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## OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE APOLOGETICAL APPROACHES REGARDING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD\*

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### ABSTRACT:

Apologetics since the Second Vatican Council has somewhat changed to deal more with reaching the person and sowing seeds rather than winning the argument. The traditional objective arguments for the existence of God are today less effective, especially when approaching postmodern non-believers. Subjective approaches are far more effective, dealing with personal experience. Covering a wide range, Peter Kreeft offers twenty arguments for the existence of God, which can be grouped according to objective, subjective, and a transition group between these. By using different approaches and combinations of these, a consistent ‘wall’ of reasons for believing in God’s existence can be created by combining these arguments like building blocks. This paper considers the range of arguments, giving summaries of the (semi-) subjective ones and commenting upon them with regards to their use, strengths, and weaknesses. It finds that as one purpose of apologetics is to assist the unbeliever in coming to know God, ways of helping bring the subjective thinker to belief in God should be developed further, and Kreeft’s offering is a very useful resource for the Christian in explaining why it is reasonable to believe in God.

### Key words:

Belief in God; Apologetics; Peter Kreeft; Objectivity; Subjectivity; Approaches; Arguments

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**W**ithin the field of apologetics today, faced with the fluidity and subjectivity of postmodern thinking and its impact upon faith in the existence of God, it is no longer effective in many cases to present

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only the traditional objective arguments that have been sufficient for many centuries. While these arguments retain some effectivity and are an important grounding and are certainly illustrative, in many apologetical encounters only partly or fully subjective arguments can be effective due to relativised thinking. This means a range of different approaches is more necessary than ever, such as the list of twenty offered by Peter Kreeft, ranging from the objective, through a transitional group, to the fully subjective ones.

This paper begins by looking at the current apologetical scene, briefly examines the strengths and weaknesses of traditional apologetics, and then focuses on anthropocentric issues today. Then, Kreeft's general approach is considered, followed by the specifics in his approach. After this, his objective arguments, reflecting well-established apologetical arguments, is briefly considered, followed by a more in-depth discussion on each of his objective-subjective (transitional) approaches, and then the fully subjective ones. Finally, it will be found not only that a wider range is much more effective but that the variety of arguments itself shows a consistency that becomes something of a proof in itself.

## **1. Setting the Apologetical Scene**

Today, there is an increasing recognition of the importance of subjective apologetical approaches, particularly regarding the existence of God. While in the period up to the Second Vatican Council the focus in the field of apologetics was to learn and pass on, where needed, information somewhat similar to systematic theology, this approach was beginning to change in the twentieth century, particularly in the West. The focus was on less information and more dialogue, being the appropriate presentation of Christian thinking to a recipient either untouched by or antithetical towards the faith and/or the Church. This growing movement was somewhat fluid and for the most part organic with practitioners such as Frank Sheed and C. S. Lewis following more the original form of apologetics as called for by Peter and other New Testament authors (Jude, Paul) as well as activities in the Early Church (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus). While the popular position today is that, in the post-conciliar period of the last century, the field of apologetics was subsumed, or even killed off, by the field of fundamental theology, it is only now being recognised that the Council actually

called for traditional, original apologetics in several documents,<sup>1</sup> albeit never using the word ‘apologetics’. This lull in the field during the 1970s enabled its rebirth in the US during the following decade, with significant methodological freedom leading to a far more effective and appropriate form of apologetics developing, reflecting both the calls from Scripture and from the Council.

The methodological change has many factors and elements and an important development is presenting subjective arguments amongst the norm of those that are objective. This is amply evidenced by Peter Kreeft’s offering of *Twenty Arguments for the Existence of God*,<sup>2</sup> with six that are more or less purely subjective. This points to a change not only in method but in the reasoning behind this, with the focus increasingly on reaching the recipient rather than just presenting a ‘wall’ of facts. Further, the older pre-conciliar intention of presenting fact rather than seeking effective conversion points to the desire to have knowledge of God rather than faith in God. However, by moving towards touching the soul through the intellect rather than changing the intellect and presuming the soul will follow, the apologist can become a more effective participant in spiritual conversion than before. This is another reason why approaches of a more subjective kind can be more effective, giving the recipient a better understanding of God’s existence.

Further, the understanding that conversion is a process not dominated by the apologist, but one that can be amply aided by him is important today where there exist plenty counter-arguments to the objective arguments, some of which are fairly effective challenges.<sup>5</sup> It must be recognised that while subjective proofs are increasingly important and effective, the ability to debate using objective arguments

<sup>1</sup> Glenn B. Siniscalchi, *Retrieving Apologetics* (Eugene (OR): Pickwick, 2016), 17–26; Stuart Nicolson, ‘The Field of Apologetics Today: Responding to the Calls of Scripture and the Second Vatican Council’, *Heythrop Journal* 59, No. 3 (May 2018): 410–423, doi: 10.1111/heyj.12985.

<sup>2</sup> In Peter J. Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Catholic Apologetics* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 52–92. The complete text of this is available online at <https://strangenotions.com/god-exists/>. This is credited online only to Kreeft so it is presumed here that this part of the book was written by Kreeft alone.

<sup>5</sup> This paper focuses on the different approaches offered by different arguments. It is acknowledged that there are a number of possible refutations of these arguments. However, Edward Feser offers robust versions of the objective arguments and defends strongly against refutations. For objective proofs of God’s existence, see Edward Feser, *Five Proofs of the Existence of God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2017). Regarding dealing with the claims of the ‘New Atheists’, see Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition* (South Bend (IN): St. Augustine’s Press, 2008).

and knowledge is also important for the apologist. Therefore, a solid grounding and knowledge of objective apologetics is just as important as the ability to utilise subjective arguments aimed at touching the (particularly postmodern) individual. In simple terms, the distinction between knowing apologetics and doing apologetics is highly important, especially in a more widely educated society. Thus, a range of objective and subjective apologetical arguments, such as those provided by Kreeft, can be effective in different ways, work together at times, and even offer a greater ‘wall’ of consistency that is apologetically effective in itself.

## 2. Traditional Apologetics – Strengths and Weaknesses

It is important to understand apologetics historically and recognise that objective arguments were sufficient and how there is a need for a movement away from the traditional apologetics that developed over the history of the Church. Apologetics changed over the centuries, becoming increasingly the domain of the clergy and, in time, was ensconced strongly within academia. With Christianity becoming first legal, then later the state religion, and then often the only socially acceptable religion (and Roman Catholicism often the acceptable form of Christianity), there was less need for apologetics as an approach or method, especially when and where catechesis was effective.

In the last century, there was, and had in recent centuries been, the need apologetically to respond to issues such as Protestantism, Jansenism, growing secularism, Catharism, etc. However, these responses tended to be at the level of academia. Once non-Catholic then non-Christian ideas had filtered down into society, at least at the level of those educated, it was the task of the priest, preacher, or schoolteacher to address such issues. However, these defenders of the faith had few or no tools to respond apologetically to those drifting from faith, from Church teachings, and from the general ethos of Christendom.

Resources were available increasingly in the last century, but the quality of their use was not guaranteed. One excellent resource after World War I, revised and republished recently due to both contemporary need and its high quality, is Archbishop Michael Sheehan’s *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine*.<sup>4</sup> Focusing on the Apologetics half,

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Sheehan, *Apologetics and Catholic Doctrine* (London: Baronius Press, 2009).

it has a developed and clear structure – the well-known form of Natural Apologetics, Christian Apologetics, and Catholic Apologetics – and this textbook for past high school students is now a good resource for degree level studies today.

Using Sheehan as an example, the content of apologetics was objective and informative. It was to be read, learned, memorised to some extent, digested, and, where required, used to defend faith in God, Christ, and Church, to show reason consistent with faith. Effectively, certain sections include common arguments against the faithful's position and how to counter these. However, the presentation of the facts of apologetics here, in the form of a one-year course, also gives the impression that apologetics presented the faith as an impenetrable wall of knowledge about God, Christ, and Church. Knowledge could replace faith in the reader, leading to the faith coming across to the faithful as course content rather than Christian faith, and to the non-believing recipient of such apologetics it was an encyclopaedic series of arguments, which, as history has shown and we continue to see, often has little effect on the non-believer. It is possible to see why pre-conciliar apologetics was condemned as anti-*aggiornamento* and not fit for purpose. Some regarded it, at times rightly, to have superiority issues or even suffer from triumphalism, betraying the humility appropriate to the apologist (cf. 1 Pt 3:16). It was fairly dry, definitely uninteresting to the casual recipient, and clearly dependent upon the proofs of God's existence as a foundation for the empirical thinker.

However, like any theoretical or non-practical information, the content of apologetics is without doubt very useful at times. A good grounding in the content of Sheehan or similar is basically necessary for the apologist, as is a wide reading of contemporary issues and a history (or better, histories) of the Church. Therefore, for the serious apologist, throwing the apologetics baby out *from* the post-conciliar bathwater, at any level of it being justified, is short-sighted and, with regards to following the Scriptural and conciliar calls for apologetical actions, endangering the souls of those non-believers who are encountered. However, as apologetics is a theological reaction with a pastoral element, with postmodern thinking becoming more deeply entrenched in society today, there has become a need for the development of (semi-)subjective approaches regarding understanding the existence of God.

### 3. Anthropocentric Issues Today

Christendom, with the Christian culture fully embedded and people measuring briefer events in Te Deums or the time of day named as Terce or Vespers, is long gone. The general acceptance, at least outwardly, of the authority of the Church's teachings and those of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church is past. It is for many, including some Catholics, almost *de rigueur* to question or avoid the culture of Christianity and the authority of the Church, her teachings, and her teachers. Therefore, with the developing rejection of such authority in postmodern society, where even objectivity is doubted, the question of what or who can be trusted – in a sort of encultured form of Cartesian Doubt – has become the context, or even the deliberate a priori position, for many.

While the rejection of authority predated the Reformation, it was strongly implemented by it. The Church was not trusted and was thus rejected. The foundations of the structure of society were rocked and in places broken, and 'Protest' became a new foundation of faith. Structures were untrustworthy and the individual was raised up as an authority in his direct relationship with God. The Enlightenment and its offspring continued the theme, rejecting Christ then proposing that man could stand alone without God. This was manifested in political revolutions and increasing secularisation, where many forms of liberalism rejected religion and sought their own truths. Even many who professed to be Christians rejected evidence and rationality in their faith, and God was boxed in as a personal God while man could get on with real life. Developing from this, there was Marx's rejection of individualism and his rebuilding of society in cold and necessary groupings; elsewhere, Hegel promoted a relativism that left no room for objectivity. The subsequent nihilism was thus inevitable really, as was existentialism, in a rejection of values and truth, and the related quaint curiosities of faith, hope, and even love. Instead, hope grew in the utilitarian dreams of socio-economic development, technology, science (when it served man), winning wars, and – whether the American Dream or keeping up with the Joneses – economic and social climbing. The modern world had arrived.

Throughout parts of the world, Marxist thinking imposed itself upon society. However, man's focus 'in the West' was increasingly on the material, his philosophical outlook becoming increasingly unhinged from the traditions and structures of the past. Society received drip-fed

ideas from academia, usually underpinned by the increasingly-pervading relativism that led to an increasingly open rejection of – indeed, rebellion against – social norms and religious thinking. Man had become his own master as each man became his own master and postmodern man lost his inhibitions from past taboos, entering into the muddy existence of subjectivism, where one can inhabit one’s preferred fluid personal norms, morals, and values. Of course, this has become a fertile breeding ground for the evolution into neo-Marxism, identity politics, and a rewriting of group values, especially against those historically held.

So, post-postmodern man is beginning to appear, seeking new meaning and an identity as part of something more than just an individual – a lonely place for most, except those who thrive on insecurity. For those seeking an identity and meaning outside of themselves, the opportunities are limited and ephemeral, discernible by fashionable memes, hashtags, and other social media tools – in reality, shifting sands of popularistic trends. If modern/postmodern man was fulfilled with the bread and circuses of eating well while watching increasingly large televisions, postmodern/post-postmodern man’s focus is more on the circuses and the (not always virtual) mob. But post-postmodern man is also seeking significance, reality, and (dare he admit it) truth, which is where the apologist may come in.

The normatively theocentric thinking of Christendom thus has disintegrated into an anthropocentric slush, where relativised man has lost the majority of his values and indeed his understanding of the past and its form, structure, and principles. Suffering from individualism, he is now prone to new structures, approached from a subjective point of view. This, therefore, means post-postmodern man is open to more subjective apologetical approaches, which should not necessarily be seen negatively as it touches the person more thoroughly in the end, both personally and theoretically. A parallel example of the importance of such depth can be seen in Balthasar’s aesthetics, where both objective as well as subjective approaches can be seen regarding the transcendental of beauty, which is central to God’s existence in theological aesthetics.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the apologetical approach today

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<sup>5</sup> The two main parts are titled ‘The Subjective Evidence’ and ‘The Objective Evidence’ in Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I: Seeing the Form*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2009). Regarding the subjective being realised fully in the objective, cf. especially 419, which points to the close link between them.

must take into account the likelihood of the recipient having a subjective position. Austen Ivereigh promoted a person-based apologetical method focusing on dialogue that is brief, informative, and interesting, which is imbued with ‘positive intention’.<sup>6</sup> By seeking communication with recipients in a manner likely to be welcomed, the message (or argument) is far more likely to be received, considered, and in time bear fruit. By applying this method when using Kreeft’s twenty arguments, recipients in a whole range of settings, whether professional like education or social work,<sup>7</sup> or social, will be more open to receiving the apologetical message.

#### 4. Kreeft’s General Approach

This apologetical opportunity, of appealing to a subjective side which is somewhat open to new possibilities in post-postmodern man as he seeks meaning and structure, is somewhat recognised by Peter Kreeft in his introduction to his twenty proofs. He remarks that while some are ‘blessed with a vivid sense of God’s presence’,<sup>8</sup> others ‘see the material universe as self-sufficient and uncaused’.<sup>9</sup> He points out that apologists hold that ‘an effective rational argument for God’s existence is an important first step in opening the mind to the possibility of faith’,<sup>10</sup> which importantly does not overstep the bounds of appropriate apologetics by knowing its limits as an aid in the conversion process and not, as held by some apologists (particularly in the past) and their detractors as an authority and a source of truth that should brook no questioning. One additional element that Kreeft does mention (but could have developed further) is that such apologetics for those already with belief in God’s presence can strengthen their faith

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<sup>6</sup> Austen Ivereigh, *How to Defend the Faith* (Huntington (IN): Our Sunday Visitor, 2012), 7. This is based upon his drive to train apologists to respond to the many issues that came up regarding Catholicism surrounding the visit of Pope Benedict to Britain in 2010, focusing on effective and informative communication to a broad range of people including those with some postmodern styles of thinking. His final chapter of ‘Ten Principles of Civil Communication’ (153–60) is especially useful, with memorable advice such as ‘Shed light, not heat’ (153) and ‘Witnessing, not Winning’ (159) in apologetical dialogue.

<sup>7</sup> Stuart Nicolson, ‘Responding to Clients and Students Regarding the Existence of God’, in *Caritas et Veritas* 01/2019, available online at <https://bit.ly/3fHswCo>, 179–191.

<sup>8</sup> Kreeft and Tacelli, *Handbook* 53.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*



through considering God in an intellectual and thoughtful way (and remove any superstitions or irrational beliefs).

Kreeft names his objective arguments in the traditional manner: ‘cosmological arguments’, and his subjective ones are named ‘psychological arguments’.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, he clarifies that Pascal’s Wager (no. 20) ‘is not an argument for God at all but an argument for faith in God’<sup>12</sup> and that the ontological argument is ‘fundamentally flawed’ but perhaps could be the basis for an improved version.<sup>13</sup> He further admits that some of them ‘claim only strong probability, not demonstrative certainty’.<sup>14</sup> However, he explains his approach, going beyond the traditional listing of strong, authoritative arguments or proofs.

We have included them because they form a strong part of a cumulative case. We believe that only some of these arguments, taken individually and separately, demonstrate the existence of a being that has some of the properties only God can have (no argument proves all the divine attributes); but all twenty taken together, like twined rope, make a very strong case.<sup>15</sup>

The twined rope image is effective, but my own preference is that of a wall where each argument is a building block, itself strong but not so effective or trustworthy alone. By compiling the blocks, the wall is taller, stronger, and more effective. They work together to make the whole, and weaker ones are strengthened by being part of the whole. The whole is greater than the parts, being more admirable, trustworthy, and reliable. Finally, they give a consistent image: they all go in the same direction, work together towards the same goal, none of them contradict, and none do not fit. While it is possible to look at God from every angle and see the same God, such consistency is here portrayed in a straight line, strong and true. But to see this effect, it is necessary to consider the range of different arguments.

## 5. Kreeft’s Specific Approaches

When studying Kreeft’s twenty arguments, it is clear that there is something of a journey taking place. These are not twenty similar

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

or limited-in-scope arguments, confined to a narrow evangelism or a philosophical treatise, for they are much more. The range can be grouped into three general areas of type: objective, subjective, and a transitional group.

The clearly objective arguments are the first nine. These range across the more traditional spectrum of proofs in apologetics, with Arguments (in listed order) from Change, Efficient Causality, Time and Contingency, Degrees of Perfection, the Design Argument, the Kalam Argument, and Arguments from Contingency, the World as an Interacting Whole, and from Miracles. While some are from Aquinas and other medieval origins, others came later, but all were well-established 'external' proofs by the last century (thus pre-postmodern), used variously as showing and proving God's existence and to some extent giving us an understanding of his essence.

Kreeft's list continues into a transitional area of generally decreasingly objective and thus increasingly subjective arguments, showing a general morphing of type. To retain Kreeft's order, the objective-subjective group contains Arguments from Consciousness, Truth, and the Origin of the Idea of God, as well as the Ontological Argument and the Moral Argument. This fusion group somewhat blends the robustness of the objective group with the approachability of the subjective group, giving them the potential of being particularly effective for some recipients.

The subjective group contains various types, but all have the experience of the individual as their starting point, thus more or less assuming that all human beings of sound mind and good will can agree that they share specific attributes or experiences. Therefore, such a subjective position or experience can be used as a foundational premise in seeking understanding of God's existence. These consist of the Arguments from Conscience, Desire, Aesthetic Experience, Religious Experience, and the Common Consent Argument. The final one is not a specific argument, being Pascal's Wager, which is a highly subjective exploration, but is included because its genuine usage is indeed an argument for believing in the existence of God because it is considered to work to some extent.

Such a range of arguments has a certain momentum due to their variety pointing to one thing: God's existence. As they call upon human experience and logic in different ways, one may ask whether this shows that God made us to know him in many ways, giving us an insight into

his essence, which is an added benefit of these arguments. Also, as God reveals himself in so many ways, this suggests that he seeks to reveal himself to all. An elitist God might limit his knowability to reason and philosophical arguments, known only by those understanding the objective arguments alone. Or, if known only in the subjective types, God's existence would seem more the fancy of wishful thinking: an anthropomorphic deity. And having only the middle group of partially both types would lack a robust grounding as well as a convincing personal connection to many a sceptic. Therefore, the range of different arguments should be known by the apologist. However, if a recipient holds an a priori atheistic position, often no arguments – individually or collectively – can convince. This is why, for apologetical-pastoral reasons, it is preferred here that these be called arguments for God's existence rather than proofs, for those that philosophically are proofs still do not prove anything to those who will not accept them and by claiming these to be proofs merely hardens the heart against them.

But their strength is in their collective nature when they are examined and accepted. For the body, made up of many abilities and attributes, works far better as a sum than as individual parts. In the same way, the arguments for God's existence also interact and thus this indicates a possible twenty-first argument for the existence of God, that is, their consistency. This should be expectable as they all point to something alive and actual, where the essence is existence, and not only theoretical and wishful thinking. Many of the arguments will now be presented succinctly, with some differences from Kreeft's text, and also will be commented upon to focus upon the objective/subjective matters discussed.

## **6. The Objective Arguments**

The nine arguments based on objective elements are, to various extents, well-known and have been explained and explored in a multitude of platforms and situations, including the apologetical. The group of nine can be further split into standard arguments, historically regarded as proofs, and additional arguments.

In the standard arguments, there are those that have well-known forms and others that are off-shoot developments from where challenges give a different focus, leading to a new argument. This is observable when comparing various sources. An example of a source is the

textbook by Sheehan, recently revised for today's apologetical requirements. Sheehan gives four 'proofs of the existence of God',<sup>16</sup> with brief and lengthier versions. Kreeft's first argument, from Change, is Sheehan's 'Proof from motion and change', while Kreeft's second, from Efficient Causality is Sheehan's 'causality'. A different focus is shown by Kreeft's sixth, the Kalam Argument, being a variant of his first (from Change). Further, Kreeft's third, from Time and Contingency, is similar to his seventh, from Contingency, which is Sheehan's 'Proof from dependence'. Finally, Kreeft's fifth argument (Sheehan's first) is the Design Argument. Whether used over the centuries as presentations, explanations, or defences, each provides a strong philosophical-theological understanding of why it is rational to believe in the existence of God. Of course, some people of good will towards the possibility of God's existence find them insufficient to be an undoubtable foundation for faith (perhaps through being too abstract or theoretical). But we must recognise that if these were indeed universally sufficient for knowledge of God's existence, faith in God's existence would be redundant. Perhaps this issue is a God-given characteristic of humanity as faith is a fundamental factor in the God-man relationship, but this is a question for another time.

The other two Arguments are from the World as an Interacting Whole and from Miracles. The former considers the fact that the world functions in a material sense very well; each scientific discovery merely strengthens this argument. Only an ordered 'mind' could design and implement anything like such an ordered and complex Creation. Although one can claim this to come from a functioning universe anyway, the complexities and detail are far beyond (in time and scope) anything chance and natural evolution could provide, as argued effectively by Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker.<sup>17</sup>

The Argument from Miracles can be misused piously and is usually rejected in a baby-and-bathwater manner, including by modern theologians. Kreeft gives a general outline of the issues here but the apologist should be more robust in presenting this argument regarding phenomena outside the scope and limitations of our understanding of the laws of physics, etc. While mocking arguments, such as by Richard

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<sup>16</sup> Sheehan, *Apologetics*, 24–46.

<sup>17</sup> Scott Hahn and Benjamin Wiker, *Answering the New Atheism* (Steubenville (OH): Emmaus Road, 2008), 10–22.

Dawkins, are rejected by Hahn and Wiker,<sup>18</sup> some claim the issue to be a lack of science/technology understanding – a time-traveller from the past would consider so much of today’s norms (internet, transport, etc.) as miracles, thus a miracle is merely a lack of understanding of reality, such as in so-called cargo cults. However, this ignores so many miracles, such as recorded instances of Eucharistic miracles, the incorrupt bodies of certain saints, etc. To claim that there are no miracles, that is, interventions of God in the normal running of the laws of physics, suggests that if there is a God then he is not all-powerful, pointing more to a God with anthropocentric origins.

These objective arguments are not particularly popular today. With postmodern thinking and the post-conciliar drive to distance oneself from classical apologetics and the image of being too traditional, these arguments are rarely considered positively in academic circles now. This is understandable and indeed agreeable for one reason: if these were the only arguments for God’s existence for convincing atheists of God’s existence then this limited approach does not take into account the recipient of the apologetical effort, or the position, experience, and formation of the person being addressed. In fact, it is more likely that the recipient will feel confirmation in his a priori view that Christians are unrealistic, dry, and possibly unnecessarily complex. In simple terms, in the postmodern world, it is not a good advertisement for Christianity. However, the nine objective arguments for God’s existence are the bedrock of all arguments in the sense that they stand up to philosophical enquiry and cannot be properly and finally refuted. This shows that there are solid reasons to believe in God and that faith is no simple personal choice or preference.

## **7. Journeying from Objectivity to Subjectivity**

This second group is comprised of five arguments – 10-14 on Kreeft’s list. The transitional arguments have neither a smooth path from the objective to the subjective, nor do they lean towards one type or another. Indeed, this grouping is no weaker set of arguments for these are possibly more effective in their apologetical potential for recipients who are not convinced by traditional arguments but remain aloof from plunging into the postmodern world of regarding the self as the arbiter of truth.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

The Argument from Consciousness (Kreeft's 10th) could be a response to Cartesian Doubt. It states that 'We experience the universe as intelligible'.<sup>19</sup> The second premise recognises that there must be a Creator of this intelligible universe and also the mind (self) that finds it intelligible. By disregarding 'blind chance', where Kreeft uses C. S. Lewis to point out that rational arguments are not possible in a blind chance / irrational world,<sup>20</sup> there must then be a Creator of the universe and also rational, conscious beings (or at least one!). Using subjective experience to show that objective reality points to an intelligent Creator is of course dependent upon the recipient agreeing that blind chance cannot (or really would not) produce such a rational world,<sup>21</sup> which is of course a subjective opinion for many today anyway.

The following Argument, from Truth, has been undermined from Pilate to news from 'Pravda'. The argument claims that as eternal truths are discoverable by our finite minds, they must have an eternal source. Kreeft's point could be developed further to argue that these eternal truths are objective in their reality, not changing due to their being perceived. However, regarding postmodern thinking, the a priori position that truth is already relative and changing must be set aside first. Therefore, with the postmodern disassembling of reality into subjective perceptions, with parallels to Cartesian Doubt, the previous argument, from Consciousness, could be used in conjunction with this to develop a stronger argument. Kreeft rightly states that for this to be a powerful argument there must be significant advances in the theory of knowledge, being an interface between the objective and subjective.<sup>22</sup>

Becoming more subjective, the Argument from the Origin of the Idea of God (12) is even more Cartesian, as Kreeft points out. That our ideas include 'an infinite, all-prefect being'<sup>23</sup> – like man's earliest understanding of the supernatural in El, the Supreme Being, the Highest God – means that these ideas had a source. By definition, that source is God himself, although the sceptic can point out that there is a certain tautology in this argument. However, the argument is about our subjective understanding of the objective in its perfection, which

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<sup>19</sup> Kreeft and Tacelli, *Handbook*, 71.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Again, Hahn and Wiker deal with this issue effectively in Hahn and Wiker, *Answering*, 10–22.

<sup>22</sup> Kreeft and Tacelli, *Handbook*, 73.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

is an area needing to be explored much more before being rejected, or indeed used as a solid argument.

The 13th offering, the Ontological Argument, has had a chequered history in philosophy and theology. Anselm's demonstration of the existence of God has been rejected and revived regularly over the centuries. It cannot be considered an objective proof, being too close to the previous argument, and too involved in the tension between objective and subjective. Is what is possible in the mind necessary in reality? The sceptic says, no, of course not! But the question is 'Why not?' This argument is being explored still today and is certainly a useful building block alongside other arguments for it explores the area between the objective and the subjective, but as a stand-alone argument it can only convince the already convinced.

The final argument with any objectivity is the Moral Argument. Morals have an objective nature as they transcend the individual but the question regards the source. The theist regards God as the source of morals because if man is the source then he creates his own morals. The atheist often argues using the Golden Rule: to harm none in any way you do not wish for yourself. Casting aside problematic exceptions such as self-harming, the same idea is presented by Jesus – 'So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.' (Matt 7:12) – who was reflecting Leviticus 19:18: 'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD'. (Both NIV version.) Because atheism has emerged from the remains of Christendom and today's society clearly bears the physical and intellectual marks of being once Christian, it is no surprise that atheists use favourable philosophical elements of Judaeo-Christianity, in the same way they use hospitals and universities, which are of Christian origin. Therefore, the argument stands that a moral system must come from something greater than man if man considers himself as required to serve that system.

No single argument can persuade the conversion of every recipient but these objective-subjective arguments, with a transitional nature overall, can help to persuade the recipient, primarily, of the fact that God's existence indeed makes sense and, secondarily, that it is reasonable to believe that God exists. That in itself is not sufficient for conversion necessarily, but they work together well to build a narrative where it is more reasonable to believe than not. It is this 'wall' of reasons that

develops and which stands against the thinking that there is no God. As the wall grows in size and strength, thus presence, the recipient is conceivably more likely to become a convert, assuming the recipient has good will and is open to receiving the content. However, none of this is sufficient for the postmodern mind who is already in a sense self-deified and considers any and all external, objective ideas to be selectable for personal use, or to be discarded as useless. It is here that the subjective arguments offered by Kreeft may be useful.

## 8. The Subjective Arguments

While the objective arguments for the existence of God appeal to external reason, the subjective arguments can be used to appeal to the experience and awareness of the postmodern, subjective mind. Kreeft offers six arguments of a subjective nature, although Pascal's Wager (20) is, arguably, not an argument in its subjectivity, which will be considered later. As the focus is on the person, and not on the system or the external, these arguments avoid the postmodern mind rejecting them on the grounds of simply being not of interest or experience. Instead, they invite the recipient to consider their relativistic experience and to realise that there can be room for God in their mindset or worldview. This is more about sowing seeds than proving the existence of God. These arguments most need the 'wall' factor of multiple building blocks of arguments, creating an edifice that remains in the understanding and even the general thoughts of the postmodern mind.

The objective element of the Moral Argument (14) can be avoided in the Argument from Conscience (15). Simply, no one ignores or rejects his own, personal conscience. As that conscience must originate somewhere, each of its possible origins – nature, self, society, or God – is considered by Kreeft. He rejects the first three because the conscience is an absolute authority and the subjective self cannot agree to properly follow a lower authority (natural instinct), an equal authority to oneself (whatever we choose is dependent upon our conscience), or a wider but equal authority (peers, society, etc.). This leaves only God – the higher authority – as the source of absolute authority, whether one likes (or believes) it or not.

Kreeft, however, offers three problems (or objections) regarding this seemingly attractive Argument from Conscience.



1. The conscience is part of the self, so it is integral to one's mental being.
2. Society, albeit consisting of our peers, can become more powerful than the individual, such as in totalitarianism, cultic groups, and even mental illness.
3. Is the conscience really absolute? Concupiscence (etc.) occurs.

But regarding problem 1, it is very presumptuous to claim the conscience is formed entirely with the mental faculties: the tautology in this objection is that the conscience is not formed by God because he does not exist. Assuming he does form consciences, this area connects to other matters such as how humans and animals differ, and the essence of God (man as *imago Dei*). Problem 2 only brings up exceptions and is therefore not a refutation here, which is an important distinction for apologists, thus it has little value here. And regarding problem 3, poor self-control is caused by our sinful nature, so this attempted refutation merely points out that sin exists (this is connected to the problem of evil). Therefore, turning the problems around, we can apologetically respond to them by saying that God gives us a conscience that can be damaged through evil and the grace of self-control can counter this.

The 16th Argument, from Desire, regards that innate feeling for something more we all experience. It is that which caused man to look up and beyond his existence for answers, to seek something more, and never to be satisfied in this life. It is a desire that cannot be sated by earthly pleasures or experiences, always leading to greater or more being desired. Attempts to counter this, from minimalism to ancient spiritual practices, to Eastern meditation, etc., merely lessens the focus upon that seeming weakness. But, rather, it is a strength. It is God's gift to us that, often with necessary help, can lead us to desire him, seek him, to learn about him, to know him, and to want to be more like him, that is, by theosis. The clinching point in this argument is that it is never something non-existent that is the object of desire, even if the understanding of that object is particularly poorly formed. However, this argument requires significant introspection for the recipient to discover that he is really seeking something quite different than he expects.

The Argument from Aesthetic Experience (17) is concise here yet powerful. Kreeft succinctly suggests the 'music of Johann Sebastian Bach', which is what proves there must be a God. Unpacking this ourselves, aesthetic experience leads to a transcendence that only God

can supply, and the recipient can be transported to a place of humbleness before the majesty of God and all of his Creation. Or not. This is, of course, the quintessential subjective argument in that it touches some but not others. However, in its expanded form, it becomes a strong argument, which is the apologetical reading of Hans Urs von Balthasar's theological aesthetics,<sup>24</sup> an area highlighted briefly by Avery Dulles but which requires significant unpacking.<sup>25</sup>

The Argument from Religious Experience (18) is also not accessible to every recipient, being dependent on his level of scepticism towards the subject matter. With links to the Argument from Desire (16), this regards the seemingly innate human capacity for religious experience, which transcends time and culture. While objectively it is tautological to claim that as God created man to know him and because some know him then he clearly exists, the recipient is called upon to consider the subjective experience of people over space and time having religious experience, and how different types (monotheism, polytheism, Eastern mysticism, etc.) are subcategory possibilities within this general phenomenon. There exists a part of humanity which is not properly understood, and it produces similar results across the board, with intense, powerful, and often life-changing experiences indicating that humans are hard-wired for something more. The origin is not necessarily God, but it is arguable that the Judaeo-Christian God fits the profile. The sceptic may argue that this is merely human nature seeking more and greater, but this is to disregard the immensity of the phenomenon in range, intensity, and effect, both immediately and over time in the individual, supporting belief in the existence of God.

The Argument from Common Consent (19) is an extension of the previous argument (thus also from Desire). It focuses on whether it is likely that the great number who have had religious experiences are wrong, which means that it is a more objective consideration of very subjective phenomena. Where the sceptic may have pulled the previous argument into very subjective terms ('I don't have religious experience!'), here is a reframing of the argument succinctly as a question: Is it reasonable to expect such widespread religious experiences not

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<sup>24</sup> Outlined in Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, Volume I: Seeing the Form.

<sup>25</sup> Avery Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium* (Mahwah (NJ): Paulist Press, 2009), 123. A study into a general transforming of Balthasar's theological aesthetics into aesthetics in apologetics has been carried out by the author of this paper and is awaiting publication at this time.

to be the product of God actually existing? This apologetically useful question shifts some of the burden of proof onto the sceptic.

It can be considered that the many arguments offered here construct a strong 'wall'. A wall has presence and the sceptic must ignore the presence in the mind (and soul) of these arguments in order to remain (as) untouched (as possible) so as to maintain that God does not exist. Naturally, not every argument would normally be presented to the recipient, but as a whole the arguments exist more strongly together than individually. A true exploration of these arguments, where the sceptic is challenged (not left in a passive mode), means the onus is upon the recipient to respond to the case brought for the existence of God.

It is necessary to acknowledge that there are many reasons for believing in the existence of God, but there is no fool-proof rational argument that proves without conceivable doubt that God exists (for subjectivism is a refuge from the philosophical arguments). Knowledge is passive but faith is active, and God requires that we have faith in him, rather than having knowledge of him. Faith is the primary element of a relationship with God, which leads to the desire to know him, and this should be quenched regularly in our learning about him. If God merely wanted us to know him, he would manifest himself to us regularly to attain this. Instead, faith requires our choice to follow him. This partially explains why God continues to allow evil. Each person has a sufficient opportunity to believe in God and follow him, not to simply and robotically follow the Master who imposes himself upon us. For the true purpose of apologetics is to help bring the unbeliever to belief in God and to know him, rather than to win arguments or demand others think a certain way.

And this brings us to Pascal's Wager, the twentieth argument, which says that the faithful win and non-believers lose if God exists and it does not matter if he does not exist. And if one struggles to gain faith from such a basic motivation, any non-believer willing to genuinely and without hypocrisy simulate fully an active Christian faith over a period of time will find faith in God and that he does indeed exist.<sup>26</sup> This final argument has subjectively the strongest proof if the ex-non-believer is indeed genuine.

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<sup>26</sup> Kreeft explores this more in Peter Kreeft, *Fundamentals of the Faith* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1995), 48–53; and at more length in his *Christianity for Modern Pagans* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), especially 291–307.

## Conclusion

It is God's desire that we believe in him, and not simply know he exists, which means that those without faith, often for subjectively good reasons, benefit immensely from having a range of arguments for God's existence presented to them, such as Kreeft's list of twenty. But the effective apologist should understand the different types of arguments regarding their objectivity or subjectivity, as well as how they work together effectively in certain ways and as a consistent whole. The objective arguments, covering the rational proofs of more traditional apologetics, are relatively well-known in philosophical terms. But they are unpopular and less effective today, being increasingly countered or refuted using subjective means. Kreeft's third group are the subjective arguments, which side-step the postmodern objections to more rational arguments, but alone these soon disintegrate into an anthropomorphic spirituality. The transitional objective-subjective group shows overall that there is some relation between the two more distinct groups, pointing to an overall cohesion which is potentially the strongest argument of all. By using the different types effectively, the apologist can sow seeds in the doubting mind as the arguments can be seen as blocks in a wall that has presence in the soul of the recipient: there are many reasons for faith, not merely one or two. Additionally, the blocks have a catechetical purpose, being the fuel on the journey from scepticism to faith. Regardless of the specific role they play in each person, understanding of God's existence and essence are to be found in them, meaning that the use of a range of objective and subjective arguments such as Kreeft's twenty arguments for God's existence is a powerful, varied, and memorable approach that should be used in apologetical encounters in today's postmodern world.

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