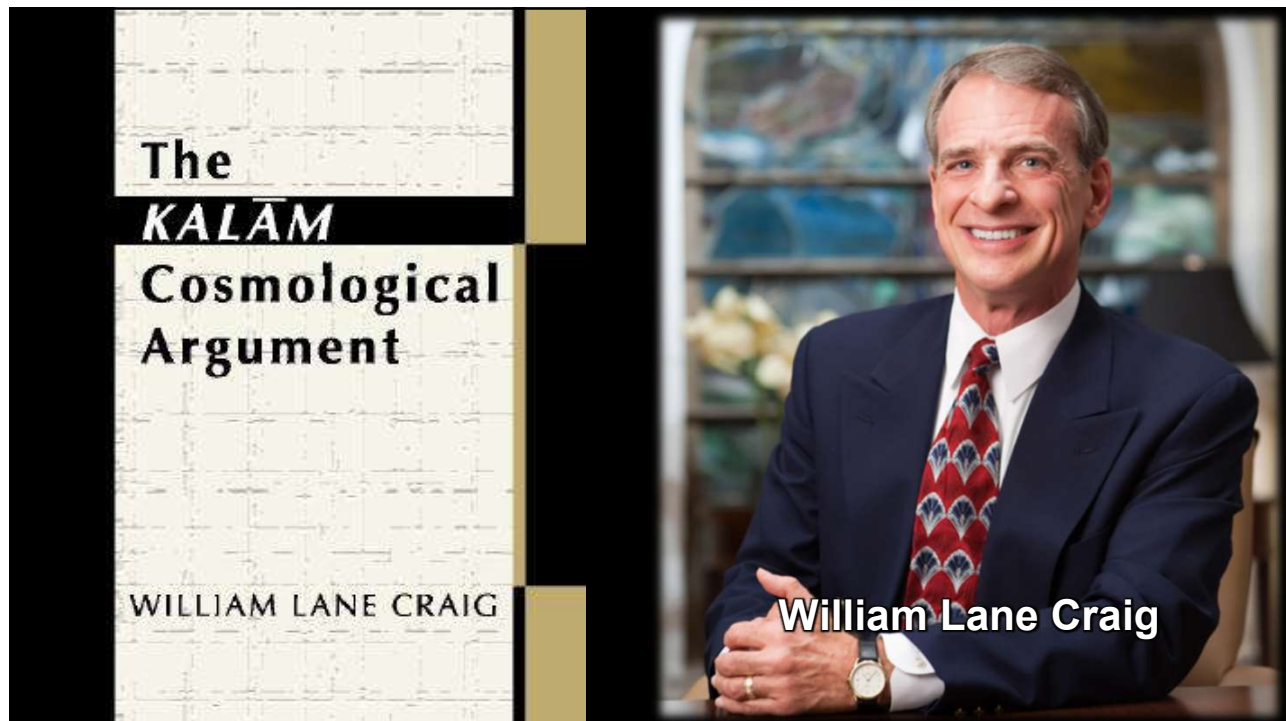
☞ Third Way ☞

"But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now **it is impossible to go on to infinity** in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes."

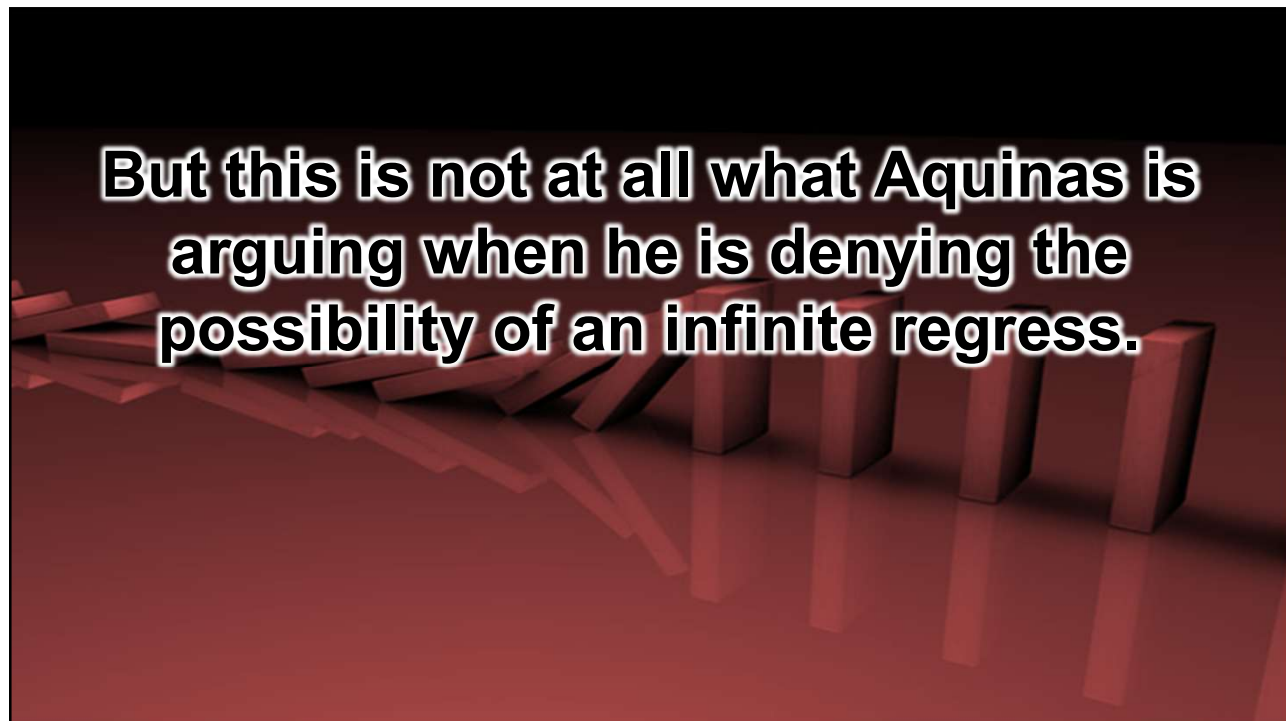
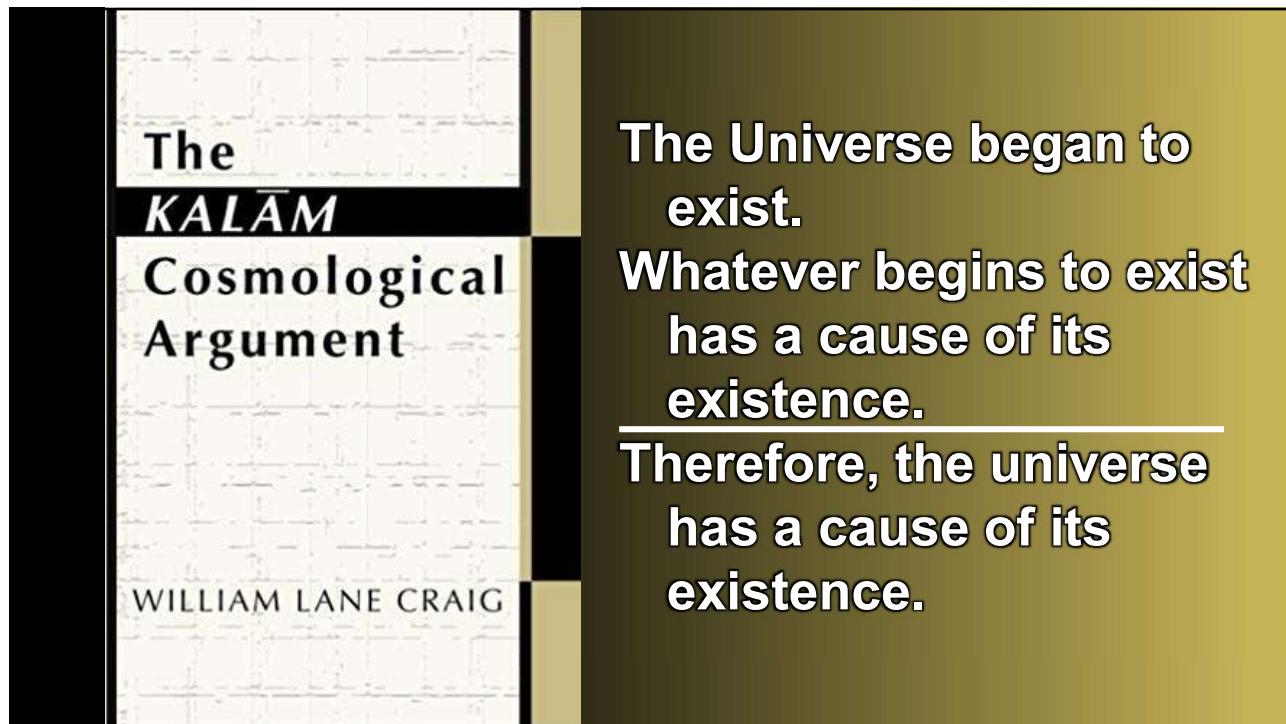


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

Dawkins is mistaken in assuming that Aquinas is making an infinite regress argument like the Kalam Cosmological Argument.



William Lane Craig





Note carefully the logic of the argument. Aquinas is not arguing:

**"Since there cannot be a infinite regress,
 there must be a first cause."**

Rather, he is arguing:

**Since there must be first cause,
 there cannot be an infinite regress."**

Note carefully the logic of the argument. Aquinas is not arguing:

"Since there cannot be a infinite regress,
there must be a **first cause**."

Rather, he is arguing:

Since there must be **first cause**,
there cannot be an infinite regress."

It is important to realize that the notion of 'first' here is not temporal but metaphysical.

Not: If (since) there cannot be an infinite regress, there must be a first cause. There cannot be an infinite regress. Therefore, there is a first cause.

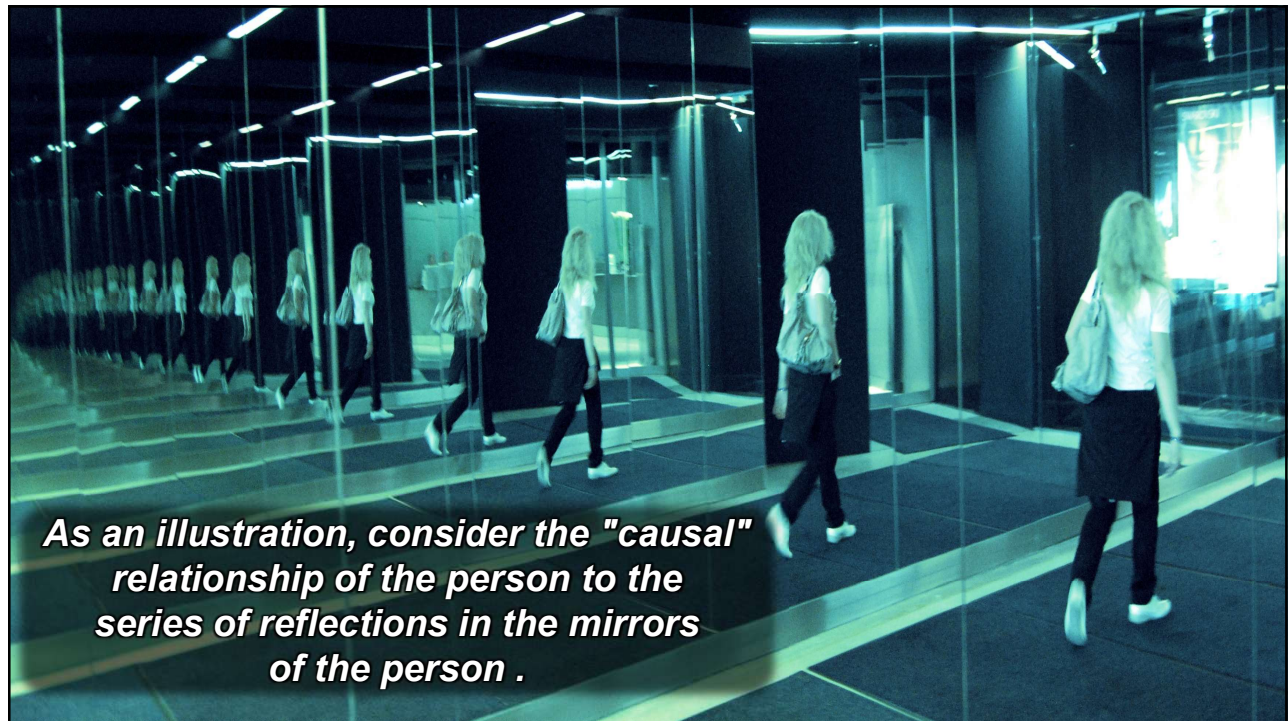
$$1. \sim IR \supset F$$

$$2. \sim IR / \therefore F$$

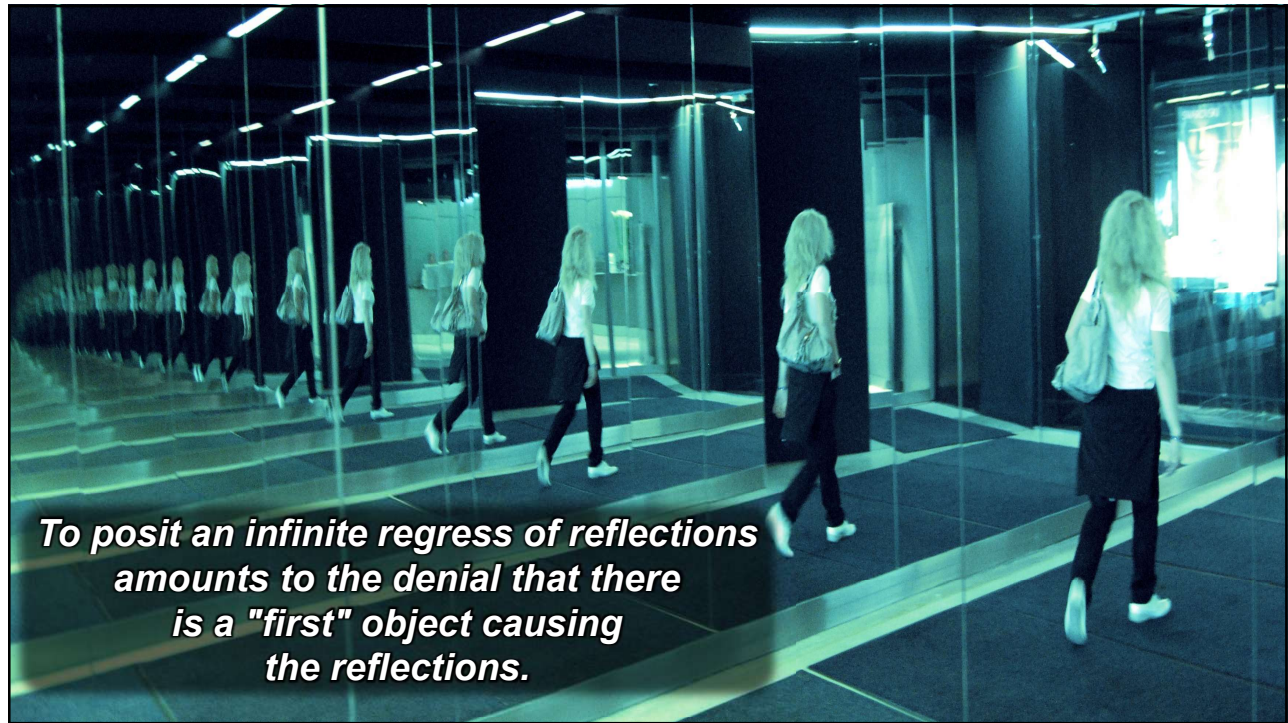
Rather: If (since) there is a first cause, there cannot be an infinite regress. There is a first cause. Therefore, there cannot be an infinite regress.

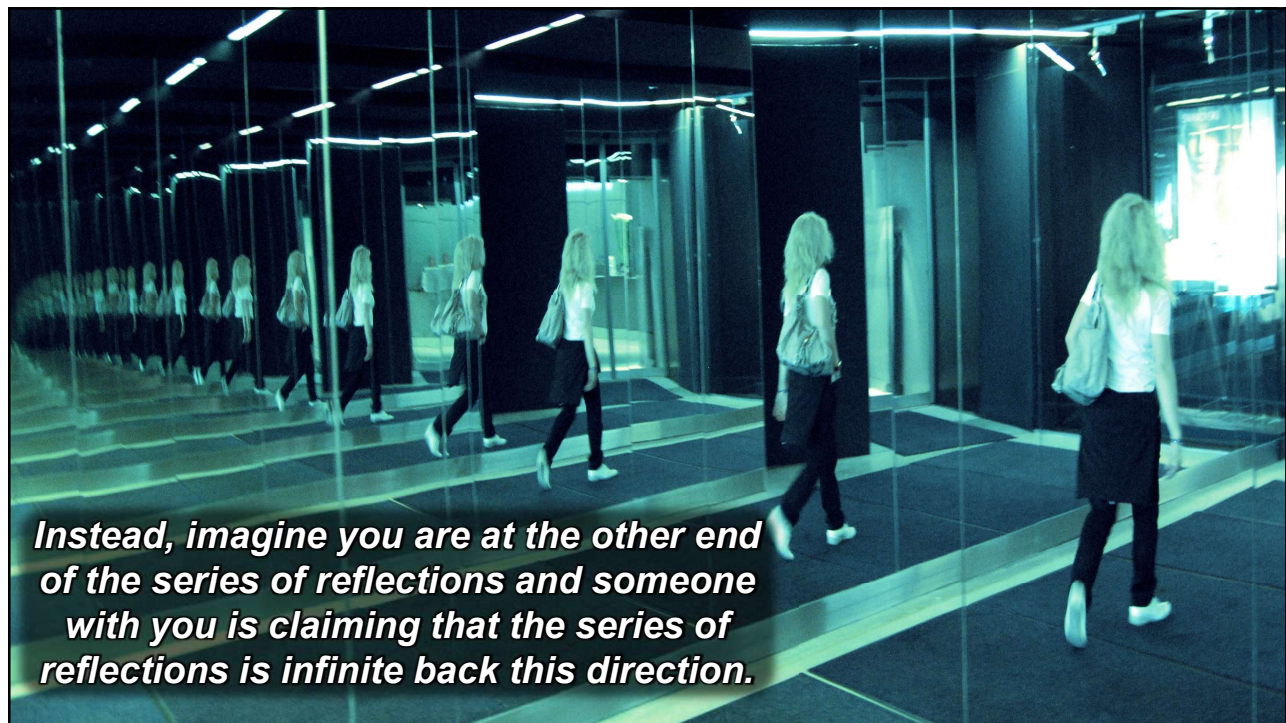
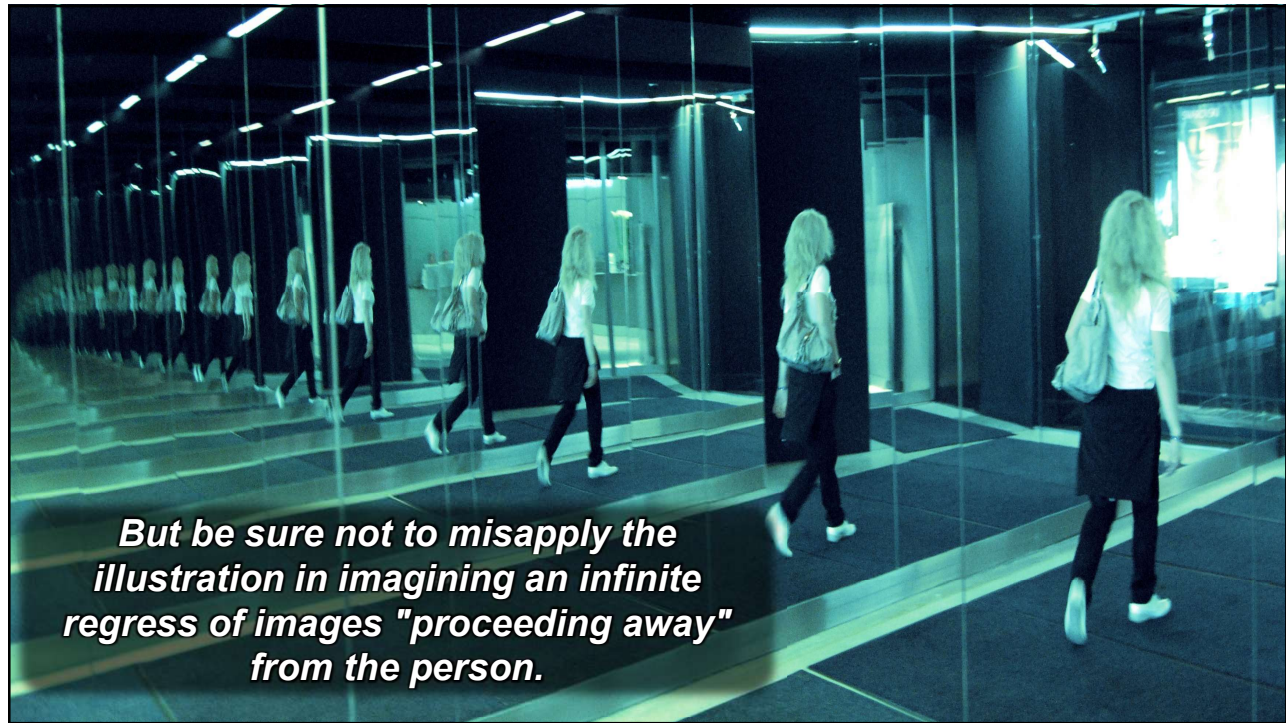
$$1. IR \supset \sim F$$

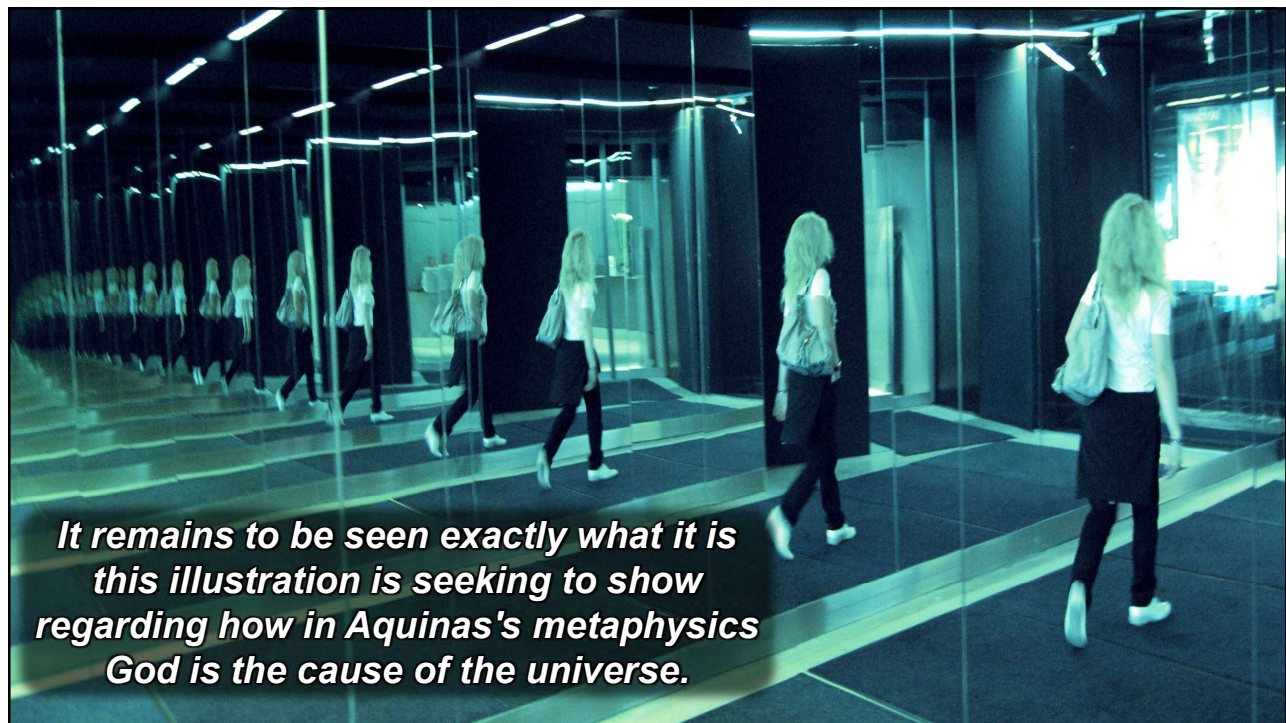
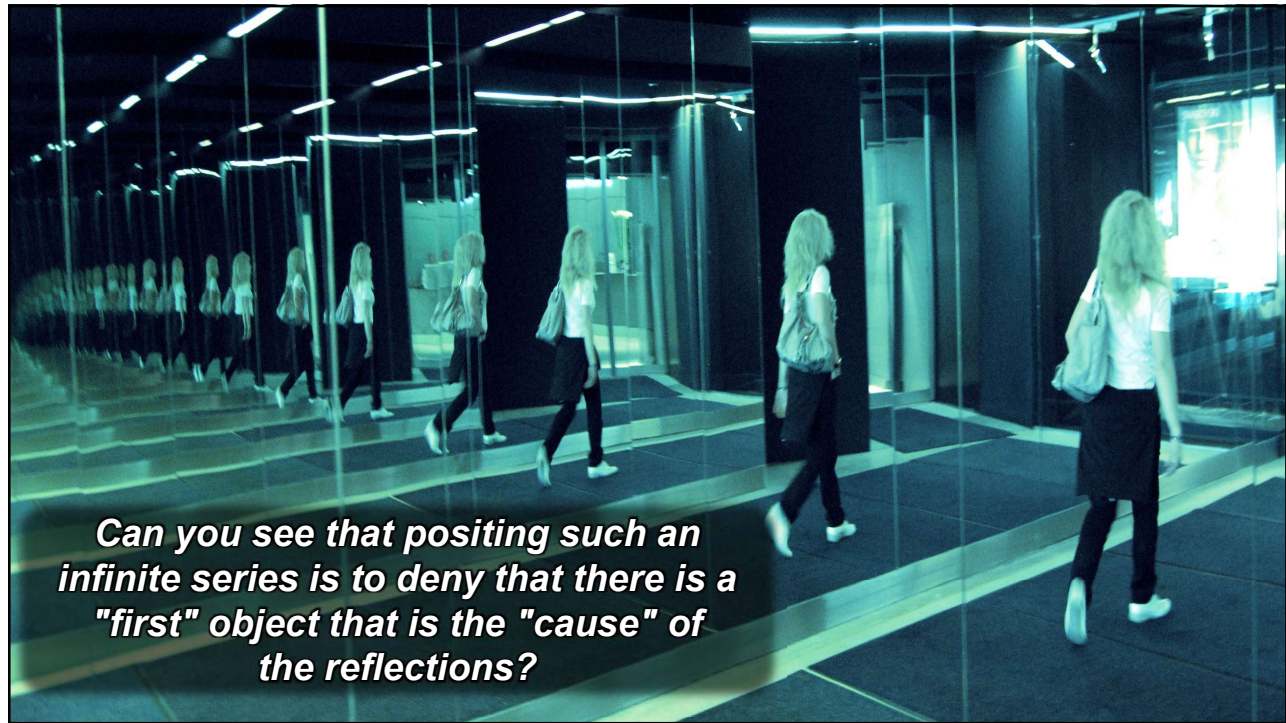
$$2. F / \therefore \sim IR$$



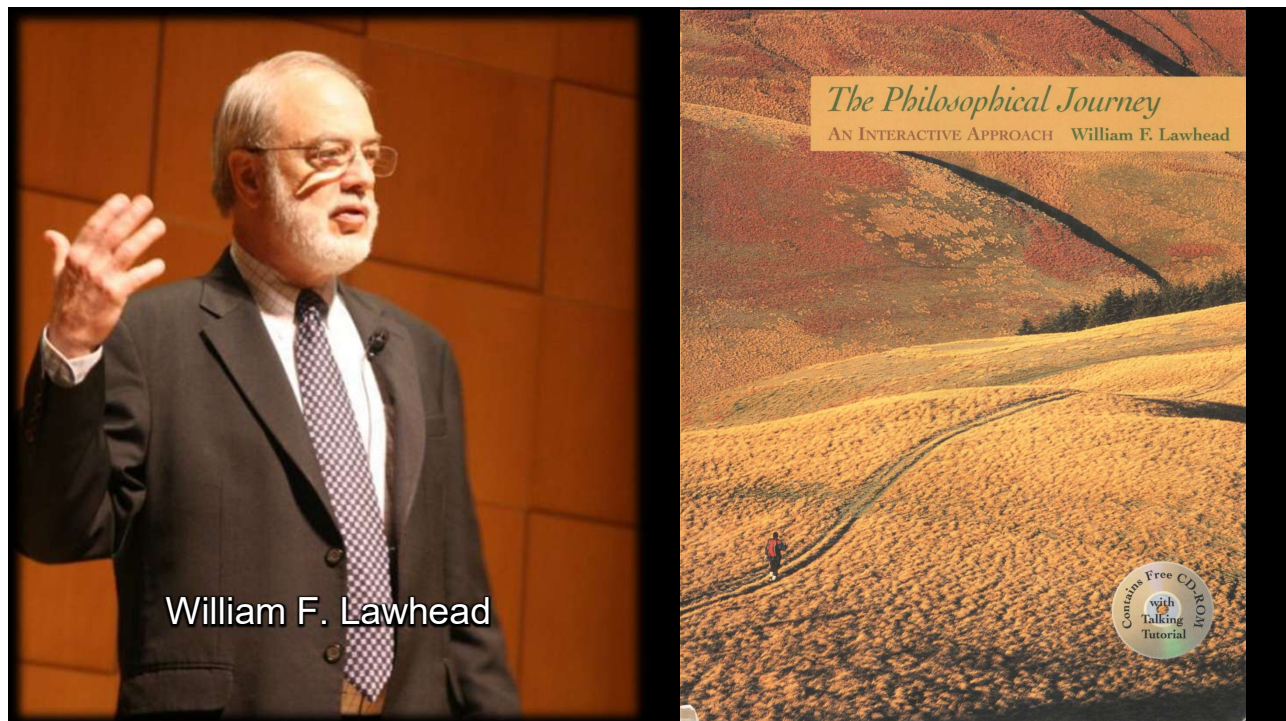
As an illustration, consider the "causal" relationship of the person to the series of reflections in the mirrors of the person .

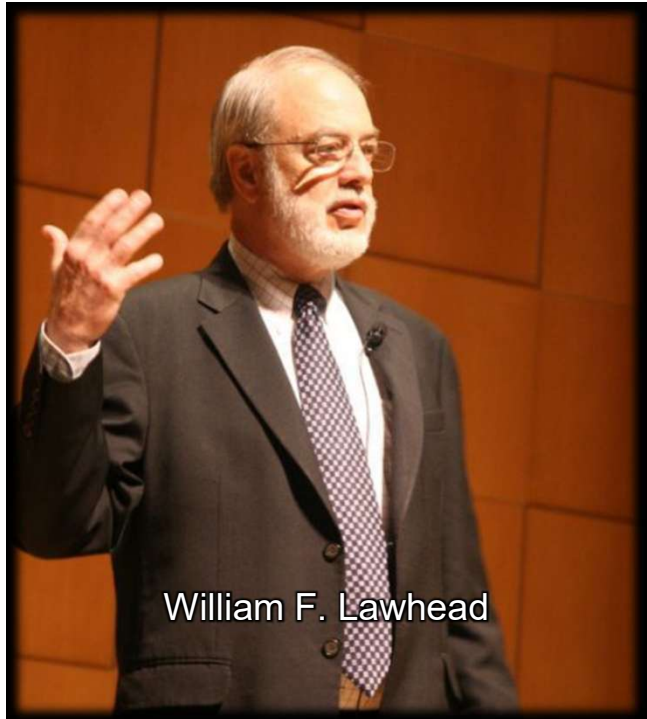






Dawkins is not alone in his mistaken assumption that Aquinas is arguing for the impossibility of an infinite regress in the Kalam sense.

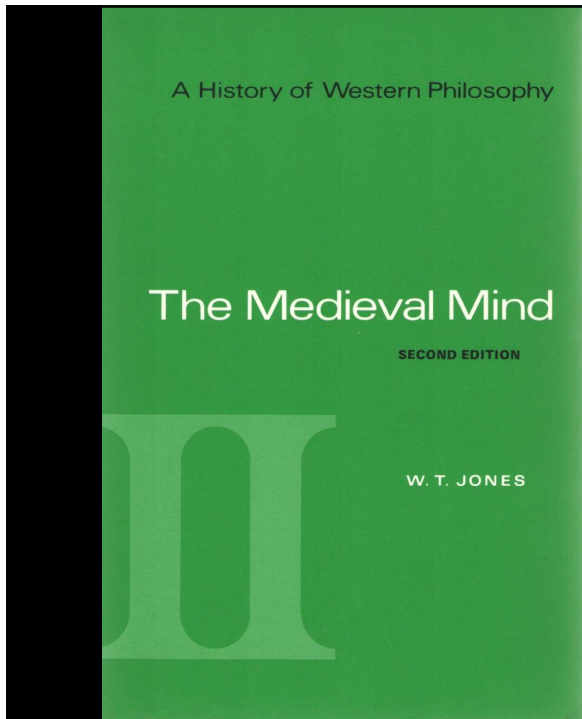




William F. Lawhead

"Critics have had the most problems with the third premise of Aquinas's [second way] argument. Why can't there be an infinite series of causes? Isn't the series of whole numbers an infinite series?"

[William F. Lawhead, *The Philosophical Journey: An Interactive Approach*, 2 ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003): 321.]




A History of Western Philosophy

The Medieval Mind

SECOND EDITION

W. T. JONES



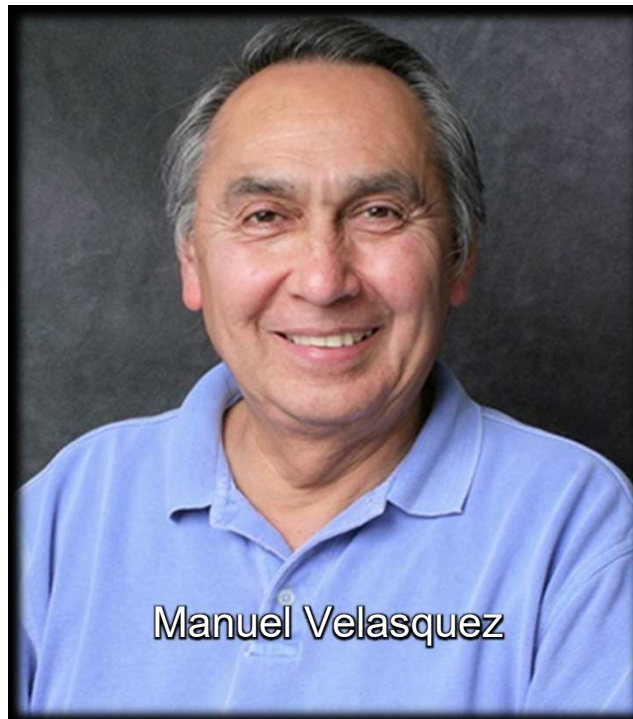
W. T. Jones
(1910-1993)

"The question, however, is whether such an infinite series of motions (or causes) is conceivable. Thomas, of course, denied that it is. In reply, the series of positive integers—1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on—could be cited. It is clear that this series does not have a last term ... Similarly, it could be said that before any time t , however remote in the past, there was an earlier time $t - 1$, in which motion was occurring. If there is no greatest positive integer, why need there be any first motion?"

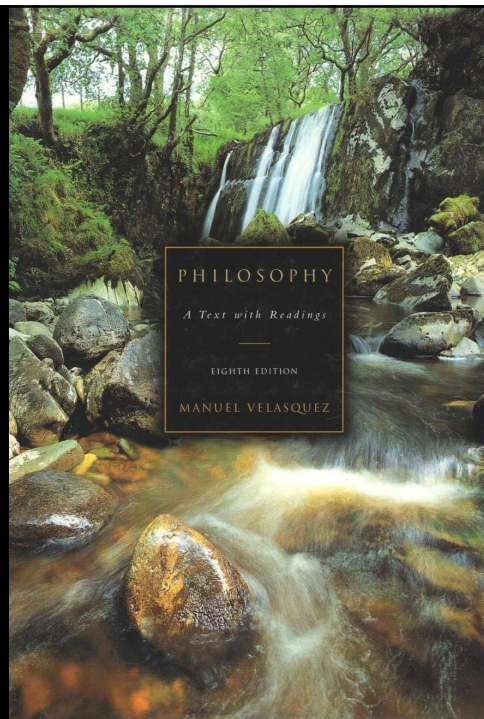
[W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy: The Medieval Mind* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1969): 219]

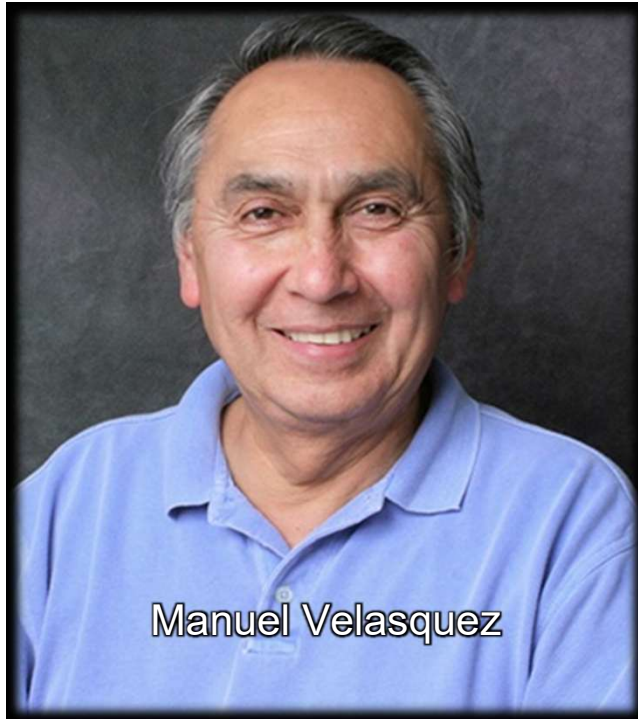


W. T. Jones
(1910-1998)



Manuel Velasquez

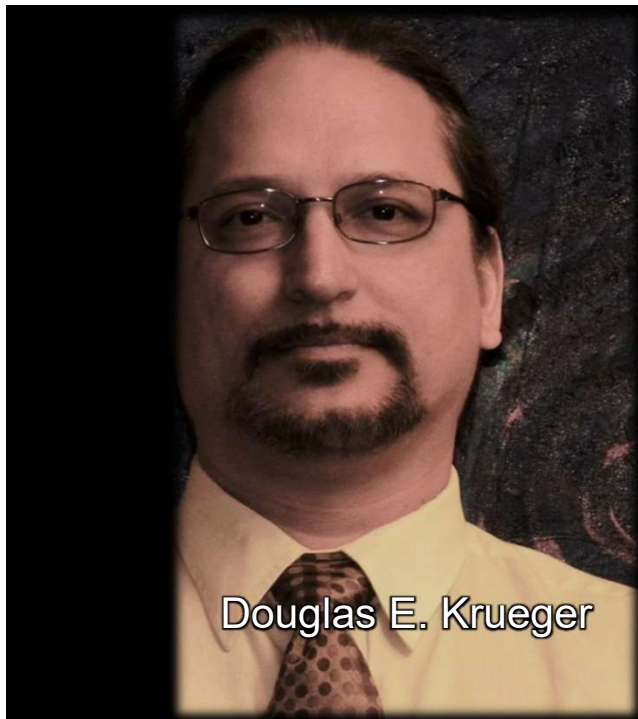




Manuel Velasquez

"Philosophers have raised two key objections to this [Thomistic] cosmological argument. The first concerns its contention that there can be no infinite regress in the causal sequences of the universe. But why not? Isn't it possible that the universe has simply existed forever and that things in it have simply been moving forever?"

[Manuel Velasquez, *Philosophy: A Text with Readings*, 8 ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002): 286, emphasis added]

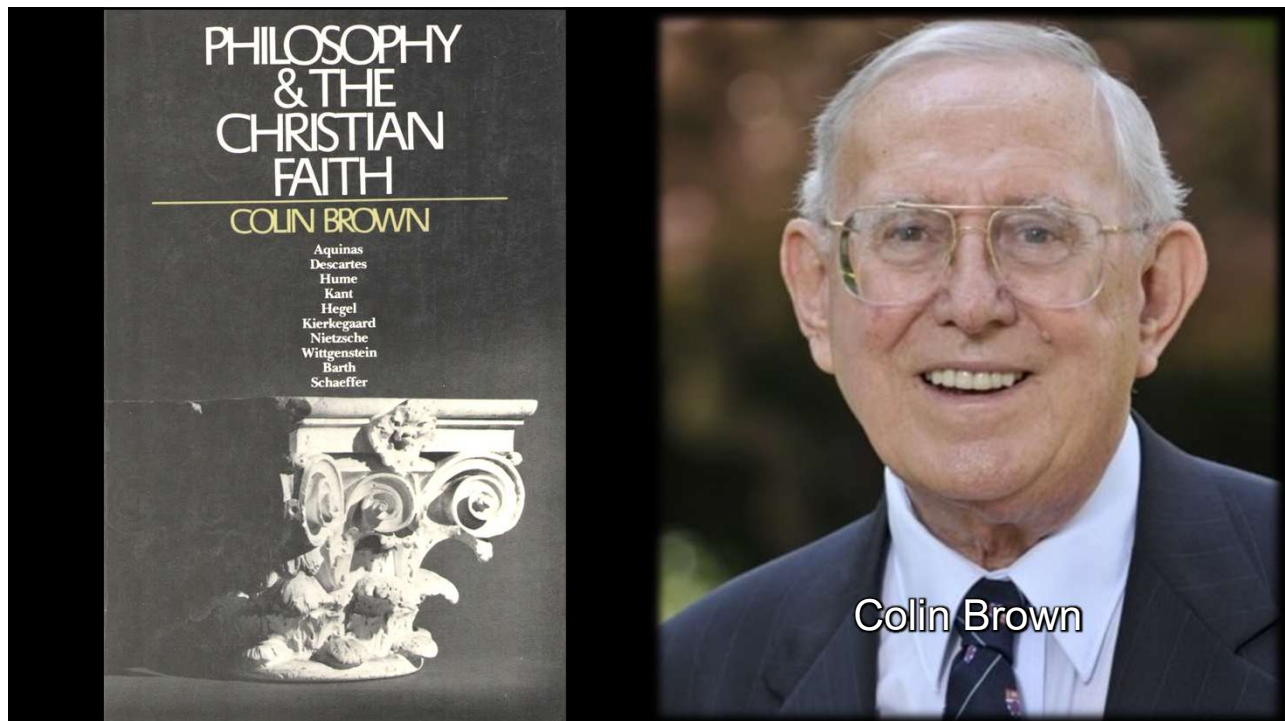
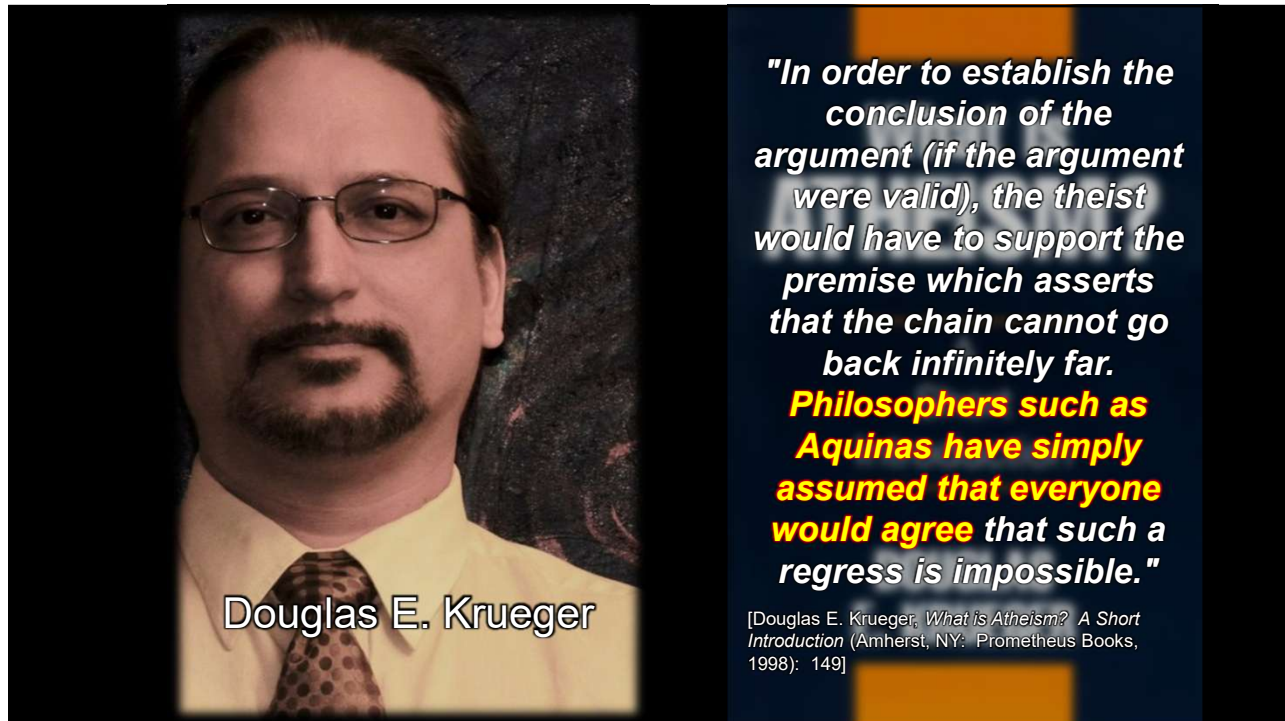


Douglas E. Krueger

**What Is
ATHEISM?**

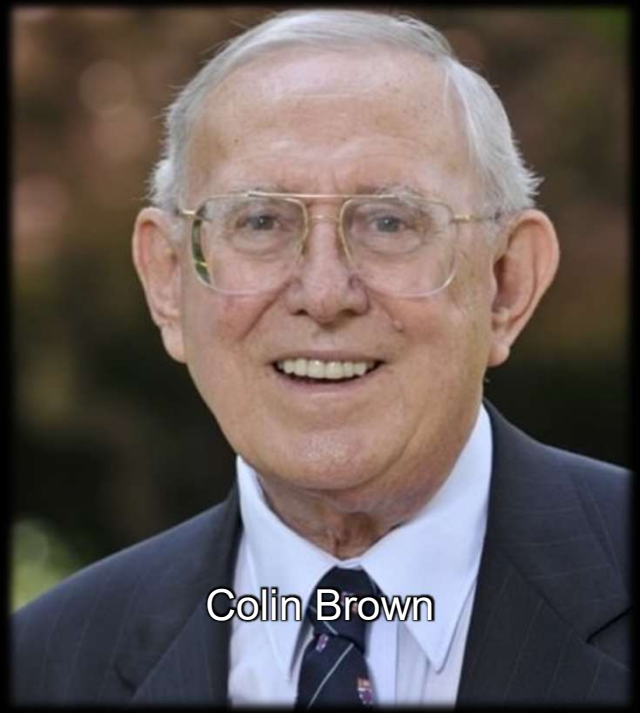
A
Short
Introduction

**DOUGLAS
E. KRUEGER**



"Aquinas believed that one could argue back from the things that we observe in the world to a prime mover, a first cause or a great designer behind it. In each case the drift of the argument follows the same basic pattern. Every event must have a cause. Nothing causes (or, for that matter, moves or designs) itself. If we press far enough back, we must acknowledge some first cause, prime mover or great designer of all things."

[Colin Brown, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1968): 26-27, emphasis added]



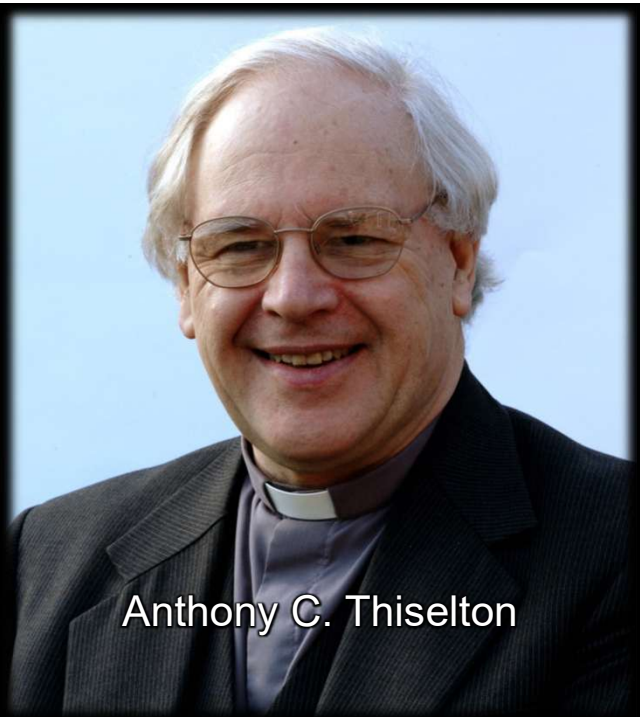
Colin Brown

Atheism Non-Human Creation
 Humanity Image of God Desire
 Alienation Jesus Christ Mediator
 Atonement Christology Holy Spirit
 Church Ministry Sacraments
 Return of Christ Resurrection
 Last Judgement Eternity
 God Method Truth Personhood
 Trinity Holy Love Grace World
 Atheism Non-Human Creation

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Anthony C. Thiselton

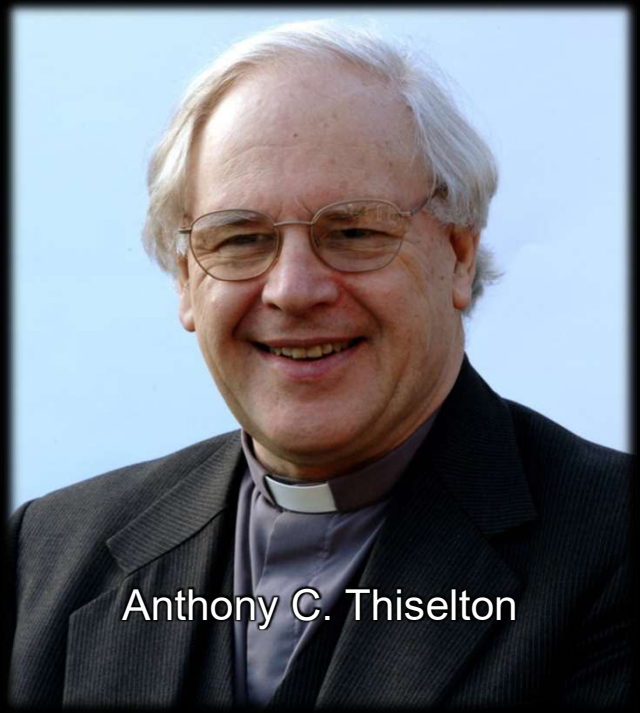
God Method Truth Personhood
 Trinity Holy Love Grace World
 Atheism Non-Human Creation
 Humanity Image of God Desire



Anthony C. Thiselton

"Other thinkers in theistic religions have held this position. The Islamic philosophers al-Kindi (c. 813-c. 871) and al-Ghazali (c. 1058-1111) believed that the infinite chain of caused causes is impossible, as Aristotle and Aquinas did. This is sometimes called the kalam tradition of Islam."

[Anthony C. Thiselton, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1985), 64-65, emphasis in original]



Anthony C. Thiselton




Ronald B. Mayers
(1940-2020)

Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic



Ronald B. Mayers

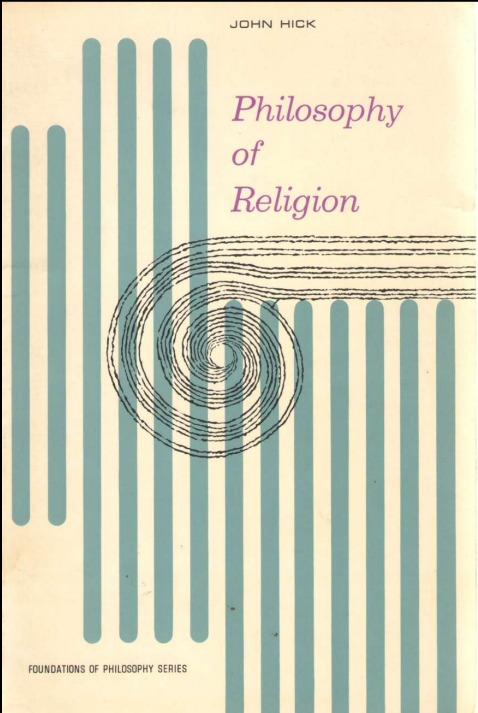
Foreword by Kenneth Kantzer



Ronald B. Mayers
(1940-2020)

"The denial of the possibility of an unending sequence of causes and effects would seem to be an assumption 'smuggled' into, and not logically demonstrated by, the argument."


[Ronald B. Mayers, *Both/And: A Balanced Apologetic* (Chicago: Moody Press, 99)]



JOHN HICK

Philosophy of Religion

FOUNDATIONS OF PHILOSOPHY SERIES



John Hick
(1922-2012)

[Aquinas'] second proof, known as the first cause argument is presented as follows: everything that happens has a cause, and this cause in turn has a cause and so on in a series which must either be infinite or have its starting point in a first cause.

Aquinas excludes the possibility of an infinite regress of causes, and so concludes that there must be a first cause, which we call God.

[John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, Prentice-Hall Foundations of Philosophy Series, eds. Elizabeth and Monroe Beardsley (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 20]



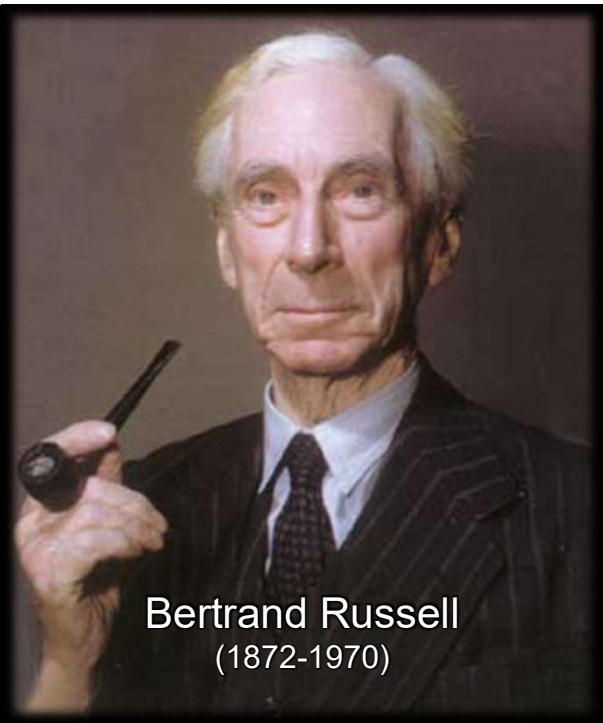
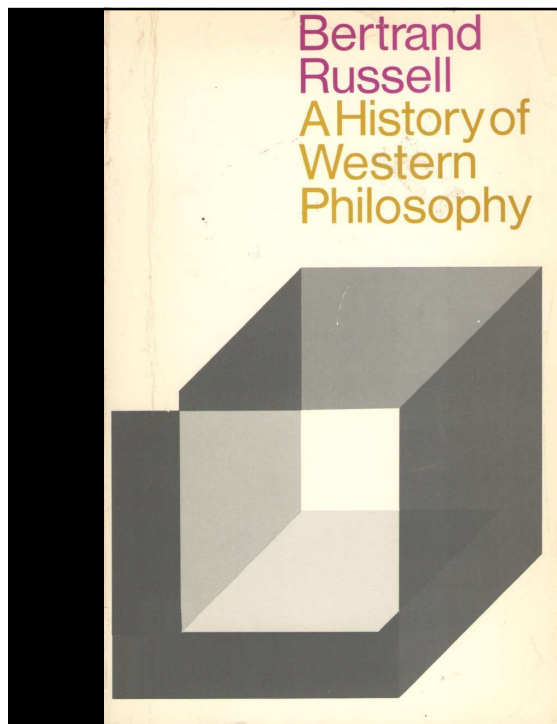
John Hick
(1922-2012)

"The weakness of the [Second Way] argument as Aquinas states it lies in the difficulty (which he himself elsewhere acknowledges) of excluding as impossible an endless regress of events requiring no beginning."

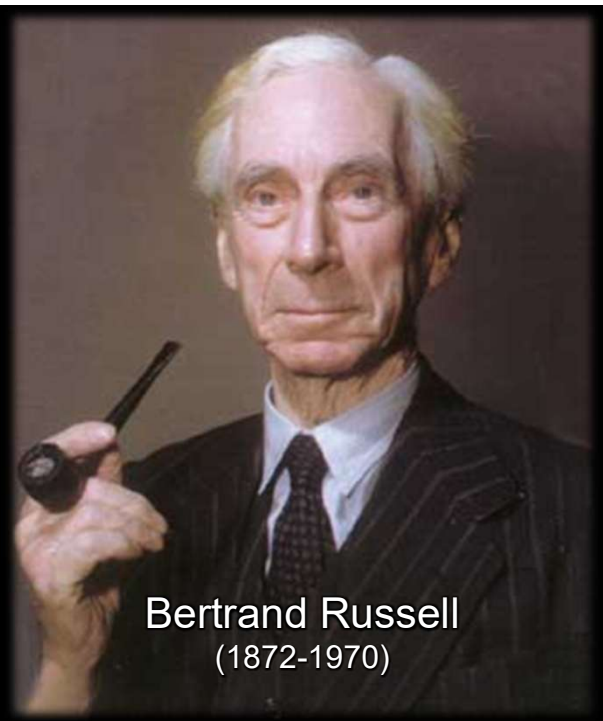
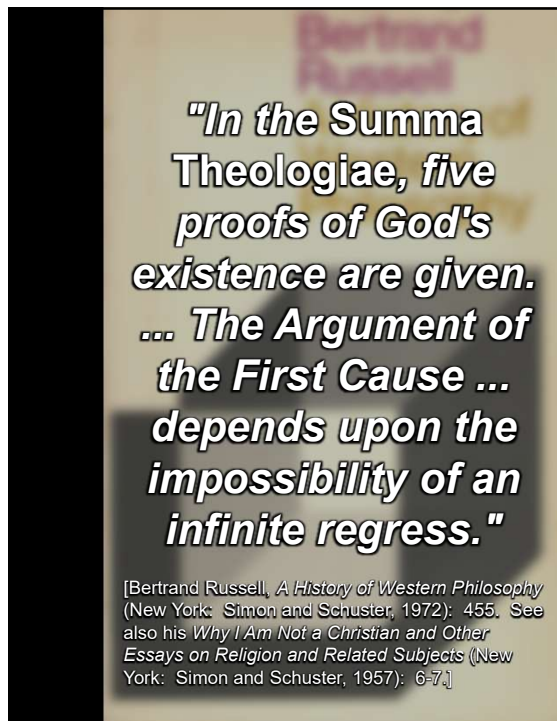
[Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 21]



John Hick
(1922-2012)



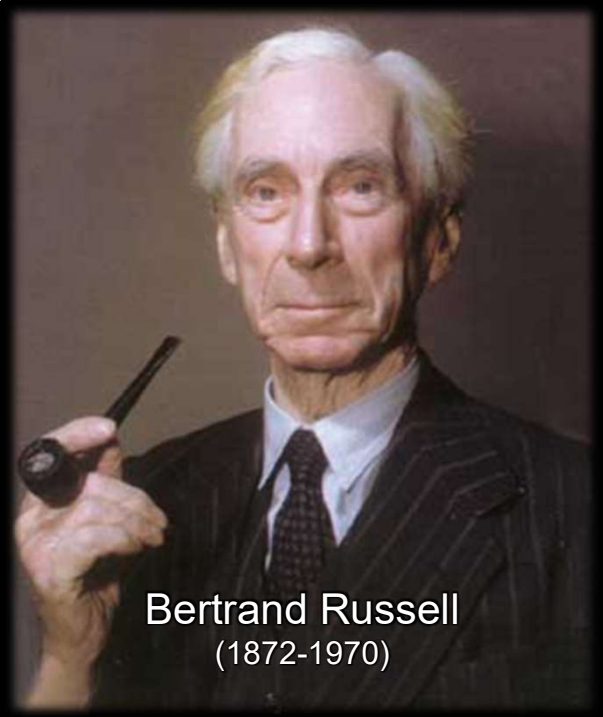
Bertrand Russell
(1872-1970)



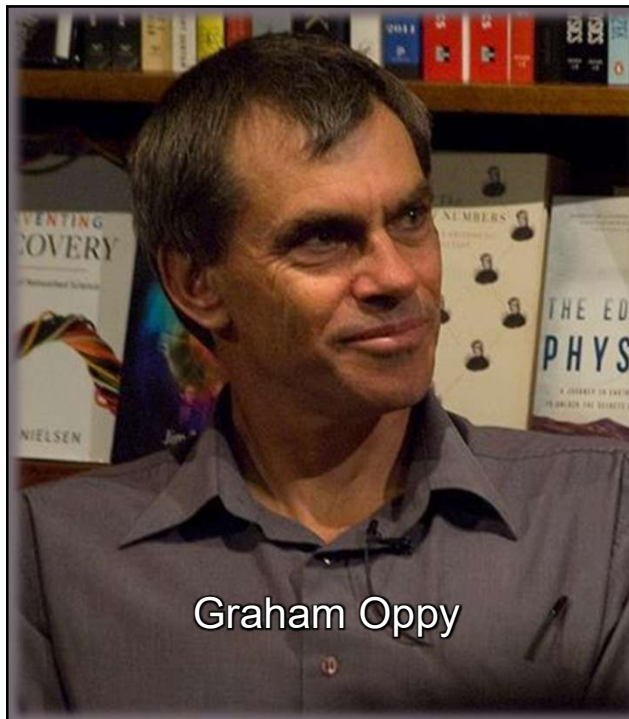
Bertrand Russell
(1872-1970)

"Take again the arguments professing to prove the existence of God. All of these, except the one from teleology in lifeless things, depend upon the supposed impossibility of a series having no first term. Every mathematician know that there is no such impossibility; the series of negative integers ending with minus one is an instance to the contrary."

[Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972): 462]

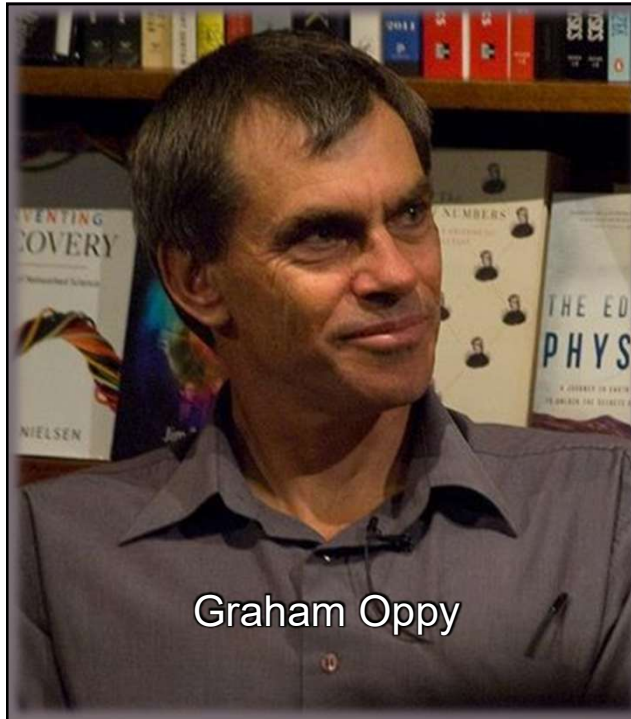


Bertrand Russell
(1872-1970)



Graham Oppy

In his examination of Thomas Aquinas's *Second Way*, Oppy remarks: "It is very hard to see how one could construct a cogent argument for the claim that there cannot be an infinite regress of efficient causes. Perhaps one might hope to argue from Big Bang cosmology to the claim that there *is* no infinite regress of efficient causation, but—as we shall go on to argue in connection with the *kalām* syllogism—



Graham Oppy

"it seems to be the case both that there can be infinite regresses of efficient causation within Big Bang universes and that efficient causation can extend 'through' the initial singularity in Big Bang universes. If this is right, then it is hard to see how one could hope to mount an *empirical* argument for the claim that there is no infinite regress of efficient causation in our world."

[Graham Oppy, *Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 101]

Note that Oppy assumes that the infinite regress of Aquinas's cosmological argument is the same as the infinite regress of the Kalam cosmological argument.

In his examination of Thomas Aquinas's *Second Way*, Oppy remarks: "It is very hard to see how one could construct a cogent argument for the claim that there cannot be an infinite regress of efficient causes. Perhaps one might hope to argue from Big Bang cosmology to the claim that there *is* no infinite regress of efficient causation, but—as we shall go on to argue in connection with the *kalām* syllogism—

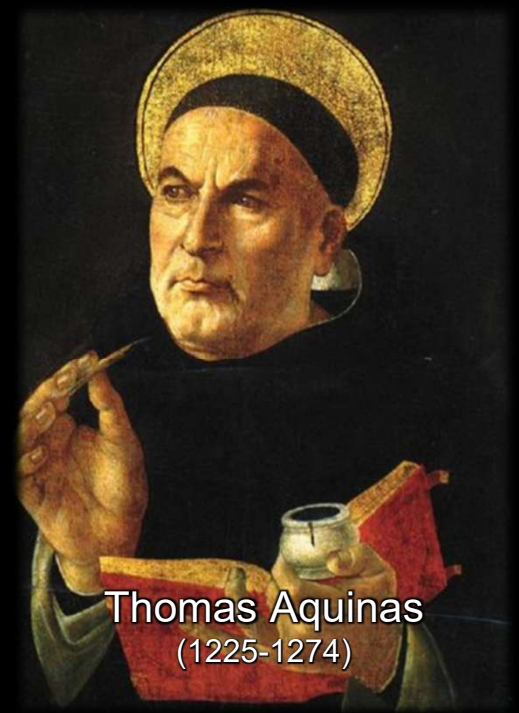
Further, note that Oppy characterizes the issue as empirical (in the modern sense of 'empirical') rather than as metaphysical (in the classical sense of 'empirical').

"it seems to be the case both that there can be infinite regresses of efficient causation within Big Bang universes and that efficient causation can extend 'through' the initial singularity in Big Bang universes. If this is right, then it is hard to see how one could hope to mount an **empirical** argument for the claim that there is no infinite regress of efficient causation in our world."

[Graham Oppy, *Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 101]

"Our knowledge, taking its start from things, proceeds in this order. First, it begins in sense; second, it is completed in the intellect."

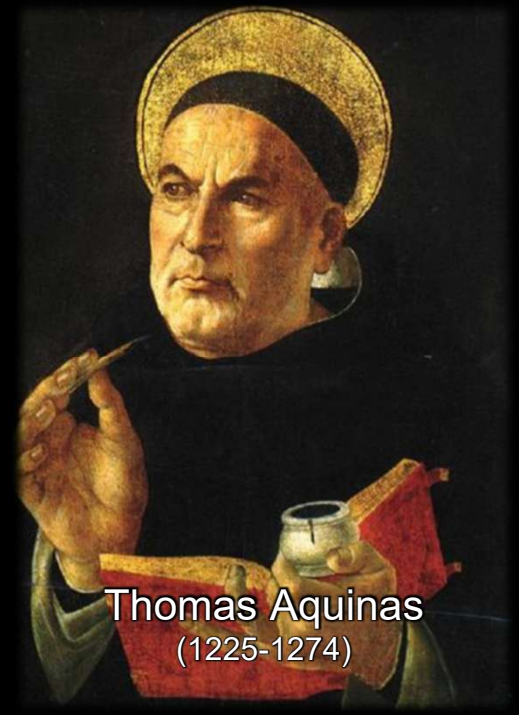
[Thomas Aquinas, *Truth*, I, 11, trans. Mulligan, 48, in *Truth* (3 vols), vol. 1 trans. Robert W. Mulligan (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952); vol. 2 trans. James V. McGlynn (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953); vol. 3. trans. Robert W. Schmidt (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1954). The three volumes were reprinted as *Truth* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994)]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

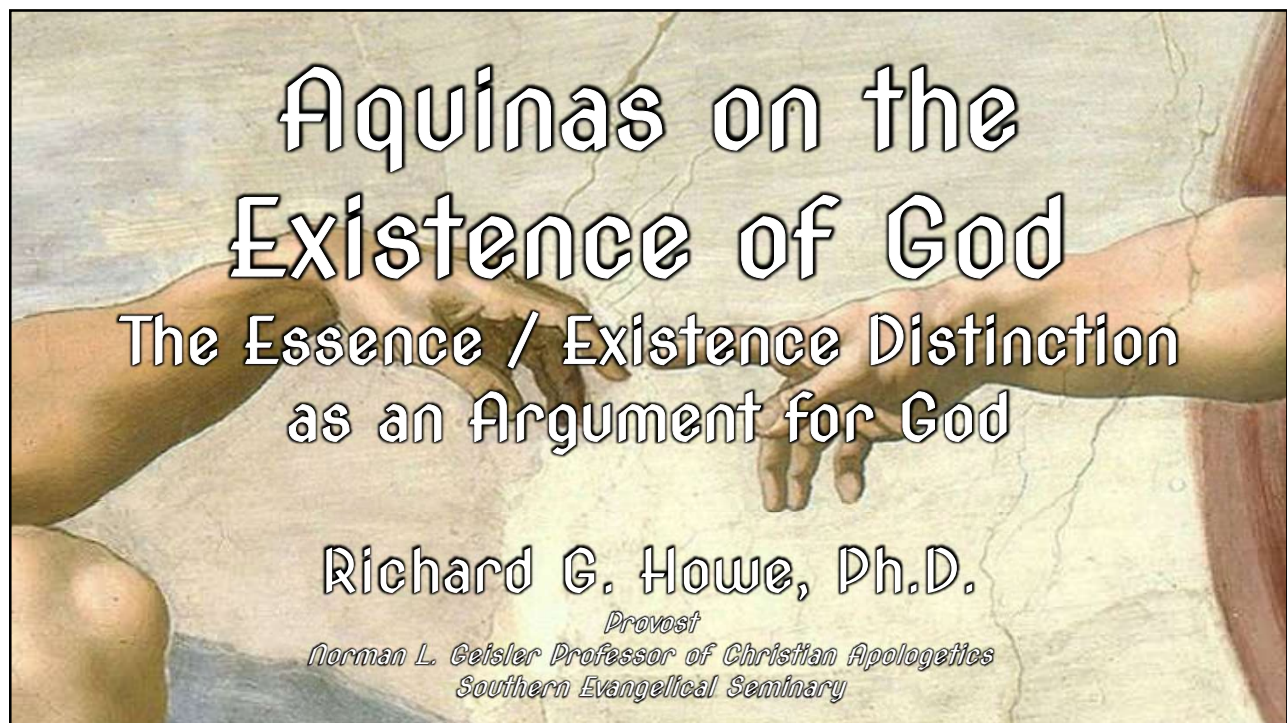
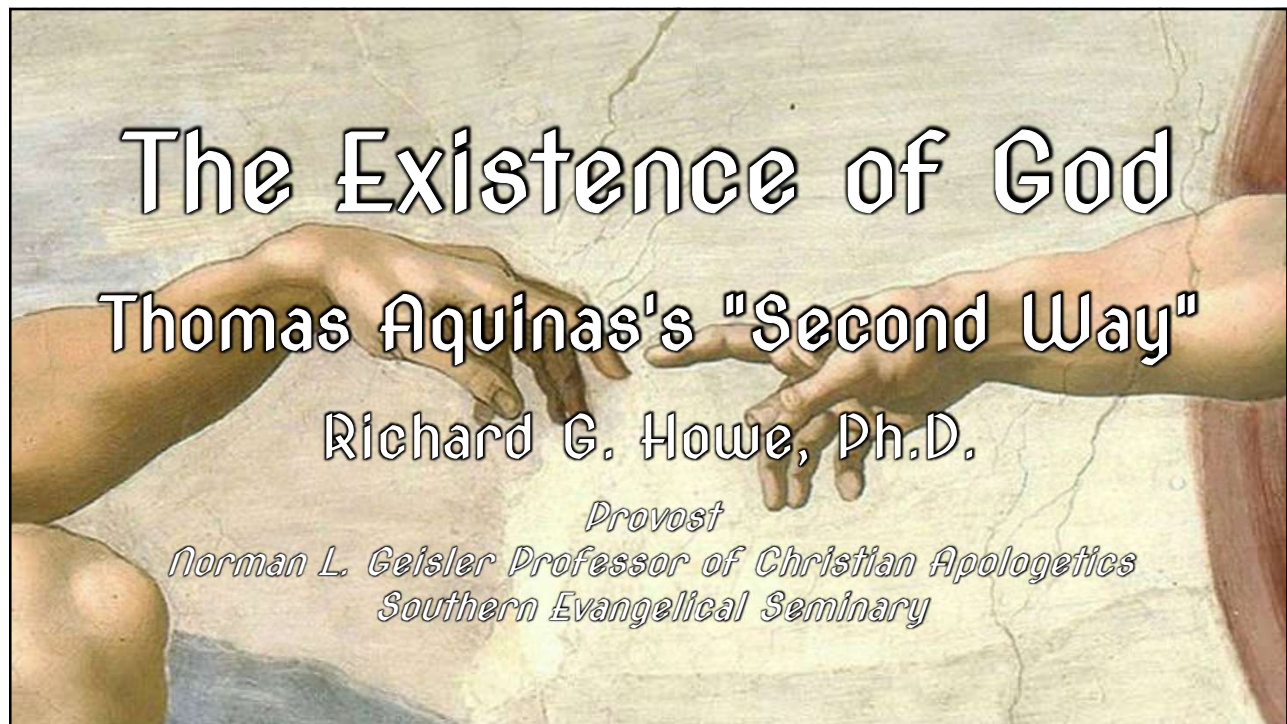
"The knowledge which we have by natural reason contains two things: images derived from the sensible object; and the natural intelligible light, enabling us to abstract from them intelligible conceptions."

[Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q. 12, art. 13, Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Westminster: Christian Classics), p. 59]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

It is my contention that all of these are misunderstanding Aquinas and that Aquinas is not making a Kalam type of argument.



To understand Aquinas's argument here, it is necessary to understand the distinction between two types of infinite series.

infinitum per accidens
(accidental infinite)

VS.

infinitum per se
(per se infinite)

Christian Apologetics Journal, 8:1 (Spring 2009)
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**TWO NOTIONS OF THE INFINITE IN
THOMAS AQUINAS' *SUMMA THEOLOGIAE*
I, QUESTIONS 2 AND 46**

Richard G. Howe, Ph.D.

Near the beginning of his *Summa Theologiae*, the thirteenth century Dominican monk, Thomas Aquinas, claims that "the existence of God can be proved in five ways."¹ These arguments are regularly referred to as his *Five Ways* and are for many perhaps the most familiar reading from Thomas. Of particular interest for my purposes are the first three of these *Five Ways* in which Thomas clearly denies the possibility of "going on to infinity."² I have discovered that a number of

1. *Deum esse quinque viis probari potest*. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 2.
3. All English translations are from *Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, translated by Father of the English Dominicans Province (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981). Thomas acknowledges that certain of these arguments are not completely original with him. They are found for example in Aristotle's *Physics* VII, 1 241²⁴ and *Metaphysics* XII, 7 1072²³. Though the *Five Ways* are Thomas' most famous arguments for God's existence, certain ones of them are expounded with greater detail in other of his works, including his *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 13.

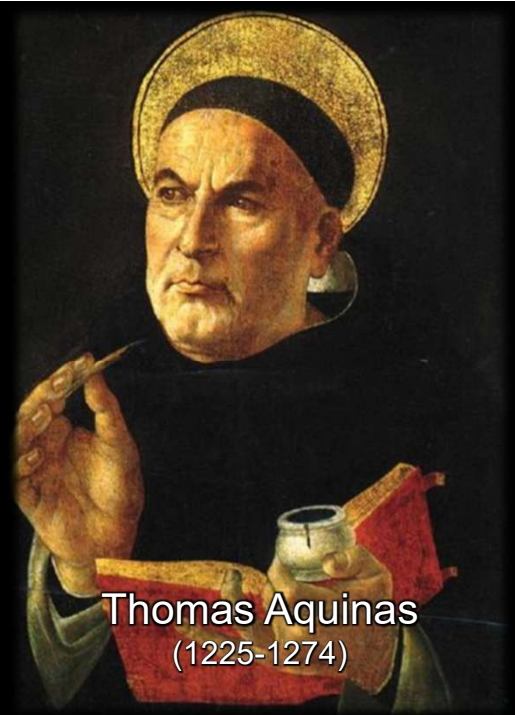
² *procedere per procedendum in infinitum*

Richard G. Howe is Professor of Apologetics at Southern Evangelical Seminary in Charlotte, NC.

"In efficient causes it is impossible to proceed to infinity *per se* — thus, there cannot be an infinite number of causes that are *per se* required for a certain effect. ...

But it is not impossible to proceed to infinity *accidentally* as regards efficient causes ..."

[*Summa Theologiae* 1, Q, 46, ii., ad 7]

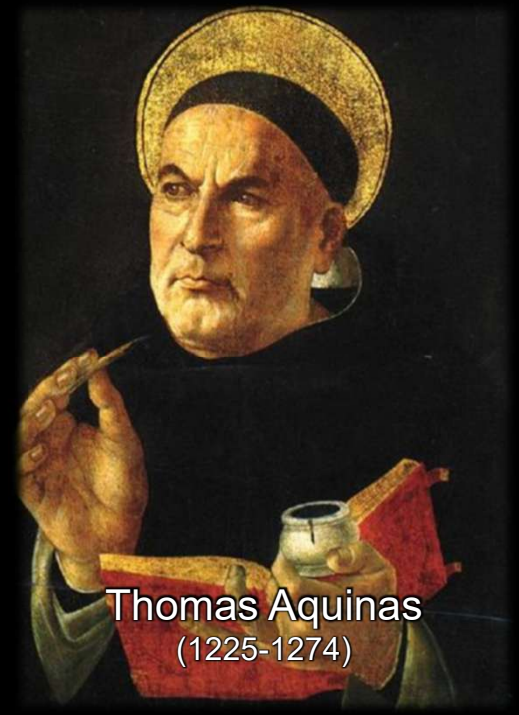


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)



"It is accidental to this particular man as generator to be generated by another man; for he generates as a man, and not as the son of another man."

[*Summa Theologiae* 1, Q, 46, ii, ad 7]



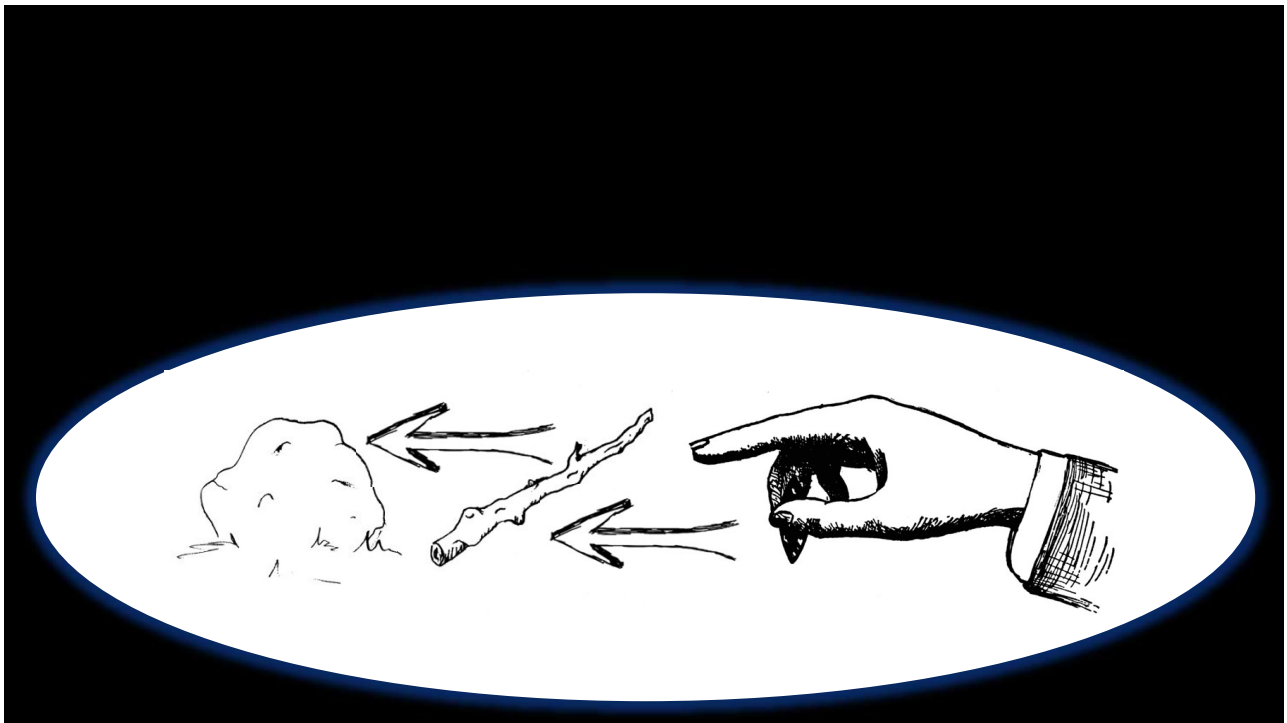
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

infinitum per accidens
(accidental infinite)

VS.

infinitum per se
(per se infinite)







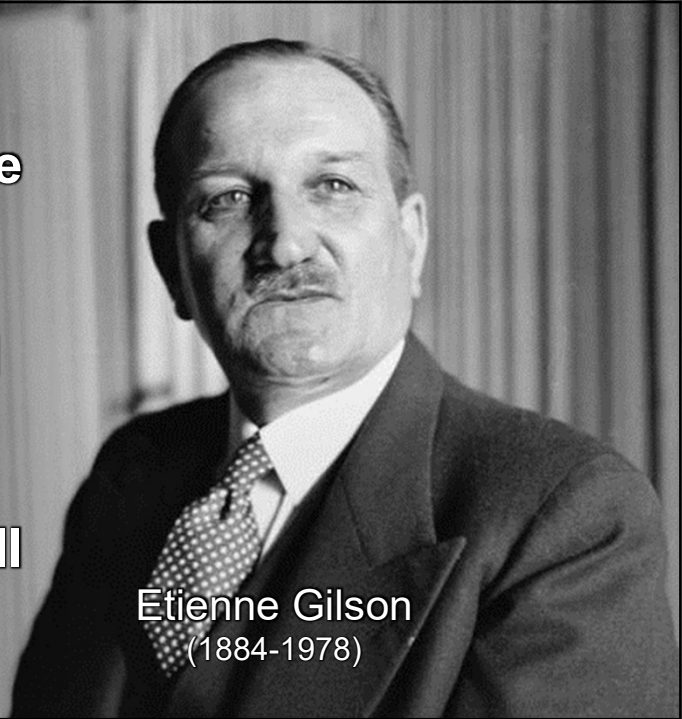


"The proof in no way considers movement as a present reality the existence of which requires an efficient cause in the past, which is God.

Étienne Gilson
(1884-1978)

"It aims simply at establishing that in the universe as actually given, movement, as actually given, would be unintelligible without a first Mover communicating it to all things."

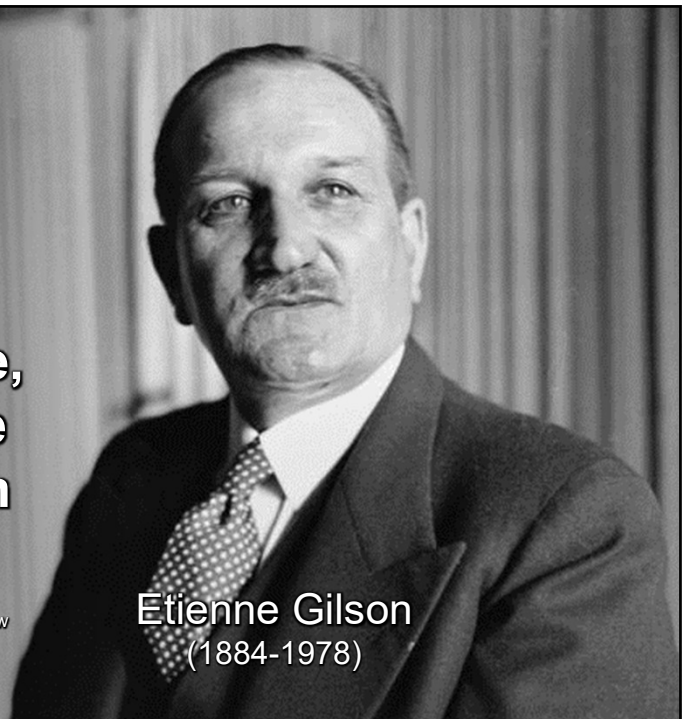
Étienne Gilson
(1884-1978)

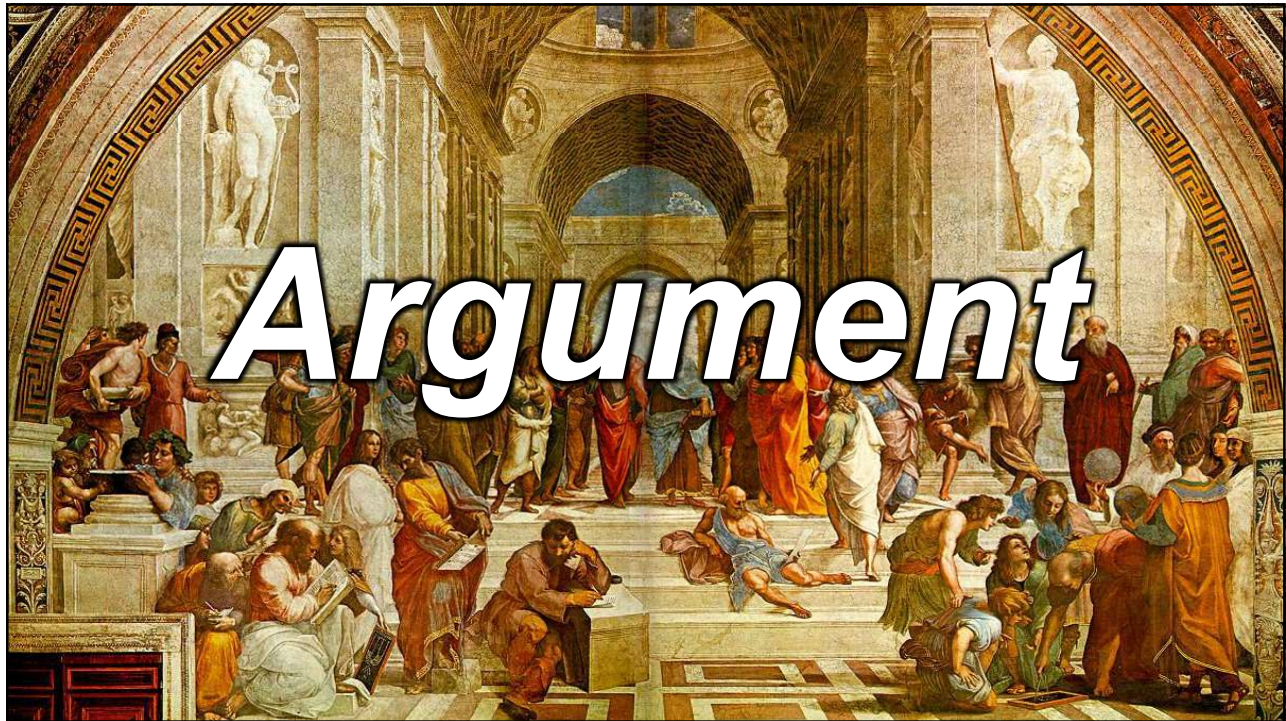
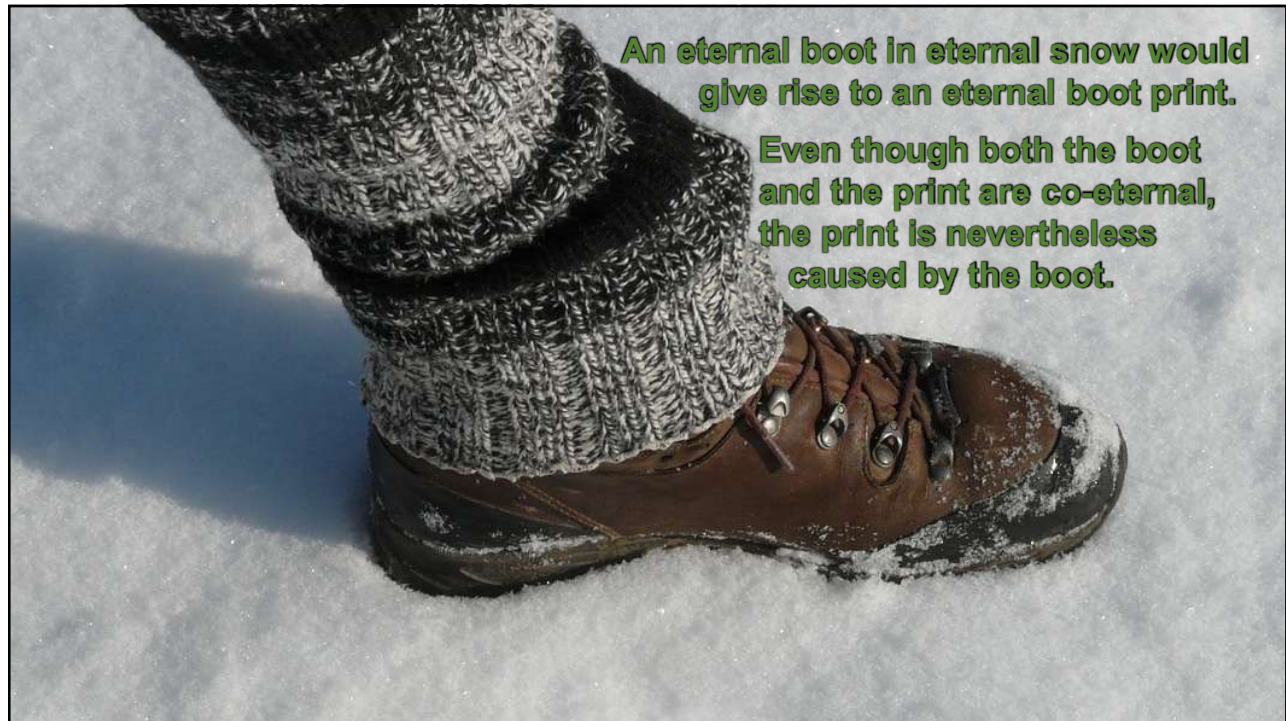


"In other words the impossibility of an infinite regress must not be taken as an infinite regress in time, but as applying to the present consideration of the universe."

[*The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Edward Bullough (New York: Dorset Press, n.d.), p. 76]

Étienne Gilson
(1884-1978)



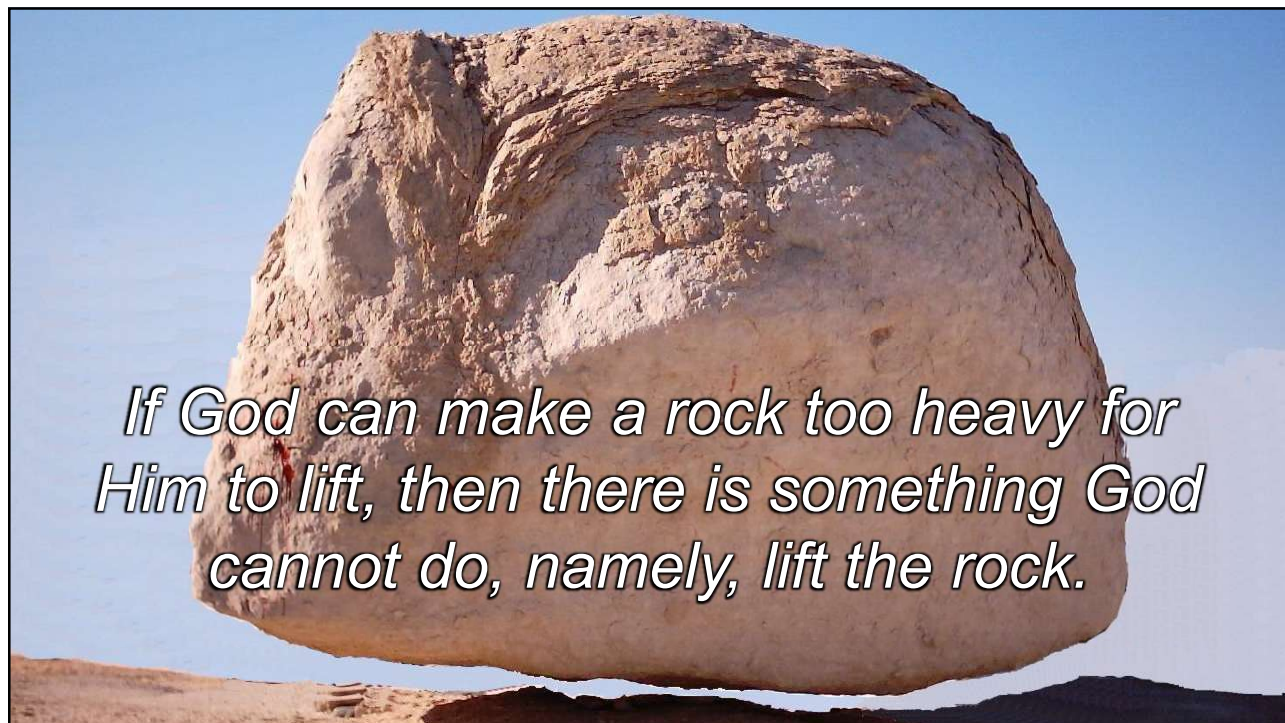
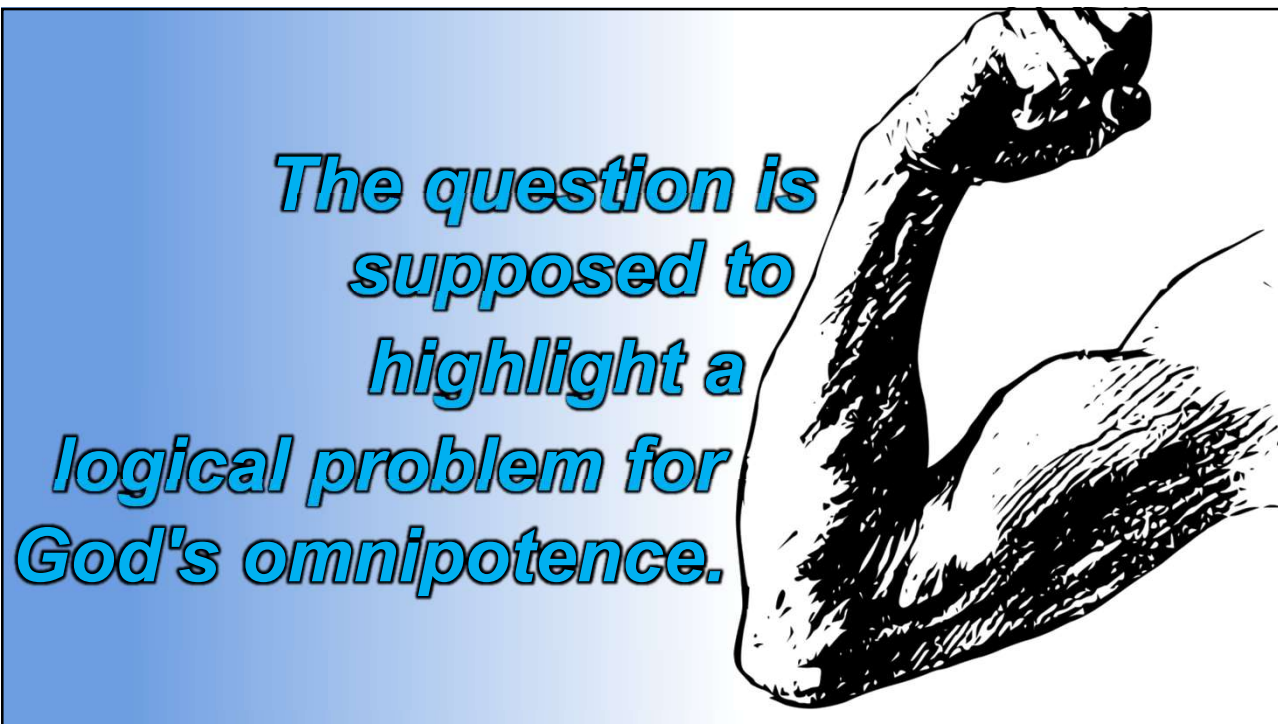


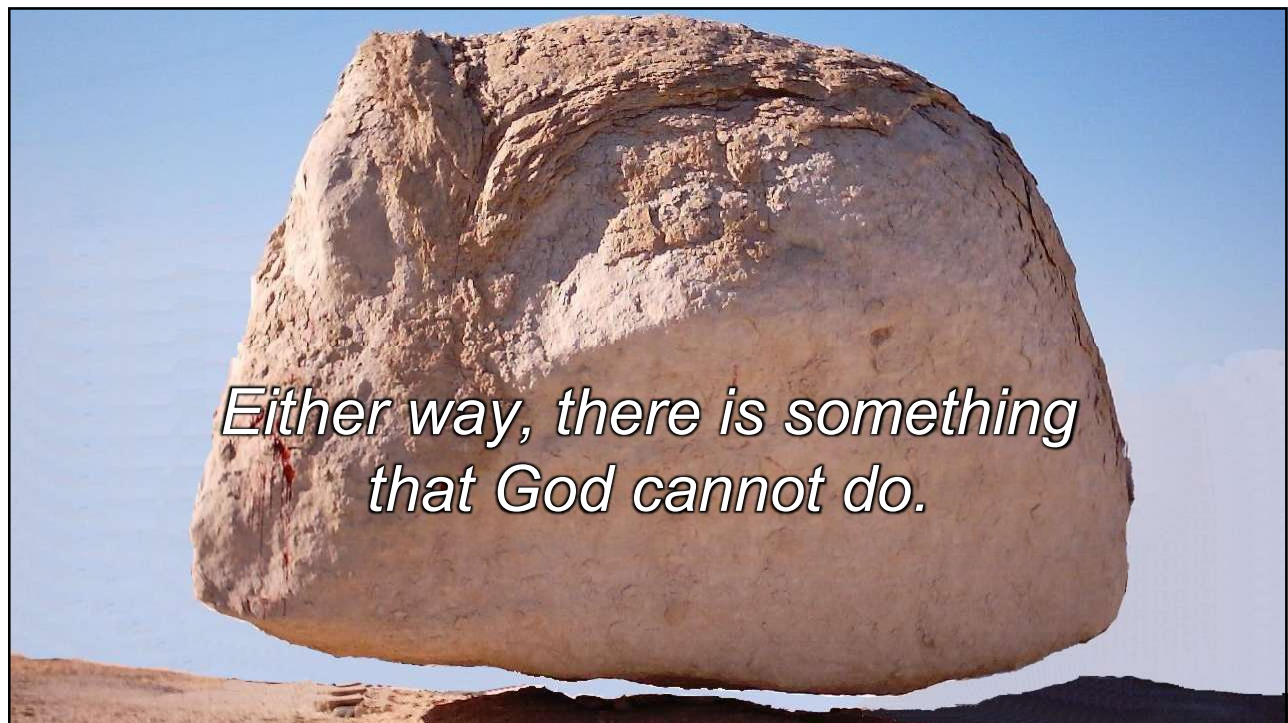
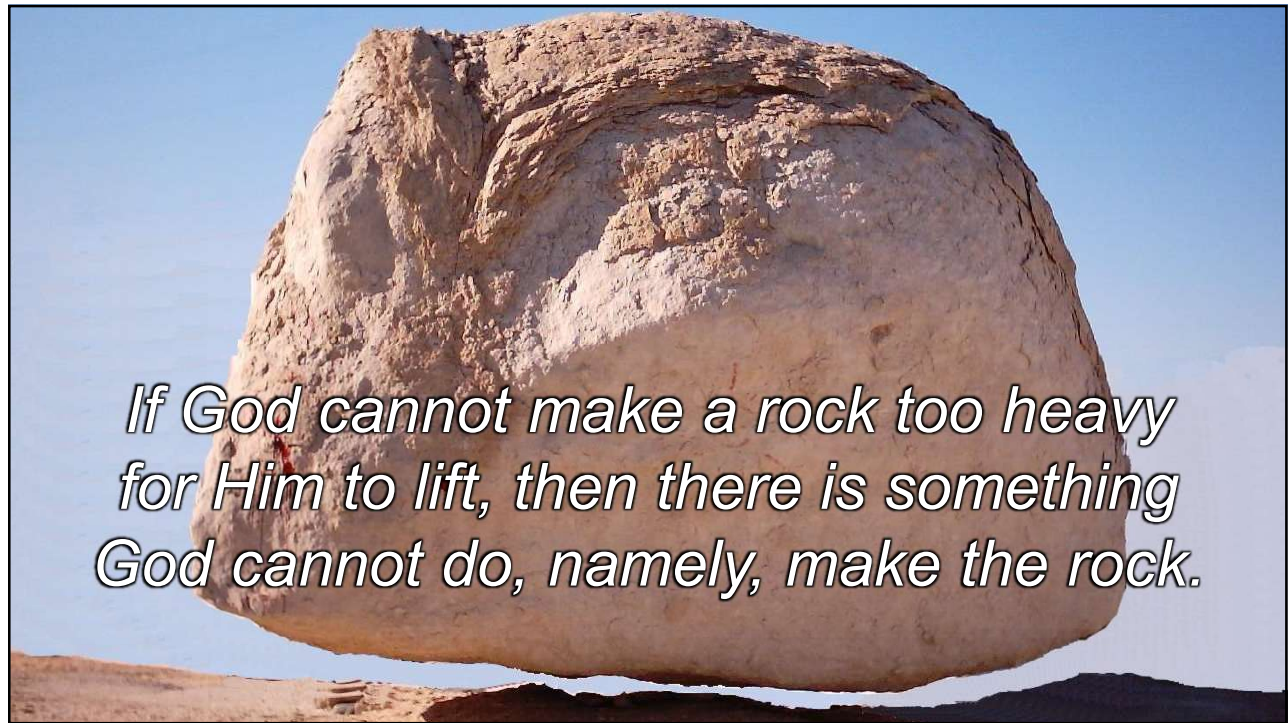


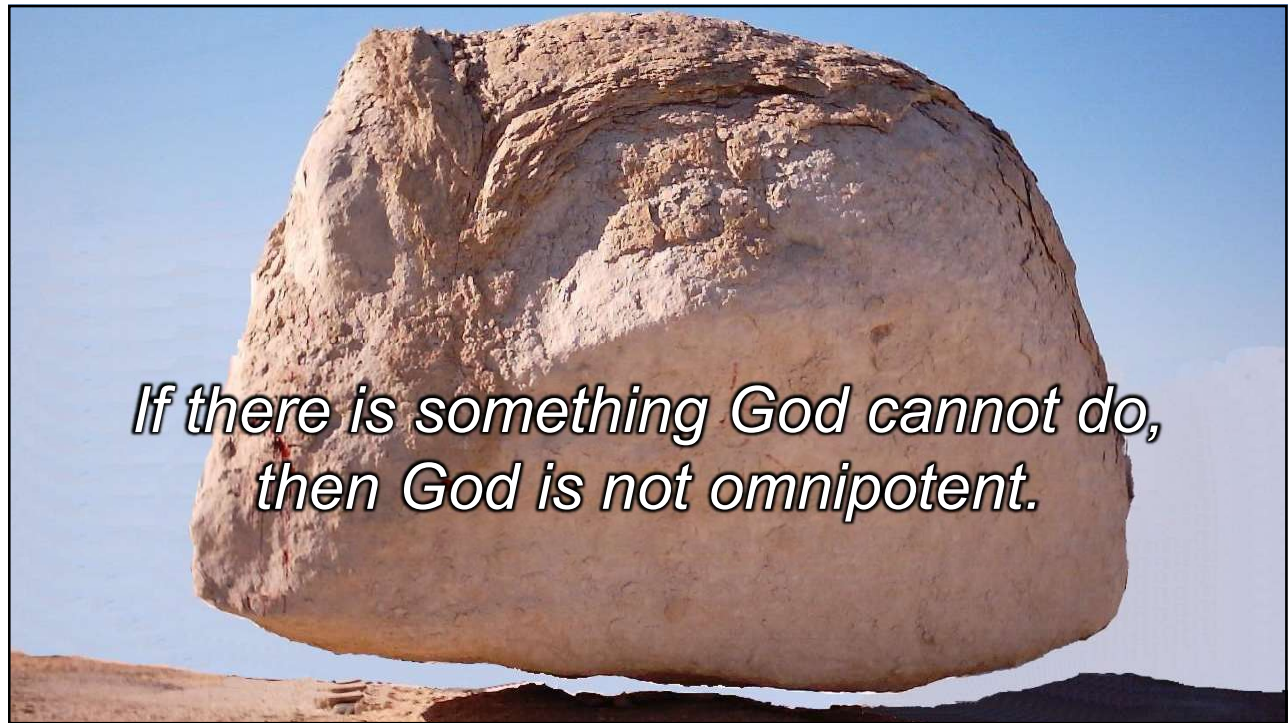
Homer Simpson's Version:

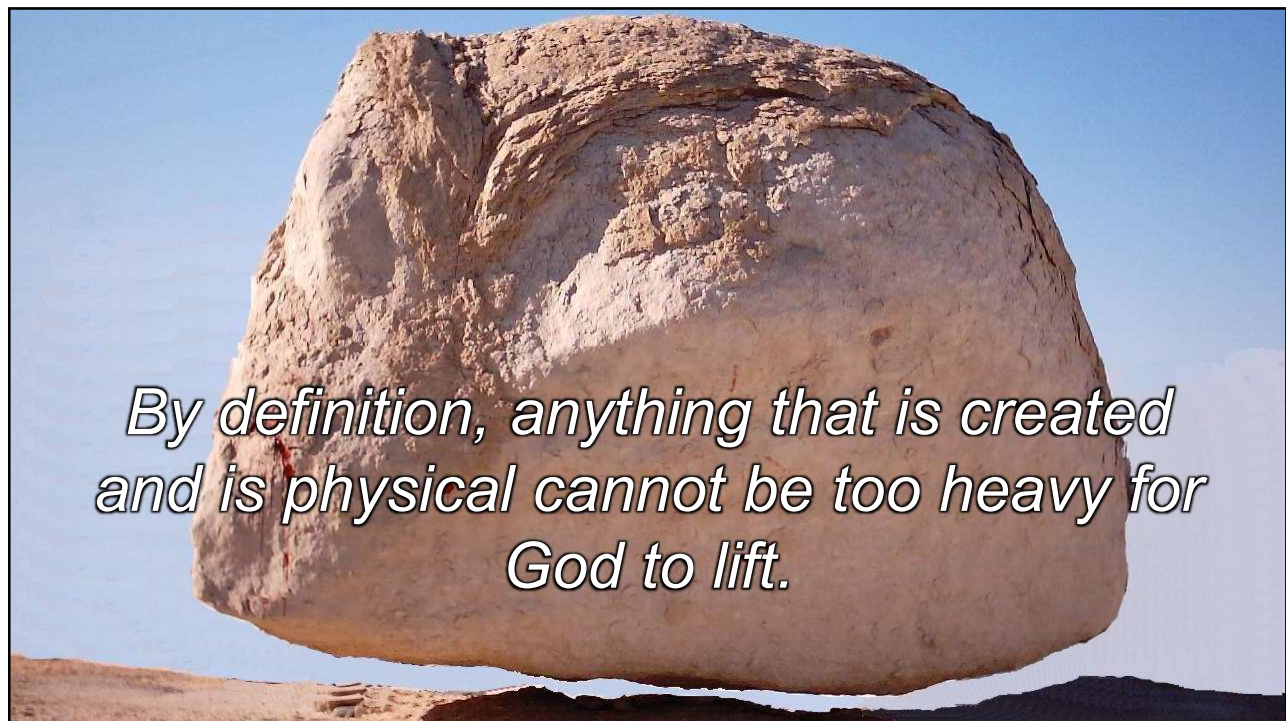
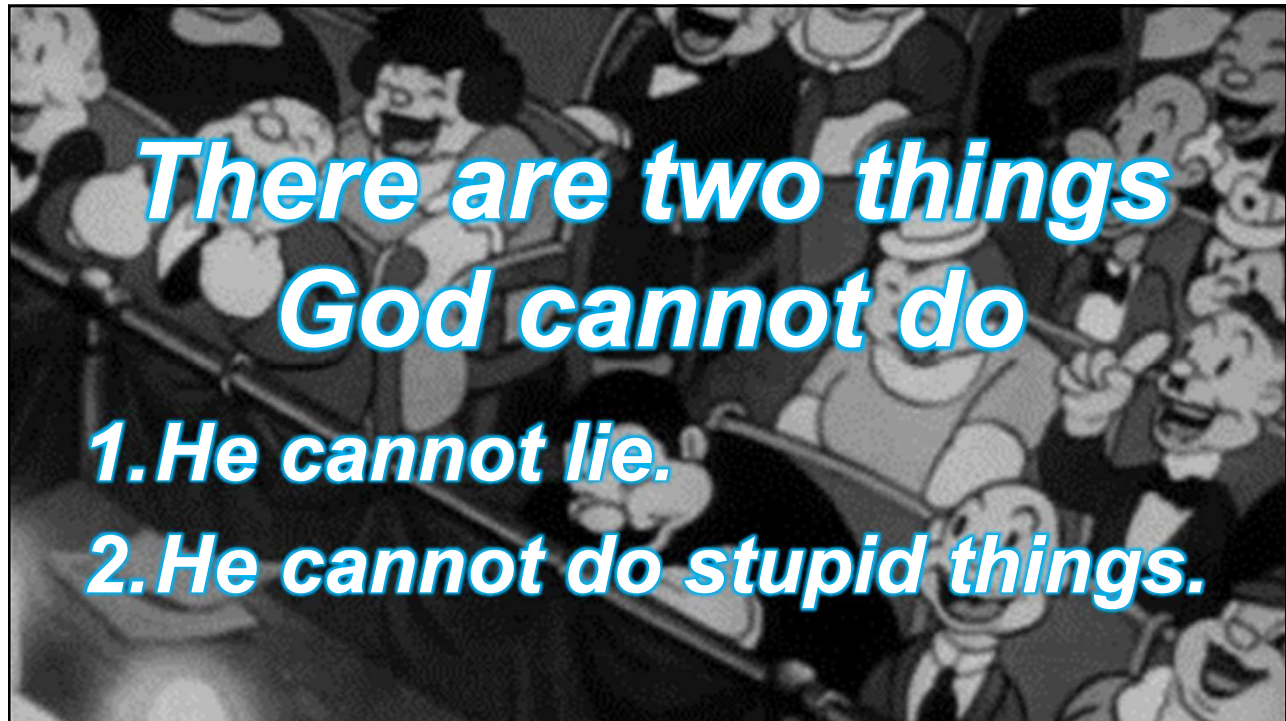
*"Can Jesus microwave
His taco too hot for Him
to eat it?"*

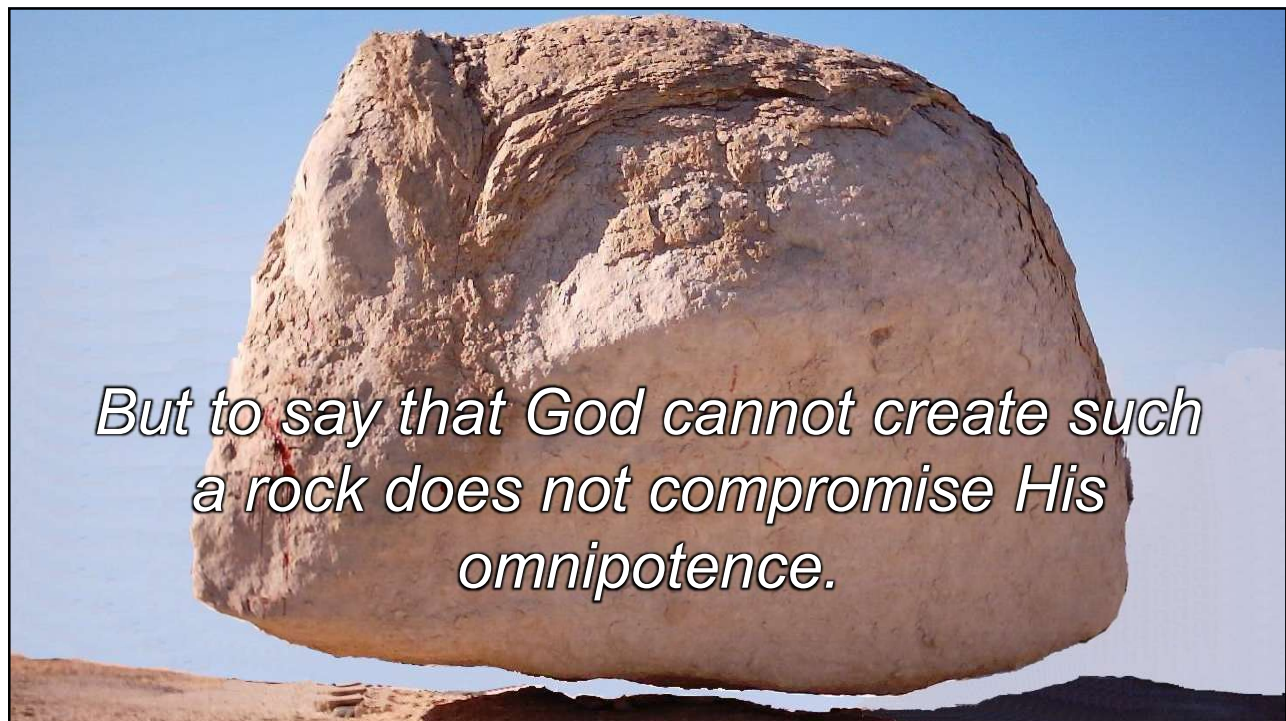
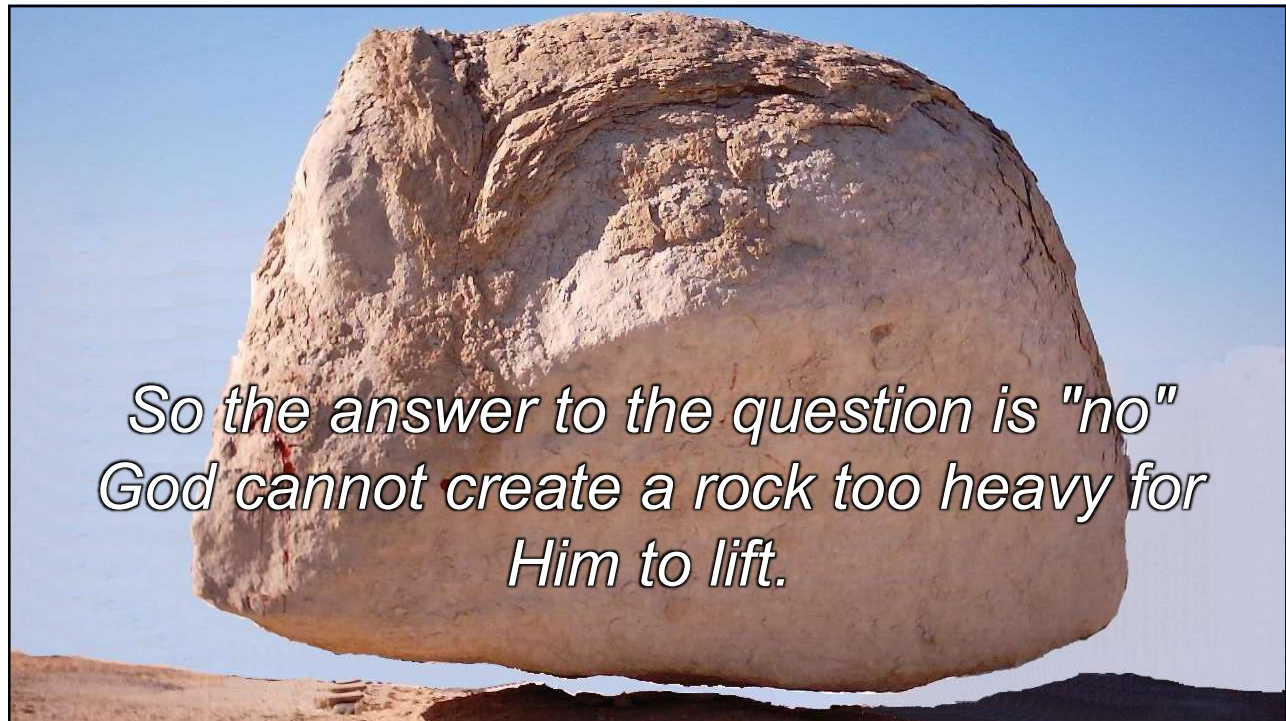


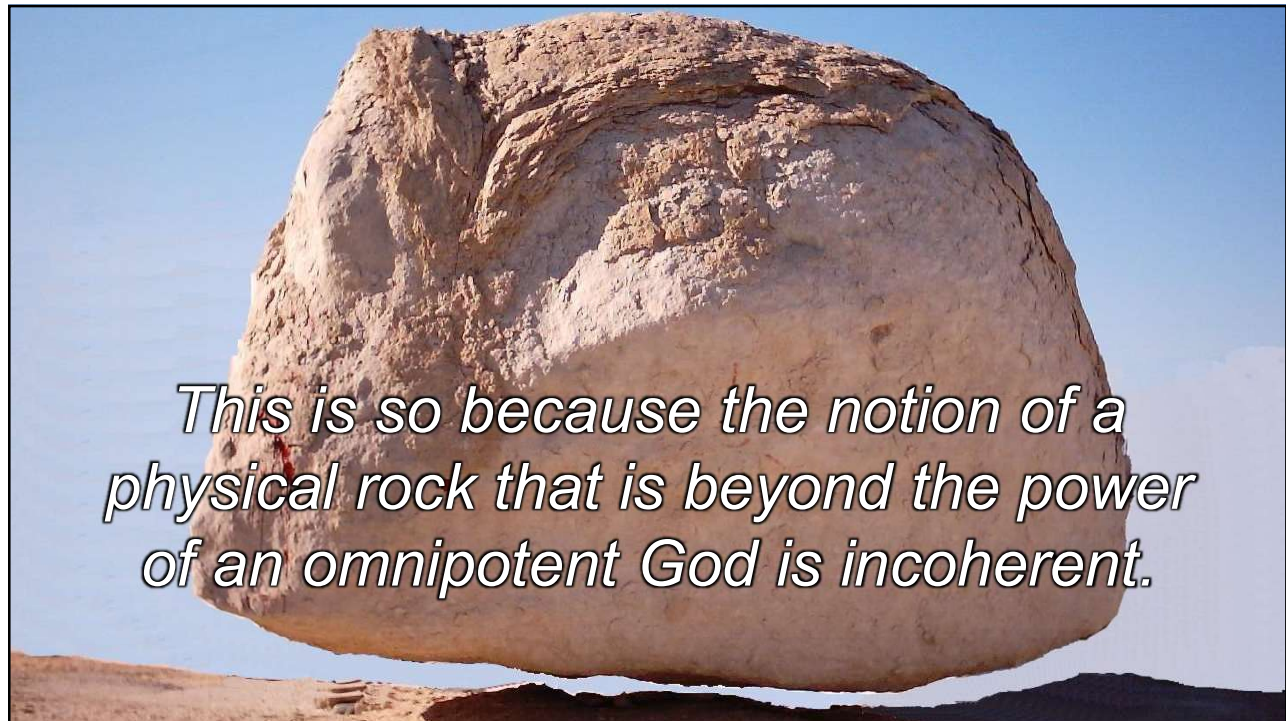








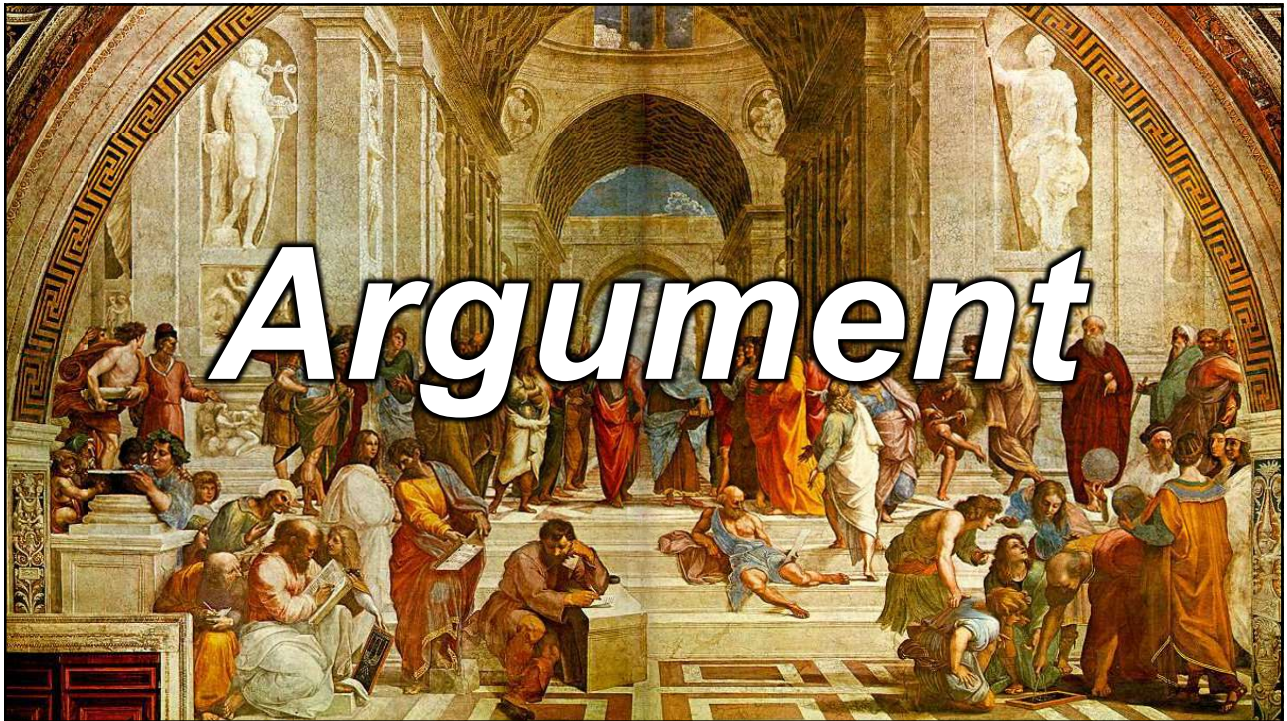
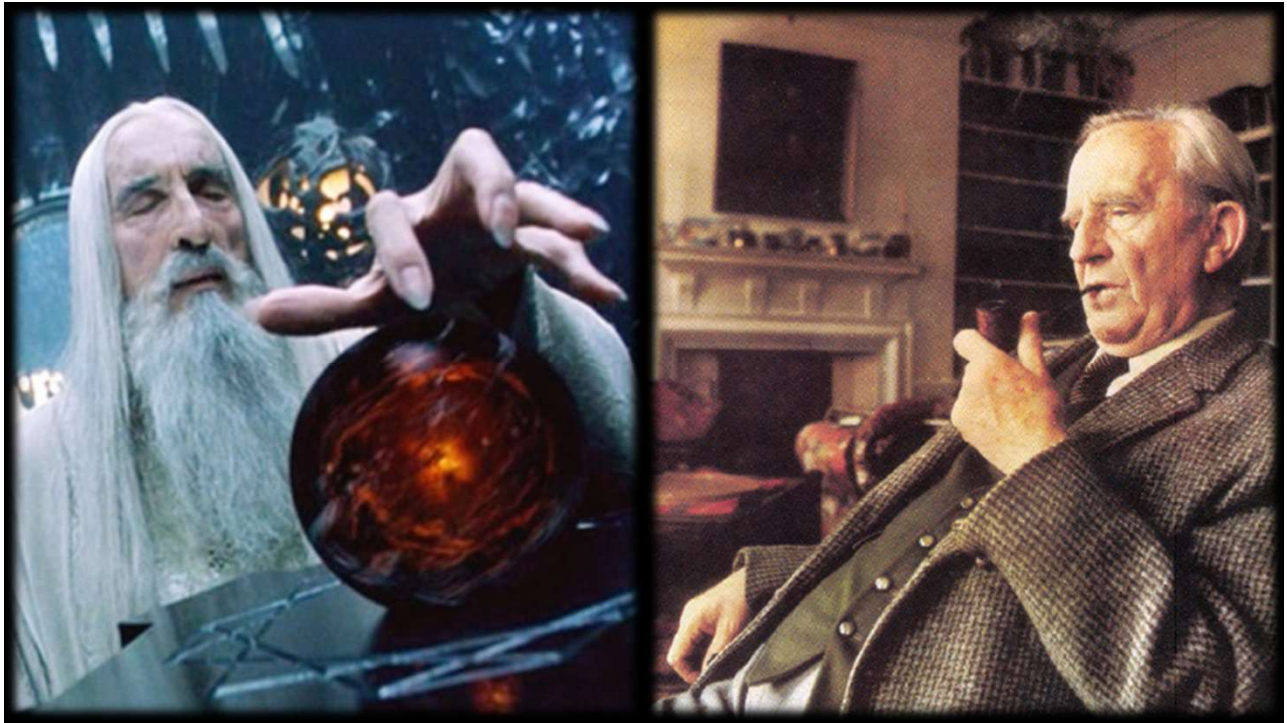


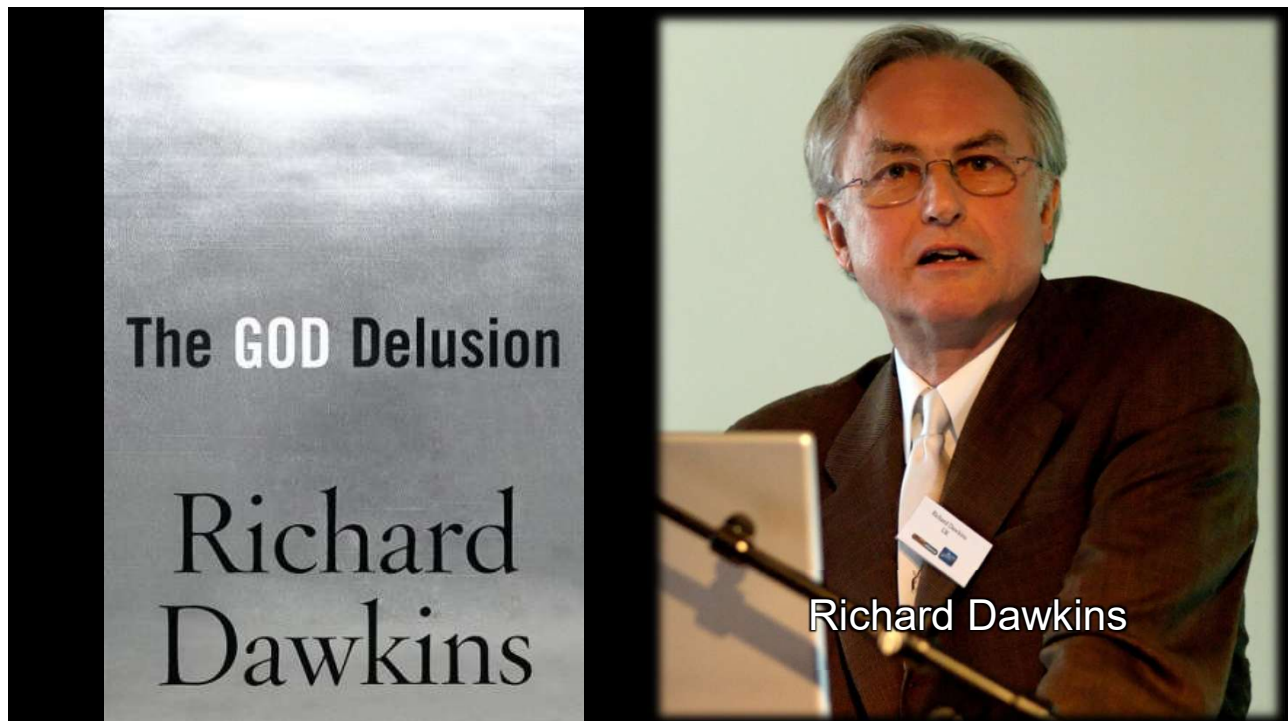


"A thing is called absolutely possible, not in relation to any power, but from the sole habitude of the terms which are not repugnant to each other; in which sense possible is opposed to impossible, as appears from the Philosopher [Metaph. v, text. 17]."

[ST, I, Q46, art. 1, ad. 1]

Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)



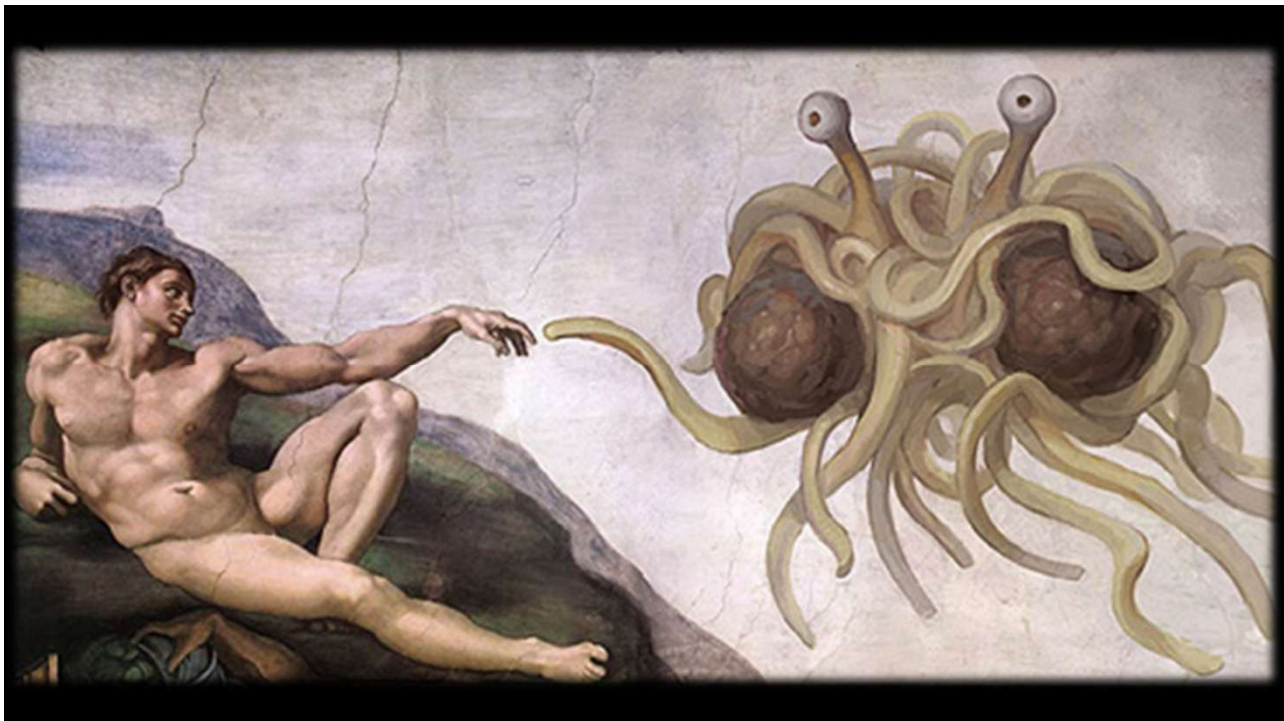


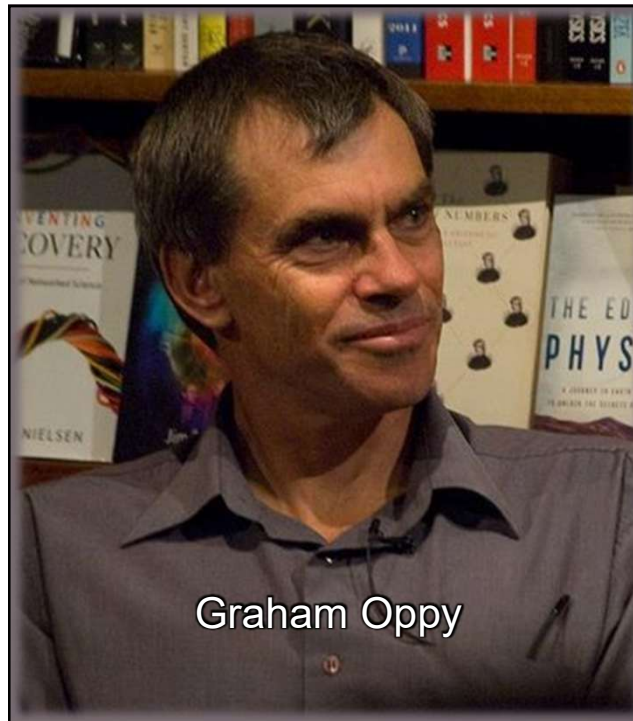
"Even if we allow the dubious luxury of arbitrarily conjuring up a terminator to an infinite regress and giving it a name, simply because we need one, there is absolutely no reason to endow that terminator with any of the properties normally ascribed to God."

[Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 77]



Richard Dawkins



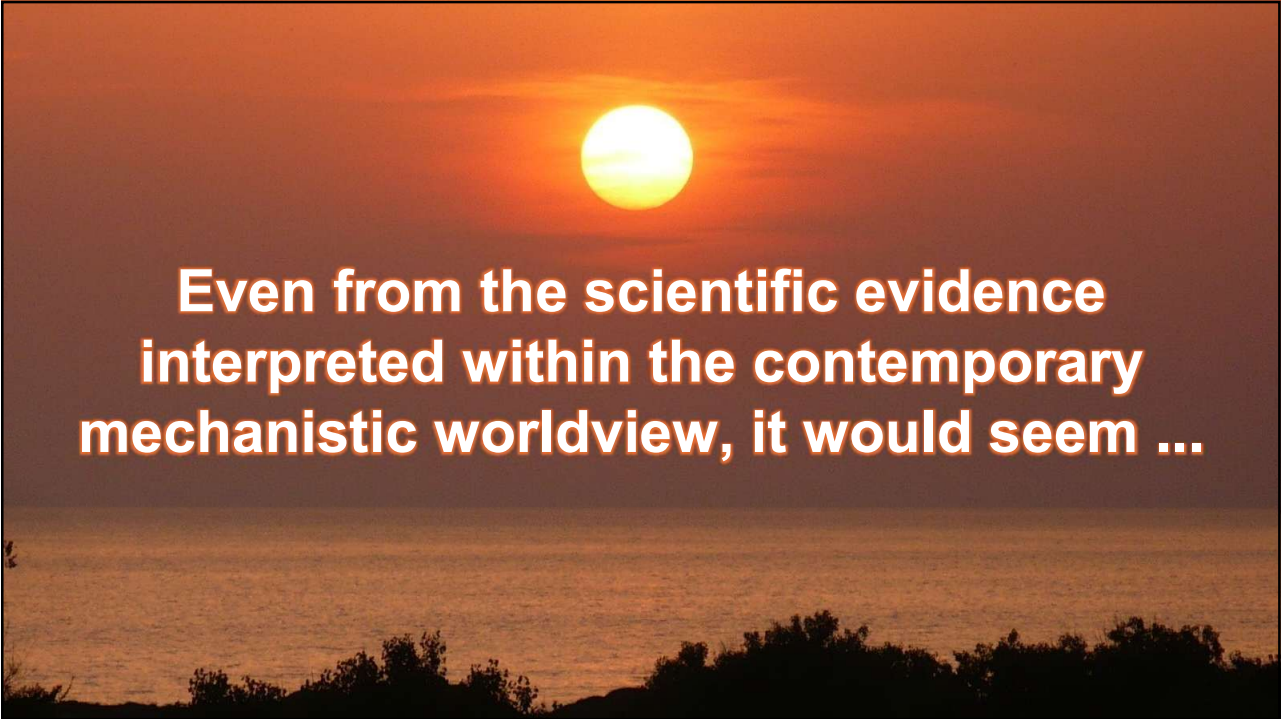


Graham Oppy

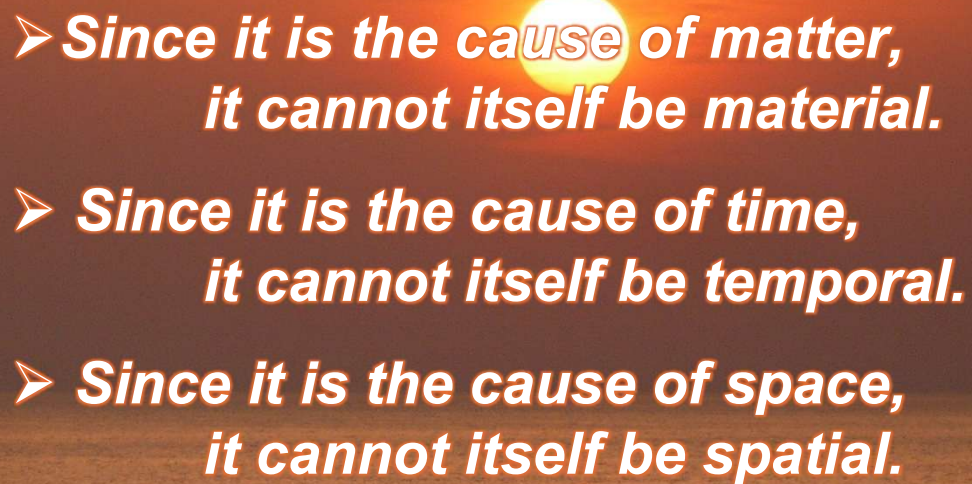
"A final characteristic of cosmological arguments is that they typically issue in conclusions that—at least *prima facie*—are only very doubtfully of genuine religious significance. Even if, for examples, one can establish that there is an efficient cause for the existence of the visible (physical) universe, it is not at all clear why one should suppose that this efficient cause can be identified with the creative activity of any of the gods whose existence is postulated in extant world religions."

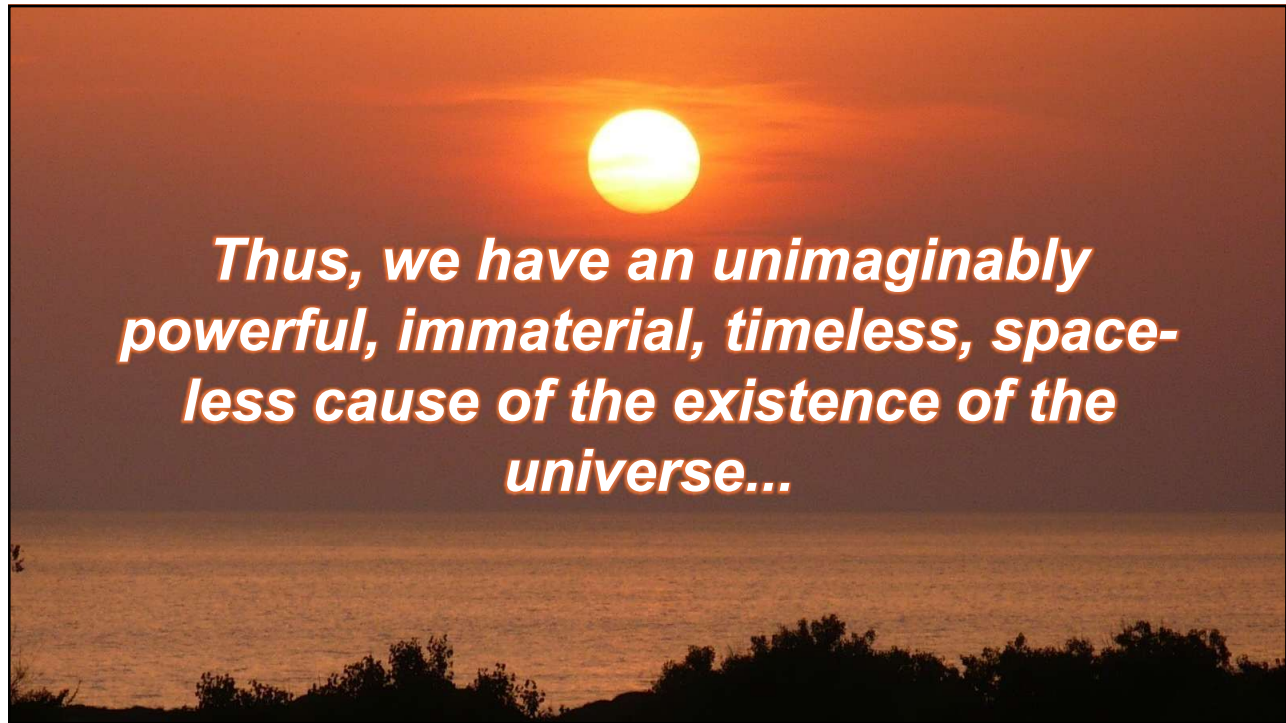
[Graham Oppy, *Arguing about Gods* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 98]





**Even from the scientific evidence
interpreted within the contemporary
mechanistic worldview, it would seem ...**

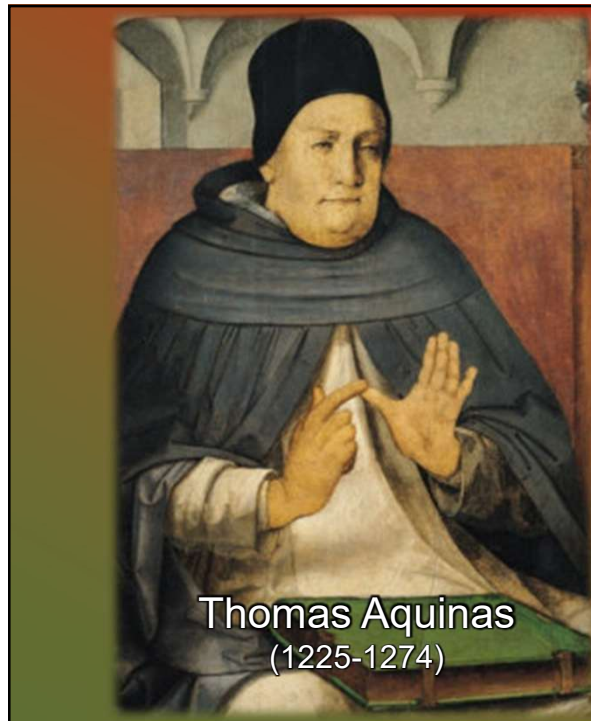
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- ***Since it is the cause of matter,
it cannot itself be material.***
 - ***Since it is the cause of time,
it cannot itself be temporal.***
 - ***Since it is the cause of space,
it cannot itself be spatial.***



Thus, we have an unimaginably powerful, immaterial, timeless, spaceless cause of the existence of the universe...

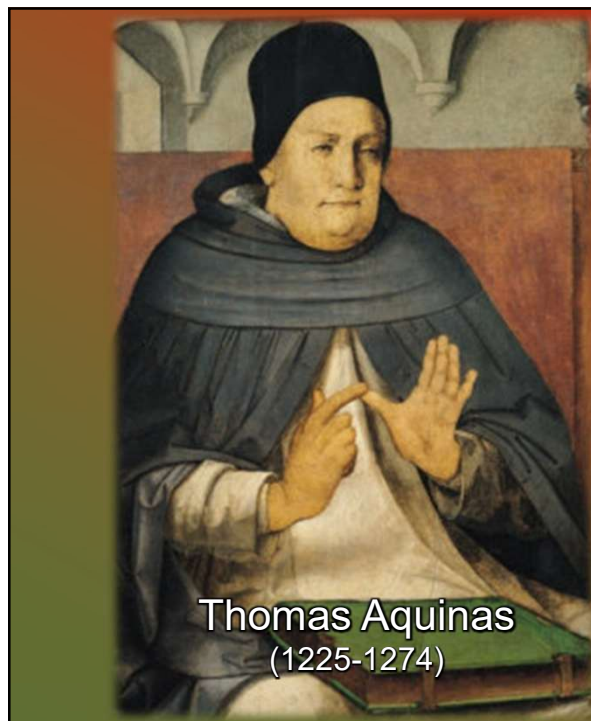
While there may be some debate as to how much the scientific arguments can demonstrate the nature and attributes of God,





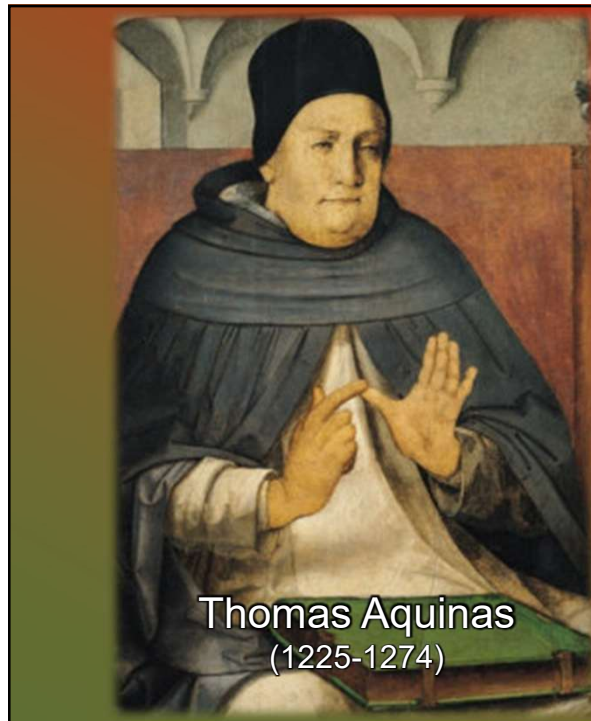
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

The Thomistic arguments not only demonstrate the existence of God, but demonstrate all of His classical attributes as well.



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