


Richard Swinburne

The Existence of God

Why believe that there is a God at all? My answer is that to suppose that there is a God explains why there is a physical universe at all; why there are the scientific laws there are; why animals and then human beings have evolved; why humans have the opportunity to mould their characters and those of their fellow humans for good or ill and to change the environment in which we live; why we have the well-authenticated account of Christ's life, death and resurrection; why throughout the centuries millions of people (other than ourselves) have had the apparent experience of being in touch with an guided by God, and so much else. In fact, the hypothesis of the existence of God makes sense of the whole of our experience, and it does so better than any other explanation that can be put forward, and that is the grounds for believing it to be true. In this lecture I shall try to show you how it makes sense of the first three of these phenomena. That phenomena evident to all, and in particular the universe and its order, provide good grounds for believing that God exists has been a general Christian, Jewish, and Islamic conviction. The production of arguments to show this is called “*natural theology*”, and it might be useful to start with a few remarks about the place of natural theology in Christian tradition.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote of the “covenant of night and day” (e.g. Jeremiah 33: 25–26), indicating that the regularity by which day succeeded night showed that the god in charge of the Universe was powerful and reliable, viz, that that god was God. The Wisdom literature of the Old Testament developed the idea that the details of creation showed much about the Creator. St Paul wrote that “the invisible things” of God “are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made” (Romans 1: 20), and pagans could see that for themselves. This Biblical tradition merged in the later Greek world with the arguments of Plato and Aristotle to the existence of a supreme source of being. And so various Christian theologians, East and West, of the first millennium had their paragraph

► Richard Swinburne, Oriel College, University of Oxford, United Kingdom. Corresponding author:  richard.swinburne@oriel.ox.ac.uk

or two summarising an argument to God from the existence or orderliness of the universe — among them Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus. But it is normally only a paragraph or two, and the reasoning is quick. My explanation of why they directed so little energy to this issue is that they felt no need to do more. Most of their contemporaries accepted that there were God or gods. What the theologians needed to argue was that there was only one such God, that he had certain specific characteristics and had acted in history in certain particular ways.

With the coming of the second millennium however the theologians of the medieval West, above all Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, began to produce arguments for the existence of God of considerable length and rigour; and this enterprise of natural theology continued uninterrupted in the Catholic tradition until the nineteenth century. Classical Protestants however, although believing that the natural world showed abundant evidence of its creator, thought that human sinfulness obscured our ability to recognise this evidence; and that in any case there were better ways of getting to know God.¹ By contrast Liberal Protestants (in particular those of eighteenth century Britain) argued at some length “from nature up to nature's God”. So many of them saw the wonders of nature, especially the new ones recorded by microscope and telescope, as new and positive evidence of the existence of God, and they wanted to stir their religiously sluggish contemporaries to wonder. But finally in the mid-nineteenth century a combination of what I regard as very bad reasons deriving from Hume, Kant, and Darwin led to the abandonment of the ancient project of natural theology by so many parts of the Christian tradition. That was unfortunate — for Christianity (and every other theistic religion) needs natural theology.

For the practices of the Christian religion (and of any other theistic religion) only have a point if there is a God — there is no point in worshipping a non-existent creator or asking him to do something on Earth or take us to Heaven if he does not exist; or trying to live our lives in accord with his will, if he has no will. If someone is trying to be rational in practising the Christian (Islamic or Jewish) religion, he needs to believe (to some degree) the creedal claims that underlie the practice. These claims include as their central claim, one presupposed by all the other claims, the claim that there is a God. None of those

¹ See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Chapter 5.

thinkers of the first 1850 years of Christianity who thought that there were good arguments for the existence of God thought that all, or even most, believers ought to believe on the basis of those arguments, or that conversion always required accepting those arguments as cogent. Most Christians may well have taken God's existence for granted. Most converts may have believed beforehand that there was a God; their conversion involved accepting more detailed claims about him. And if they did not initially believe that there is a God, they may have come to believe on the basis of religious experience in some sense rather than on the basis of natural theology. But nevertheless, most Christian thinkers before 1850 held that these strong arguments are available, and that those who did not initially believe that there is a God and were rational could be brought to see that there is a God by means of them.²

Many post-Kantian religious thinkers have drawn our attention to the roles of our personal religious experience and religious tradition in sustaining religious belief. It is indeed a basic principle of rational belief—which I call the Principle of Credulity — that what seems to you to be so on the basis of experience, probably is so— in the absence of counter-evidence. If it seems to you that you see me lean on the lectern or hear my voice, then probably you do — unless you wake up and find that it was all a dream, or someone shows you that really there is no lectern there; what seems to be a lectern is really a hologram. And it is also a basic principle of rational belief which I call the Principle of Testimony, that what people tell you is probably true— in the absence of counter-evidence. And so if your teachers tell you that the Earth is many millions of years old, or you read in a newspaper that there has been an earthquake in Turkey, these things are probably so — unless you learn something else which casts doubt on them. When doubt is cast, we need positive arguments

² “Not that the same method of instruction will be suitable in the case of all who approach the word ... the method of recovery must be adapted to the form of the disease ... [It] is necessary to regard the opinions which the persons have taken up, and so frame your argument in the accordance with the error into which each have fallen, by advancing in each discussion certain principles and reasonable propositions, that thus, through what is agreed on both sides, the truth may be conclusively brought to light. Should [your opponent] say there is no God, then, from the consideration of the skilful and wise economy of the Universe he will be brought to acknowledge that there is a certain overmastering power manifested through these channels.” — St. Gregory of Nyssa, «The Great Catechism», *Prologue*. (Trans. W. Moore and H.A. Wilson, in *Selected Writings of Gregory of Nyssa*, Parker and Co., Oxford, 1893).

to show that there is a lectern there, or that the Earth is many millions of years old. There can be no justification for not extending these general principles of rationality to the case of religious belief. If you have had an experience apparently of God, you probably have; and if your teachers tell you that there is a God, it is rational to believe them — in the absence of counter-evidence. Counter-evidence may take various forms — the fact of pain and suffering may seem incompatible with the existence of God or render it improbable; and rival teachers may tell you that there is no God. Counter-evidence may be strong or weak; and even if fairly strong may (rationally) not disturb the belief of someone who has had an overwhelmingly strong religious experience or believes on the authority of innumerable teachers of diverse backgrounds. But in general the presence of counter-evidence opens up the question of the existence of God which then requires to be backed up by positive arguments (and/or to have negative arguments rebutted) if belief that there is a God is to be rational. But since there is so much more doubt about the existence of God in the sceptical West of today than in most previous cultures and centuries, the need for natural theology is far greater than ever it has been before — both to deepen the faith of the believer, and to convert the unbeliever.

The medievals, paradigmatically Aquinas, tried to cast reasoning from the world to God into the form of a deductive argument. But all that a deductive argument can do is to draw out in its conclusion what you are committed to by its premises. A valid deductive argument is one in which, if you affirm the premises but deny the conclusion, you contradict yourself. Yet it is most implausible to suppose that such a statement as “there is a physical universe but no God” (irrational though it may be to believe it) contains any internal contradiction. It's not like “there exists a round square”. “There is a God” goes beyond premises affirming the existence or orderliness of the Universe, to something far bigger. But an argument that purports to be a valid deductive argument and is not valid, is invalid. And in the centuries subsequent to Aquinas many have pointed out the fallacies in the details of Aquinas's arguments.

However, an argument from the existence and orderliness of the Universe to the existence of God is best represented not as a deductive, but as an inductive argument — one in which the premises make the conclusion to some extent probable, perhaps very probable, but not certain. All arguments in science and history from evidence to theory are inductive; but Aristotle and his successors,

who tried (with moderate success) to codify deductive arguments by the forms of the syllogism, had very little understanding of the distinction between deduction and induction, let alone of the criteria of a good inductive argument. Only today are we beginning to have some understanding of induction. One feature of inductive arguments is that they are cumulative. One piece of evidence stated in one premises may give a certain amount of probability to the conclusion, and another piece of evidence may increase that probability. And if arguments from the universe and its order yield only a probable conclusion, not a certain one, there is room for religious experience and tradition. I wish now to argue that three arguments — from the existence of the Universe, from there being simple scientific laws, and from those laws leading to the evolution of human beings — to the existence of God, are strong inductive arguments. There will not be time to discuss other arguments, or to discuss arguments against the existence of God.

Each of the phenomena cited in my opening paragraph has formed the starting point of an argument for the existence of God. These arguments seem to me to have a common pattern. Some phenomenon E, which we can all observe, is considered. It is claimed that E is puzzling, strange, not to be expected in the ordinary course of things; but that E is to be expected if there is a God; for God has the power to bring about E and he might well choose to do so. Hence the occurrence of E is a reason for supposing that there is a God.

This pattern of argument is one much used in science, history, and all other fields of human inquiry. A detective, for example, finds various clues — John's fingerprints on a burgled safe, John having a lot of money hidden in his house. John being seen near the scene of the burglary at the time when it was committed. He then suggests that these various clues, although they just might have other explanations, are not in general to be expected unless John had robbed the safe. Each clue is some evidence that he did rob the safe, and “*confirms*” (that is, strengthens) the hypothesis that John robbed the safe; and the evidence is cumulative — when put together it makes the hypothesis probable.

Arguments of this kind are inductive arguments to the cause of the phenomena cited as evidence in the premises. Scientists use this pattern of argument to argue to the existence of unobservable entities as causes of the phenomena they observe. For example, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, scientists observed many varied phenomena of chemical interaction,

such as that substances combine in fixed ratios by weight to form new substances (e.g. hydrogen and oxygen always form water in a ratio by weight of 1:8). They then claimed that these phenomena would be expected if there existed a hundred or so different kinds of atom, particles far too small to be seen, which combined and recombined in certain simple ways. In their turn physicists postulated electrons, protons, neutrons and other particles in order to account for the behaviour of the atoms, as well as for larger-scale observable phenomena; and now they postulate quarks in order to explain the behaviour of protons, neutrons and other particles.

To be good arguments (that is, to provide evidence for their hypothesis), arguments of this kind must satisfy four criteria. First, the phenomena they cite as evidence must be the sort of phenomena you would expect to occur if the hypothesis is true. If John did rob the safe it is quite likely that his fingerprints would be found on it. Secondly the phenomena must be much less likely to occur in the normal course of things, that is if the hypothesis is false. We saw in the burglary example how the various clues, such as John's fingerprints on the safe, were not much to be expected in the normal course of things. Thirdly, the hypothesis must be simple. That is, it must postulate the existence and operation of few entities, few *kinds* of entities, with few *easily* describable properties behaving in mathematically *simple* kinds of way. We could always postulate many new entities with complicated properties to explain anything which we find. But our hypothesis will only be supported by the evidence if it postulates few entities that lead us to expect the diverse phenomena that form the evidence. Thus in the detective story example we could suggest that Brown planted John's fingerprints on the safe, Smith dressed up to look like John at the scene of the crime, and without any collusion with the others Robinson hid the money in John's flat. This new hypothesis would lead us to expect the phenomena we find just as well as does the hypothesis that John robbed the safe. But the latter hypothesis is confirmed by the evidence whereas the former is not. And this is because the hypothesis that John robbed the safe postulates one object — John — doing one deed — robbing the safe — which leads us to expect the several phenomena we find. Scientists always postulate the fewest new entities (e.g., subatomic particles) that are needed to lead us to expect to find the phenomena we observe; and they postulate that those entities do not behave erratically (behave in one way one day, and a different way the next day), but that they

behave in accordance with as simple and smooth a mathematical law as is compatible with what is observed. And fourth, the hypothesis must fit in with our knowledge of how the world works in wider fields — what I shall call our background knowledge. The hypothesis that John robbed the safe must fit with what we know from other occasions about whether John often robs safes. But the more we are dealing with a hypothesis which purports to explain a vast range of phenomena, the more this criterion tends to drop out — since there will be no wider fields of inquiry. There are no wider scientific fields relevant to assessing a very general theory of physics, such as Einstein's General Theory of Relativity purporting to explain all physical phenomena. And this criterion will not be relevant in assessing the hypothesis of theism — that there is a God — which is put forward as a hypothesis to explain everything we know (a hypothesis more general than the widest ranging hypothesis of physics). An inductive argument from phenomena to a cause will be stronger the better the four criteria are satisfied i.e. the more probable it is that the phenomena will occur if the postulated cause occurred, the less probable it is that the phenomena will occur if the postulated cause did not occur, the simpler is the postulated cause, and the better the explanation fits with background knowledge. The better the criteria are satisfied, the more probable it is that the purported explanation is true.

The most general phenomenon that provides evidence for the existence of God is the existence of the physical universe for as long as it has existed (whether a finite time or, if it has no beginning, an infinite time). This is something evidently inexplicable by science. For a scientific explanation as such explains the occurrence of one state of affairs S1 in terms of a previous state of affairs S2 and some law of nature which makes states like S2 bring about states like S1. Thus it may explain the planets being in their present positions by a previous state of the system (the sun and planets being where they were last year) and the operation of Kepler's laws which state that states like the latter are followed a year later by states like the former. But what science by its very nature cannot explain is why there are any states of affairs at all.

My next phenomenon is the operation of the most general laws of nature, that is, the orderliness of nature in conforming to very general laws of physics, from which the regularities of chemistry and biology follow. What exactly the most general laws are science may not yet have discovered — perhaps they are the field equations of Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, or more likely there

are some yet more fundamental laws, perhaps the laws of a “*Theory of Everything*” Now science can explain why one law operates in some narrow area, in terms of the operation of a wider law in the particular conditions of that narrow area. Thus it can explain why Galileo's law of fall holds — that small objects near the surface of the Earth fall with a constant acceleration towards the Earth. Galileo's law follows from Newton's laws, given that the Earth is a massive body far from other massive bodies and the objects on its surface are close to it and small in mass in comparison. But what science by its very nature cannot explain is why there are the most general laws of nature that there are; for *ex hypothesi*, no wider laws can explain their operation.

That there is a Universe and that there are laws of nature are phenomena so general and pervasive that we tend to ignore them. But there might so easily not have been a universe at all, ever. Or the Universe might so easily have been a chaotic mess. That there is an *orderly* Universe is something very striking, yet beyond the capacity of science ever to explain. Science's inability to explain these things is not a temporary phenomenon, caused by the backwardness of 21st Century science. Rather, because of what a *scientific* explanation is, these things will ever be beyond its capacity to explain. For scientific explanations by their very nature terminate with some ultimate natural law and ultimate arrangement of physical things, and the questions I am raising are why there are natural laws and physical things at all.

However, there is another kind of explanation of phenomena which we use all the time and which we see as a proper way of explaining phenomena. This is what I shall call personal explanation. We often explain some phenomenon E as brought about by a person P in order to achieve some purpose or goal G. The present motion of my lips is explained as brought about by me for the purpose of delivering a lecture. The cup being on the table is explained by a person having put it there for the purpose of drinking out of it. Yet this is a different way of explaining things from the scientific. Scientific explanation involves laws of nature and previous states of affairs. Personal explanation involves persons and purposes. If we cannot give a scientific explanation of the existence and orderliness of the Universe, perhaps we can give a personal explanation.

But why should we think that the existence and orderliness of the Universe has an explanation at all? We seek for an explanation of all things; but we have seen that we only have reason for supposing that we have found one if the

purported explanation is simple, and leads us to expect what we find when that is otherwise not to be expected. The history of science shows that we judge that phenomena that are many and complex need explaining, and that they are to be explained in terms of something simpler. The motions of the planets (subject to Kepler's laws), the mechanical interactions of bodies on Earth, the behaviour of pendula, the motions of tides, the behaviour of comets, etc., formed a pretty miscellaneous set of phenomena. Newton's laws of motion constituted a simple theory that led us to expect these phenomena, and it was judged to be a true explanation of them. The existence of thousands of different chemical substances combining in different ratios to make other substances was complex. The hypothesis that there were only a hundred or so chemical elements of which the thousands of substances were made was a simple hypothesis that led us to expect the complex phenomenon.

Our Universe is a complex thing. There are lots and lots of separate chunks of matter in the universe. The chunks have each a different finite and not very natural volume, shape, mass, etc. — consider the vast diversity of the galaxies, stars and planets, and pebbles on the sea shore. Matter is inert and has no powers that it can choose to exert; it does what it has to do. There is a limited amount of it in any region and it has a limited amount of energy and velocity. The Universe is a large and complex thing.

The conformity of objects throughout endless time and space to simple laws is likewise something which cries out for explanation in yet simpler terms. For let us consider what this amounts to. Laws are not things, independent of material objects. To say that all objects conform to laws is simply to say that they all behave in exactly the same way, that they have certain powers which they exert on other objects, and liabilities to exert those powers in certain circumstances. To say, for example, that the planets obey Kepler's laws is just to say that each planet at each moment of time has the power of moving in the way that Kepler's laws state, and the liability to do so while the sun and other planets are there. There is therefore this vast coincidence in the powers and liabilities of objects at all times and in all places. If all the coins of some region have the same markings, or all the papers in a room are written in the same handwriting, we seek an explanation in terms of a common source of these coincidences. We should seek a similar explanation for that vast coincidence we describe as the conformity of objects to laws of nature — e.g. the fact that all electrons are produced, attract

and repel other particles and combine with them in exactly the same way at each point of endless time and space.

The hypothesis of theism is that the Universe exists because there is a divine person³ who keeps it in existence and that laws of nature operate because there is a divine person who brings it about that they do. He brings it about that the laws of nature operate by sustaining in every object in the Universe its liability to behave in accord with those laws. He brings it about that the Universe exists by sustaining at each moment (of finite or infinite time) objects with the powers and liabilities codified by laws of nature including the laws of the conservation of matter energy, i.e. by making it the case at each moment that what there was before continues to exist. The hypothesis is a hypothesis that a person brings about these things for some purpose. He acts directly on the Universe, as we act directly on our brains, guiding them to move our limbs (but the Universe is not his body — for he could at any moment destroy it, and act on another universe, or do without a universe). As we have seen, personal explanation and scientific explanation are the two ways we have of explaining the occurrence of phenomena. Since there cannot be a scientific explanation of the existence of the Universe, either there is a personal explanation or there is no explanation at all. The hypothesis that there is a divine person is the hypothesis of the existence of the simplest kind of person there could be. A person is a being who exists for some time with *power* to bring about effects, *knowledge* of how to do so, and *freedom* to make choices of which effects to bring about. A divine person is by definition an everlasting omnipotent (that is, infinitely powerful), omniscient (that is, all knowing), and perfectly free person; he is an everlasting person of infinite power, knowledge and freedom; a person to whose existence, power, knowledge and freedom there are no limits except those of logic. The hypothesis that there exists a being with infinite degrees of the qualities essential to a being of that kind is the postulation of a very simple being. And it is simpler to suppose that these properties are not accidentally correlated with each other but follow necessarily from the essence of the divine person. The hypothesis that there is such a divine person is a much simpler hypothesis than the hypothesis that there is a God who has such and such a limited power. It is simpler in just the same

³ See, for example, the simple description of this evidence in J. Leslie, “Anthropic Principle, World Ensemble, Design”, *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19 (1982), pp. 141–152; and in his *Universes*, Routledge, 1989, chs 1–3.

way that the hypothesis that some particle has zero mass or infinite velocity, is simpler than the hypothesis that it has 0.32147 of some unit of mass or a velocity of 221.000 km/sec. A finite limitation cries out for an explanation of why there is just that particular limit, in a way that limitlessness does not. It follows from God's perfect freedom that he will be subject to no influences deterring him from doing what he sees reason to do. That is what he believes good to do; and since being omniscient, he will always know what is good, he will always do what is good. He will be perfectly good.

That there should exist anything at all, let alone a universe as complex and as orderly as ours, is exceedingly strange. But if there is a God, it is not vastly unlikely that he should create such a universe. A universe such as ours is a thing of beauty, and a theatre in which humans and other creatures can grow and work out their destiny. The orderliness of the Universe makes it a beautiful Universe, but, even more importantly, it makes it a Universe which humans can learn to control and change. A good God will want to create creatures such as humans, having a free choice between good and evil, a deep responsibility for themselves and each other, and an ability to form their own character in such a way as to love God; and for that we need bodies, places where we can take hold of each other and so hurt or benefit each other. But we can only look after ourselves and each other (or choose not to do so) if there are simple laws governing a Universe in which humans are embodied. If we have bodies, then there are ways in which we can hurt or benefit each other. But only if there are simple laws of nature which we can come to know will there be ways in which my doing this or that will make a predictable difference to me or you. Only if humans know that by sowing certain seeds, weeding and watering them, they will get corn, can they develop an agriculture. And only if they know that by rubbing sticks together they can make fire will they be able (if that is what they choose) to burn the food supplies of others. Graspable laws of nature allow agents a choice of how to treat each other. So God has good reason to make an orderly Universe and, *ex hypothesi*, being omnipotent, he has the power to do so. So the hypothesis that there is a God makes the existence of the Universe much more to be expected than it would otherwise be, and it is a very simple hypothesis. Hence the arguments from the existence of the Universe and its conformity to simple natural laws are good arguments to an explanation of the phenomena, and provide substantial evidence for the existence of God.

The last phenomenon I shall consider is the evolution of animals and humans. In the middle of the nineteenth century Darwin set out his impressive theory of evolution by natural selection to account for the existence of animals and humans. Once upon a time there were primitive organisms.

These animals varied in various ways from their parents (some were taller, some shorter, some fatter, some thinner, some had the beginnings of a wing, others did not; and so on). Those animals with characteristics that made them best fitted to survive, survived and handed on their characteristics to the next generation. But, although in general resembling their parents, their offspring varied from them, and those variations that best fitted the animal to survive were again the ones most likely to be handed on to another generation. This process went on for millions of years producing the whole range of animals we have today, each adapted to survive in a different environment. Among the characteristics giving advantage in the struggle for survival was intelligence, and the selections for this characteristic eventually led to the evolution of man. Such is Darwin's account of why we have today animals and humans.

As far as it goes, his account is surely right. But there are crucial matters beyond its scope. The evolutionary mechanism Darwin describes only works because there are certain laws of biochemistry (animals produce many offspring, these vary in various ways from the parents, etc.) But why are there these laws rather than other laws? No doubt because these laws follow from the basic laws of physics. But then why do the basic laws of physics have such a form as to give rise to laws of evolution? And why were there the primitive organisms in the first place? A plausible story can be told of how the primeval “*soup*” of matter–energy at the time of the “Big Bang” (a moment some 15,000 million years ago at which, scientists now tell us, the Universe, or at least the present stage of the Universe, began) gave rise over many millennia, in accordance with physical laws, to those primitive organisms. But then why was there matter suitable for such evolutionary development in the first place? With respect to the laws and with respect to the primeval matter, we have again the same choice, of saying that these things cannot be further explained, or of postulating a further explanation. The issue here is not why there are laws at all or why there is matter at all, but why the laws and the matter have this peculiar character, that they are ready wound–up to produce plants, animals and humans. Since it is the most general laws of nature that have this special character, there can be no scientific

explanation of why they are as they are. And although there might be a scientific explanation of why the matter at the time of the Big Bang had the special character it did, in terms of its character at some earlier time, clearly if there was a first state of the Universe, it must have been of a certain kind : or if the Universe has lasted forever, (in addition to having the right kind of laws), its matter needed to have had at all times certain general features (e.g. in respect of the quantity of its matter–energy) if at any time there was to be a state of the Universe suited to produce plants, animals and humans. Scientific explanation comes to a stop. The question remains whether we should accept these particular features of the laws and matter of the Universe as ultimate brute facts or whether we should move beyond them to a personal explanation in terms of the agency of God.

What the choice turns on is how likely it is that the laws and initial conditions should by chance have just this character. Recent scientific work has drawn attention to the fact that the Universe is fine–tuned. Given laws of the present type (the four forces, constrained by the requirements of Quantum Theory), the matter–energy at the time of the Big Bang had to have a certain density and a certain velocity of recession; increase or decrease in these respects by one part in a million would have had the effect that the Universe was not life–evolving. For example, if the Big Bang had caused the quanta of matter–energy to recede from each other a little more quickly, no galaxies, stars or planets, and no environment suitable for life, would have been formed. If the recession had been marginally slower, the Universe would have collapsed in on itself before life could be formed. Similarly, the constants in laws of nature needed to lie within very narrow limits if life was to be formed. If we allow the possibility of laws of other types than those that actually operate in our universe, they would have to be very special kinds, no more simple than the actual ones; and so again it is a priori very unlikely that sentient life would evolve. It is, therefore, most unlikely that laws and initial conditions should have by chance a life–producing character. God is able to give matter and laws this character. If we can show that he would have reason to do so, then that gives support to the hypothesis that he has done so. There is available again the reason which (additional to the reason of its beauty) was a reason why God would choose to bring about an orderly Universe at all — the worthwhileness of the sentient embodied beings that the evolutionary process would bring about, and above all of humans, who can themselves make informed choices as to what sort of a world there should be.

So the three arguments I have considered — from the existence of the Universe, from its conformity to natural laws, and from the existence humans and animals — to the hypothesis of the existence of God, are all arguments that satisfy well the three criteria given earlier for inductive arguments to an explanation. The phenomena cited by the premises are not ordinarily to be expected, they are to be expected if the cause postulated in the conclusion exists, and the hypothesis of the existence of that cause is simple. Indeed, I suggest that not merely are these good arguments for the existence of God, but they are very strong ones. The postulated divine person is a very simple one, and it is vastly improbable that the phenomena cited should occur by chance — e.g. that there should exist such an enormous number of atoms in the Universe, all of which behave in exactly the same human-life producing way.

Of course, the God to whom these arguments point is a person (or persons) about whom we can know only those properties responsible for the phenomena I have been discussing — his omnipotence omniscience and perfect freedom (and other properties, which, I believe are consequences of these — e.g. omnipresence and perfect goodness). Of what underlies these properties, of that in which the properties inhere, we cannot have any full understanding. But for the human pilgrim in this life, the former is quite enough; and some human pilgrims in the modern world need the strong inductive arguments that are available to show the existence of a God having these properties.

Competing interests: The author declare has no conflicts of interest to disclose. **Ethics committee approval and informed consent:** Not apply to this work. **Author contributions:** R.S. confirms being the sole contributor of this work and has approved it for publication. For inquiries about this work, the correspondence may be addressed: (✉) richard.swinburne@oriel.ox.ac.uk.

References

- Calvin, John (1536/1559). *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. 2 Vols. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1846.
- Leslie, John (1982). "Anthropic Principle, World Ensemble, Design". *American Philosophical Quarterly* 19, no. 2: pp. 141-152.
- Leslie, John (1989). *Universes*. London: Routledge.
- St. Gregory of Nyssa (1893). «The Great Catechism». In *Selected Writings of Gregory of Nyssa*. Translated by W. Moore and H.A. Wilson. Oxford: Parker and Co.

Notes on contributor

► **Richard Swinburne** is a Fellow of the British Academy and Emeritus Nolloth Professor of the Philosophy of the Christian Religion at the University of Oxford, UK. Doctor in Philosophy (PhD) at the University of Oxford. His main interests are in philosophy of religion, metaphysics, epistemology and philosophy of mind. Has published

books as *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford University Press, 2016); *The Existence of God* (Oxford University Press, 2004); *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press, 1998); or, *The Evolution of the Soul* (Oxford University Press, 1997). **Contact:** Oriel College, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 4EW, United Kingdom. — (✉): richard.swinburne@oriel.ox.ac.uk.

How to cite this article

Swinburne, Richard (2020). «The Existence of God». *Analysis* 27, no. 3: pp. 1–15.