Avicenna's Proof for the Existence of God

Or, "the world is intelligible?"

And, "God is not a cue stick!"

Modality

- Contingency (Possibility)
  - "Look around! The world is full of contingent things!"
  - Things (events, objects) are *caused* by other events or objects, yes? Everything has a cause.
- Necessity
  - Some things are necessary through another (i.e., contingent in themselves)
  - Is there something that is necessary in itself? (TBD)
- Impossibility
  - Some things are just impossible: square circle

Modality in Reality

- Modality is ***real***, that is to say, it is not just conceptual or propositional or epistemological
- There are things whose **essences** may or may not **exist**.
- Distinction between essence and existence.
  - It is in the triangle's—and my—essence (nature) to either exist or not.
  - The essence of a triangle is to have three sides the sum of whose angles equals 180°.
    The essence of a triangle is not 'to exist' or 'not to exist'.
- The essence of a triangle and a human is to have possible existence. - CONTINGENT
- A dragon has an essence whose existence is impossible - IMPOSSIBILITY
- Is there anything whose essence is necessarily to exist? (TBD) - NECESSITY

All Things Are Either...

- Contingent
  - Contingent things can become necessary through another
    - They are *caused to exist* by something else
- Impossible
  - Impossible things are either impossible in themselves (square circle), or...
  - Impossible through another (my winning lottery ticket—doesn't exist, *yet!*)
- Necessary
  - A necessary thing would have an essence that guarantees its existence (TBD)

“Why is there something rather than nothing?”

- Here begins Avicenna’s proof for God
- Everything that exists, exists contingently.
  - It could not exist. But it does. Something causes it to exist (preponderates it into existence).
  - I am caused by my mother. Who is caused by her mother. Who is caused by her mother. And so on.
  - Why not infinite regress?
    - An infinite regress does not demonstrate why there is something (an infinite regress) rather than nothing (no infinite regress).

“Why is there something rather than nothing?”

- Do not imagine
  - C from eternal beginning→C1→C2→C3→C4→C to infinity→
- Set [All Contingent Things] = Set-C (the universe)
  - What causes Set-C to exist? Either it is Impossible, Contingent, or Necessary
  - Impossible? Nah.
  - Contingent? Well then it would be in Set-C, right?
  - So, that just leaves necessity. That is, the cause of Set-C is Necessary

Wājib al-Wujūd

- Necessary Existence
  - The cause of the universe is a being whose essence is to exist, that is, a being who necessarily exists. And this we call "God".
  - Avicenna demonstrates that this *wājib al-wujūd* must also be One/Unique, Simple, and Immaterial, etc.
    - I won't go into the details, but this also prevents an objection: maybe Set-C (universe) is Necessary.

Challenging the Premises

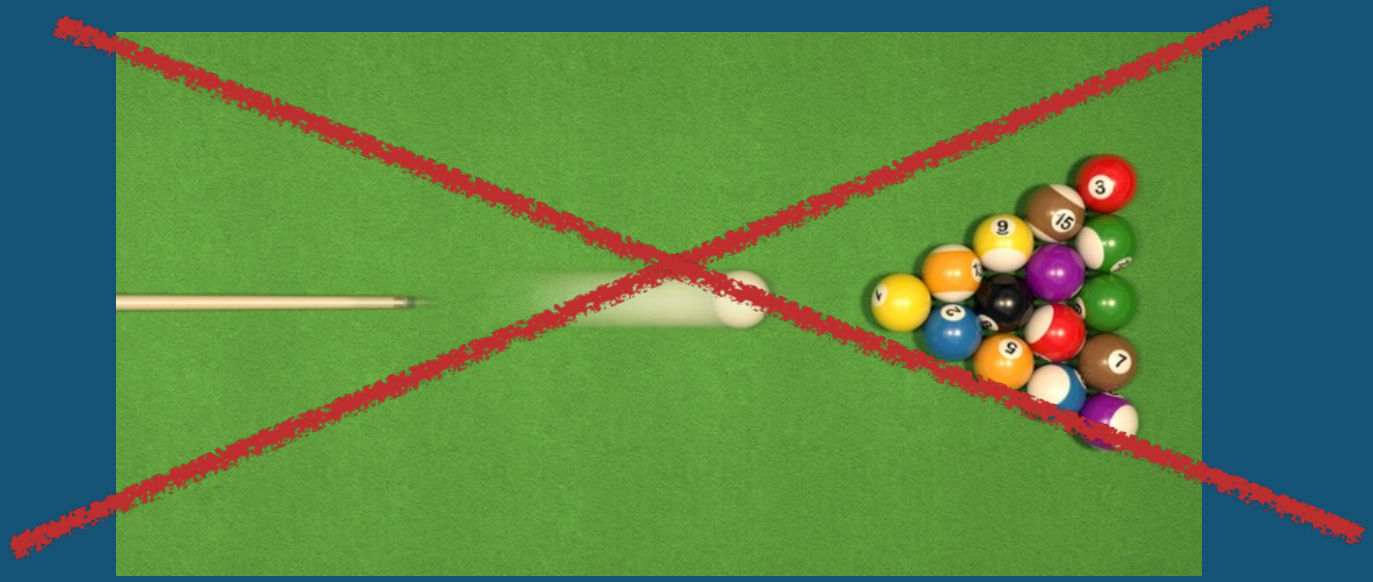
- Premise (or, First Principle): "There are contingent things in the world."
- The proof relies on contingency argument: if something does exist, and might not have existed, then some external cause *caused* it to exist.
- Maybe universe just happens to exist? It is arbitrary. Random. There is no explanation. No cause. And it is also not necessary.
  - But, this does not cohere with how we know, experience, and test out the world.
  - In other words, the world is intelligible. It is not unintelligible.

Proof for God
Or Proof that the World is Intelligible

- The only possible objection is that the proof is not proving God.
- Rather, it is proving that the world is intelligible.
- That is, the world functions intelligibly through an understanding of cause and effect.
- There are conditions that lead to an event happening or object existing and these conditions are intelligible.
  - This is quite literally the basis for the scientific method.
  - We can test out chemical, biological, and physical processes to discover patterns of cause-and-effect.

GOD IS NOT A CUE STICK

- Whatever you take away from this, it should NOT be that God is the cue stick setting billiard balls (set of causes and effects) into temporal motion.
- No.
- God is the ground or source for contingent reality *as such*.

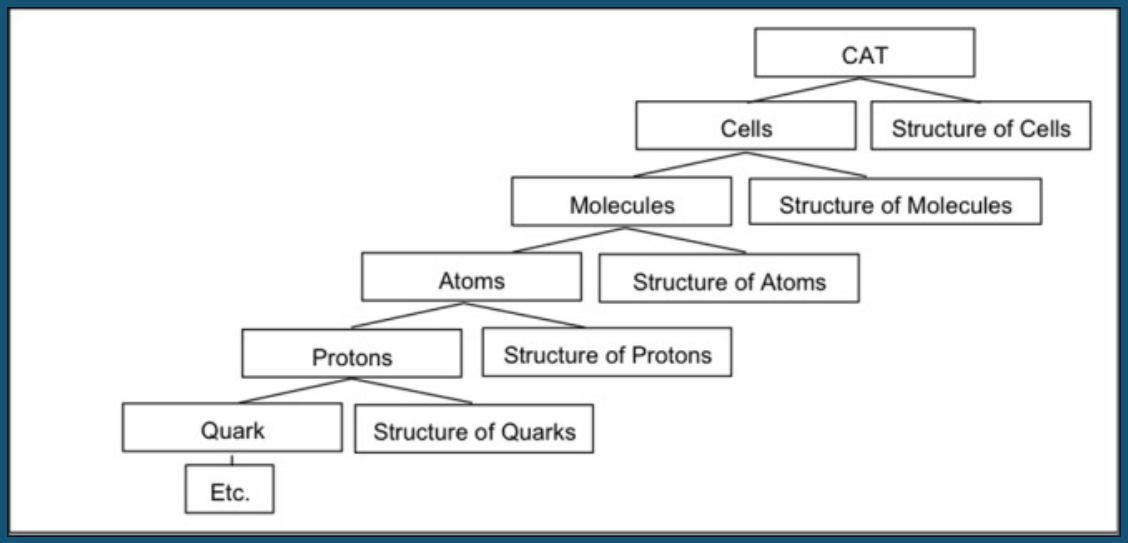


Science (Physics) and Metaphysics

- The enterprise of modern science is interested in discovering the rules or laws of nature by which the natural world behaves but it does not reveal anything about the origins or ultimate causes of the existence of the natural world and the causes of the laws of nature. To use an analogy, **science is about observing the moving pieces of a chess board and documenting the rules of the movement of pieces, but science cannot tell you where the chess board, the pieces, and the rules of the game come from or why they exist in the first place**. This second question can only be determined by philosophy and metaphysics.

Similar Proof

- **Conditioned Reality**: Any reality (human, plant, animal, wood, etc.) that depends on something else for its existence. For example, a cat depends on its organs, the organs depend on cells, the cells depend on molecules, which depend on atoms, etc. This dependence is simultaneous at any moment the conditioned reality exists



- **Unconditioned Reality**: Any reality that is self-sufficient, i.e. does not depend on anything else for its existence.

Similar Proof

- Some conditioned reality exists (i.e. cats, animals, trees, humans, etc.)
- Any conditioned reality (R1) always depends upon another reality (R2) in order to exist (per definition of conditioned reality)
- Any conditioned reality, by definition, must either depend upon:
  1. either a finite number of conditioned realities only
  2. or an infinite number of conditioned realities only
  3. or a finite number of conditioned realities + at least one unconditioned reality

Finite Number of Conditioned Realities?

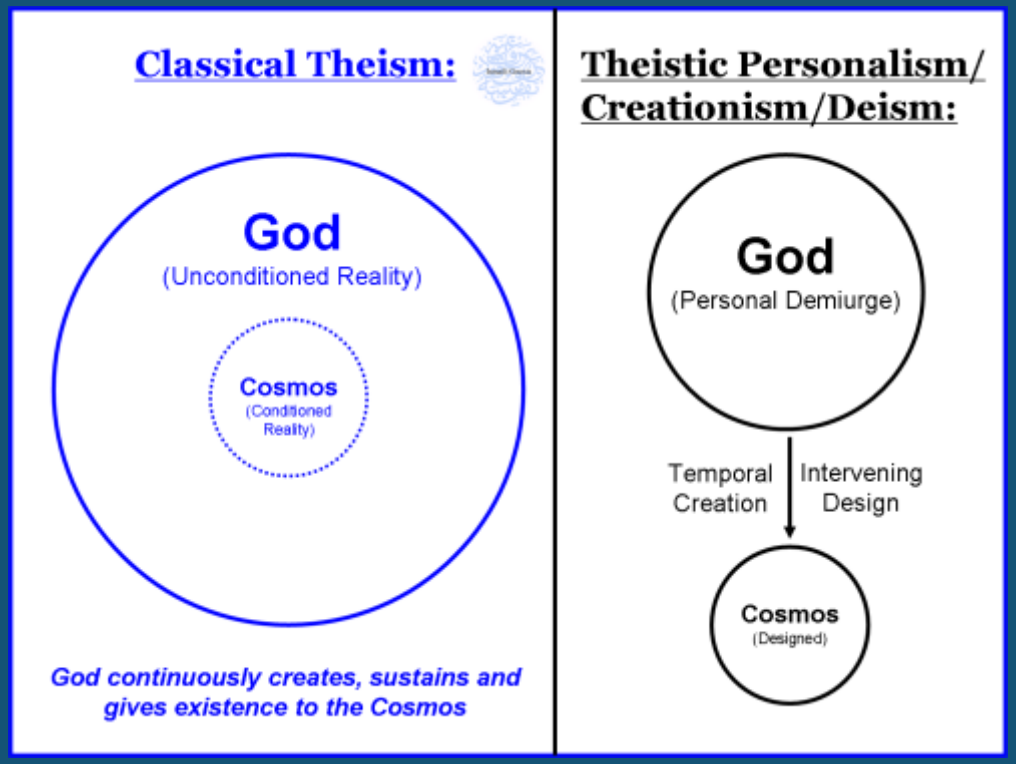
- Nope.
- What would the first one depend on? Since the first one, by definition, must depend on (be conditioned by) something else to exist, but it is the first, with nothing prior, then the linear chain ceases to exist.
- Circular chain of conditioned realities? Nah. Each conditioned reality fulfills its own conditions which violates the definition of conditioned reality

Infinite Number of Conditioned Realities?

- Nah.
- *If* an infinite series of conditioned realities could exist on its own, then the complete set of infinite conditioned realities would be an unconditioned reality.
- However, this is impossible because an unconditioned reality cannot depend upon an aggregate of conditioned realities — if this were the case, it would still be conditioned.
- Therefore, a set of infinite conditioned realities is itself a conditioned reality (the set depends on, is conditioned by, the existence of the conditioned realities within it), and fails to exist on its own.

One Unconditioned Reality

- Conditioned Reality (with all its conditioned objects and events) is caused by an Unconditioned Reality
- The image on the LEFT (Classical Theism) is more accurate depiction.
- Conditioned Reality participates in the existence of God but is distinct from God



That God Exists

- Proofs for God's existence—and there are many others—may merely demonstrate *that* God exists.
  - A being who conditions reality; a being who causes reality; etc.
- While Avicenna demonstrates—maybe—some attributes of God, that is, *what* God is, those attributes are "basic"—One/Unique, Simple, Immaterial, and (even more tentatively) Intellect.
  - They all stem from basic metaphysical premises about contingent and conditioned reality.
  - By definition, an unconditioned reality must be One, Simple, and Immaterial (because matter conditions things).

That God Exists

- In other words, *that* God exists may be demonstrable.
- But, (perhaps) *what* God is, is unknowable (transcendence of God)
- Also, (perhaps) *how* God relates to the world is not rationally demonstrable (immanence of God)
- *What* God is and *how* God relates to the world may therefore fall within the purview of revelation, and consequently Theology and Sufism

Source

- I am grateful to ismailignosis.com for some images and materials: https://ismailignosis.com/2014/03/27/he-who-is-above-all-else-the-strongest-argument-for-the-existence-of-god/