

- **Baha'i Proofs for the Existence of God**

Ian Kluge

- **to show that belief in God can be rational and logically coherent and is not necessarily a product of uncritical religious dogmatism or ignorance.**
- **To prove proofs of God in the Baha'i Writings are logically valid and defensible.**
- **to up-date explanations for some traditional proofs which are still valid but easy to discount in their original form.**
- **to persuade people to engage in philosophic studies of the Baha'i Writings including correlations with other systems of thought as promoted by the Guardian.**

- The Existence of the Divine Being hath been clearly established **on the basis of logical proofs**, but the reality of the Godhead is beyond the grasp of the mind" (*Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 46)
- "The utmost one can say is that **[God's] existence can be proved**, but that the conditions of Its existence are unknown." (Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, p. 54)
- Contrary to some philosophers and modern thinkers, the Writings assert that God's existence can be logically proven.
- This does not mean every disbeliever can be persuaded that God exists (people can be persuaded by many different things, e.g. life experiences.) but it does mean that from a logical perspective, a statement that denies the existence of a supra-natural 'entity' is "untenable." Persuasion and proof are not the same things.
- "Untenable" in logic means a position cannot be defended without getting entangled in various kinds of logical errors.

## Why is this important in regards to the Baha'i Writings?

- More than any other religious texts, the Baha'i Writings emphasize the importance of reason, especially in our time: Abdu'l-Baha (SAQ, p. 7) says, ***"in this age the peoples of the world need the arguments of reason."*** He also says,
- ***"If religious belief and doctrine is at variance with reason, it proceeds from the limited mind of man and not from God; therefore, it is unworthy of belief and not deserving of attention; the heart finds no rest in it, and real faith is impossible. How can man believe that which he knows to be opposed to reason? Is this possible? Can the heart accept that which reason denies? Reason is the first faculty of man and the religion of God is in harmony with it"*** (Abdu'l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 231.
- "If religion were ***contrary to logical reason*** then it would cease to be a religion and be merely a tradition" (Abdu'l-Baha, Paris Talks, p. 143)
- ***"The foundations of religion are reasonable"*** ('Abdu'l-Bahá *The Promulgation of Universal Peace,* p. 128. )

➤ **Definitions. The first is, *What is a logical “proof”?***

- A logical proof is a chain of connected inferences that leads to a necessary conclusion.
- A conclusion is necessary if it cannot be denied without falling into contradiction with known facts or falls into self-contradiction (self-undermining or self-refutation) or other type(s) of reasoning errors.
  - An example of self-undermining and self-refuting: “All truth is relative”. Is this claim relative? If it is, then some truths might be absolute. In that case, the claim is not true. Is this claim absolute? If so, it has contradicted itself i.e. asserted the opposite of what it claims, and has no meaning.
  - (The same problem applies if you say “All truths are matters of perspective.”)

- **What do the Writings Say About Logic?**

- “The human spirit consists of the rational or **logical reasoning** faculty.” (*Tablets of Abdu’l-Baha*, V I, p. 115) (The human spirit is the “rational soul” SAQ 208).
- “If religion were contrary to **logical reason**, then it would cease to be religion . . . ” (Abdu’l-Baha, *Paris Talks*, p. 142.)
- “If we insist on such and such a subject is not to be reasoned out and tested, according to the **established logical modes of the intellect**, what is the use of the reason God has given man?” (Abdu’l-Baha, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 63.)
- For an in-depth study of reason and logic in the Writings, see Ian Kluge, “Reason and the Baha’i Writings” in “Lights of Irfan” 14, (2013) # 121 at <http://bahai-library.com/series/Irfan> and “Reason and the Bahai Writings: The Use and Misuse of Logic and Persuasion,” [http://bahai-library.com/kluge\\_reason\\_bahai\\_writings](http://bahai-library.com/kluge_reason_bahai_writings)

➤ **What do we mean by 'God'?**

- We not mean God in the personal sense, or the God-image of any religion. We mean the “God of the philosophers” i.e. an ‘entity’;
- Whose nature it is to exist i.e. is beyond time and Who is absolutely independent of anything else;
- Who does not exist in time and space, i.e. is not localized by time and space or conditioned by time;
- Who is absolutely immune from change or influence or limitation by anything else and is, therefore, omnipotent, and omniscient.

## This philosophical definition prevents confusions and errors in reasoning

- E. G. “category mistake” : atheists may assume that God is a ‘thing’ like all other things – subject to change, time, space, dependence on external causes etc.
- A common atheist argument: “If God created everything, who created God?” This shows two logical mistakes:
  - (1) A **category mistake** in which one kind of thing – those subject to time, space and needing a cause –is confused with another type of ‘thing’ which has none of these traits, i.e. God.
  - (2) **Changing the subject**: the atheist is substituting his concept of God for the religious concept. Since the religious concept of God is under debate, the atheist is changing i.e. avoiding the subject. Because the atheists’ version of God leads to paradoxes does not necessarily mean the religious concept does too. Such a false assertion is also a non sequitur – i.e. the conclusion does not follow from the premise(s).

- **# 1: THE “PRIME MOVER” ARGUMENT:**

- “Thou art He Who from everlasting hath been the King of the entire creation and its *Prime Mover* . . .” (Baha’u’llah, Prayers and Meditations, p. 262).
- “Such a process of causation goes on and to maintain that this process goes on indefinitely is *manifestly absurd*. Thus such a chain of causation must of necessity end lead eventually to Him . . . Who is the Self-Dependent and the Ultimate Cause.” (*Tablet to August Forel*, p. 18)
- “Manifestly absurd” because infinity has neither beginning nor end.
  - In order to get to the present moment, you would have to first go through an infinite number of prior ‘steps’ or ‘causal events’. Or, to trace the source of a present event, you would have to go back an infinite number of ‘steps’ or ‘causal events.’ This is logically impossible – because you never arrive in present.
  - Not a re-hash of Zeno’s paradox: it is not based on the infinity of ever smaller (theoretical) steps over a limited distance with a fixed beginning and end but an infinity with neither beginning nor end. This comparison is a false analogy.

- To see why an infinite regress is “manifestly absurd” imagine wanting to borrow a book, but each person you go to has to get it from someone else – infinitely. You will never get the book. What’s worse, there is no way of getting the book because there is nobody who actually has the book and does not need to borrow it.
- Abdu’l-Baha: ‘the least change produced in the form in the smallest thing proves that there is a creator.’ (SAQ, 6)
- Interpretation: All actions – even the most insignificant lead back to the First Mover.
- Hilbert’s Hotel: It has an infinite number of rooms and shows why the idea of an actual infinity leads to logically nonsensical consequences. Even when the hotel is full, there is always room for more – one guest or an infinity of them!

➤ **# 2: The Argument of Contingency (SAQ, 5)**

- Everything we know has a cause external to itself. Nothing brings itself into existence because to cause itself means it has to exist before it exists. This is logically impossible.
- “THEREFORE, “because a characteristic of contingent beings is dependency, and this dependency is an essential necessity, therefore, there must be an independent being whose independence is essential. (SAQ, p. 6)
- A non-contingent, independent being i.e. an external cause must exist to bring contingent beings into existence.

- *“It is certain and indisputable that the creator of man is **not like man** because a powerless creature cannot create another being.” (SAQ 5)*
- *“One of the proofs and demonstrations of the existence of God is the fact that man did not create himself: nay, his creator and designer is another than himself.” (SAQ, 5)*
- This First Cause must be unlike all contingent beings – if it were like them, it would be contingent too and require an external cause. Therefore, it is unlimited by time, space, change, or anything than itself and is omnipotent & omniscient.
- 
- EXTENSION: Everything in the universe is contingent. But if everything in the universe is contingent then the universe itself must be contingent since the universe is made of everything (which is contingent). Therefore, it requires a ‘creator’ or first mover.

### **# 3: The Argument from Sufficient Reason (PSR):**

- The PSR states that for every thing or event there is a reason why that thing/event exists or happened. This is the basis of all science and scientific thinking done by scientists or not. All peoples and all cultures use it consciously or unconsciously.
- The reason or cause must be adequate, i.e. able to explain a thing's existence or event.
- An adequate reason/cause must be of the right kind and have the ability, i.e. power to do what is required. E.g. you sneezing cannot explain why the car next door broke down.
- Abdu'l-Baha appeals to the PSR vis-à-vis (1) the power to bring things into existence (SAQ p. 5) and the existence of "law and rule" (SAQ, p. 6)
- There is no adequate explanation for the universe, i.e. nature does not explain itself.

- Natural / scientific explanations lead to an infinite regress.
- Because of the requirements of the scientific method, each explanation leads to another natural explanation ad infinitum (Recall the book borrowing). At some point we get to the ultimate PSR question: Why, i.e. what is the reason or cause for there being something rather than nothing?
- Since natural / scientific explanations lead to infinite regresses – these are not scientific answers and are signs of error – logic requires us to look beyond nature for an answer, i.e. God.
- IOW, natural explanations by their inherent essence cannot satisfy the PSR on fundamental existential questions. God can.

## #4: The Proof from Nothingness (implicit in the PSR)

- Abdu'l-Baha: “For absolute nothingness cannot find real existence, as it has not the capacity for existence.” (SAQ, p. 281) Therefore, a super-natural entity is needed to bring things into existence or to be their foundation.
  - Nothingness is the non-existence of anything, so how could existence come from it? The ‘nothingness’ of quantum theory is not really an absolute nothing but a potential.
- **Conclusion:**
  - To claim that absolute nothingness can bring something into existence is a logical error: it violates the law of identity: nothingness is not something. It also violates the law of self-contradiction by claiming “A = not-A”.

## **The Eternal Universe Argument:**

- the universe has always existed: no God as source or 'ground' of being is needed.
- Problems:
  - (a) violates the empirically observed contingency of all material things i.e. a claim made despite contrary evidence;
  - (b) Illogical: creation is made of contingent parts and is, therefore, contingent. (If every part in my Buddha figure is ceramic, my Buddha is ceramic)
  - (c) provides no scientific or logical evidence against its alternatives and therefore no reason to prefer it.
  - Illogical: it abandons the PSR which is the basis of all science and rational explanation.

- **Interlude: the God-of-the-Gaps argument (which is specious)**
  
- Assumes science can and will be able to explain the problems ‘the God solution’ answers.
  - This is not empirical evidence nor a logical argument. It says nothing empirical to disprove a properly argued God proof nor does it point out logical errors in the ‘God hypothesis’. It is an expression of attitude and faith – and is worthless as a logical reply.
  
  - The God-of-the-Gaps leads to an infinite regress – which is not a scientific answer and seen as a sign of error. As said before, the problem is that nature cannot explain its own existence – which is exactly what the super-natural God hypothesis does. This is a logical problem for which there is no scientific solution.
  
  - **God-of-the-Gaps is a rhetorical not logical argument.**

## # 5: The Argument from Form and Law

- “It is certain that the whole contingent world is subject to a law and a rule which it can never disobey. . . .” (SAQ 6)
- What is the origin of natural rules and laws that gives things order, and thereby, form?
- If these laws come from matter, how, where did matter get the capacity to make them? And what gave matter its susceptibility to the influence of these laws or the power to influence others?
- If we stay within natural explanations, we wind up again with an infinite regress – which gives us no answer and no indication that an answer exists. To say we don’t need an answer is to abandon the PSR and the basic project of science.

## ➤ Page 18

### ➤ **We must also ask about the origin of natural laws.**

➤ Law is the basis of form, i.e. limitation and regularity.

This leads to three questions:

➤ #1: What is the origin of the laws of nature?

➤ # 2: Why do we have these laws and not others?

➤ # 3: Why are these laws so friendly to life, consciousness?

➤ If you assume the laws 'just exist' your argument is circular, i.e. you are assuming what is to be proved. This is a fallacy.

➤ If we assume matter somehow made these laws, you are asking about the origins of matter and its strange ability to make the laws by which it exists. That is a logical contradiction.

➤ But does this prove God exists?

➤ It proves (1) a natural answer is logically impossible and (2) a super-natural answer is the rational remaining and logical alternative. There is no logical reason to reject it.

- **# 6: The Argument from Design:**

- *“This composition and arrangement, through the wisdom of God and His pre-existent might, were produced from one natural organization, which was composed and combined with the greatest strength conformable to wisdom. From this it is evident that it is the creation of God and is **not a fortuitous composition and arrangement.**” (SAQ, p. 131)*
- *“this garden, this tree, this blossom, this fruit would in nowise have come to exist by themselves in such order and perfection. Similarly . . . **this infinite universe with all its grandeur and order could not have come to exist by itself.** ... (Tablet to August Forel, p. 11)*
- *“this piece of bread proves that it has a maker.” (SAQ 6)*

- First: the actions of making the bread, like any action, lead to a First Cause.
- Second: Even if the composition was “fortuitous” i.e. without design, we must still seek for the origin of the laws of chance and probability – which in themselves show order and design, e.g. the laws of gravity; thermodynamics;
- No natural / logical explanation of natural laws is logically possible: the formation of natural laws requires other natural laws and lead to an infinite regress – and the end of logic and science.
- The existence of natural laws requires a super-natural maker.

- That is the (often missed) point of Paley's watchmaker argument: even if the complex watch could form by random processes, the laws of probability, chemical attraction, etc cannot be explained without leading to an infinite regress.
- # 7: The Argument from Degrees
  - Because of the various deficiencies or imperfections in all phenomenal things, Abdu'l-Baha argues that "there is an Eternal Almighty One, Who is the possessor of all perfections" (SAQ, 6)
  - The reasoning is straight forward:
    - all phenomenal things have limitations;
    - limitations have to be imposed in some way;
    - what imposes the limitations must be superior to what is limited.
    - When we apply this principle to the whole natural, phenomenal universe, it is clear that a super-natural entity or principle is needed which does not have any limitations itself.

- We can start with any limitation we choose – as with the First Cause argument we eventually end at a Prime Mover or Prime ‘Limiter.’
  
- # 8: The Ontological Argument (Anselm, Goedel, Plantinga)
  - Embedded in the argument from God’s perfection.
  - Existence is a ‘perfection’, a predicate i.e. something positive that adds ‘something’.
  - If you deny this (like Kant) try paying off a bank loan with imaginary money that lacks this predicate and perfection . . .
  - The concept of something whose nature it is to exist is not inherently self-contradictory and is not forbidden by the facts of reality. Therefore, it is possible for such a thing to exist.
  - If existence is possible to something whose nature it is to exist, then that something must exist. If it’s possible for a necessary being to exist, it exists.
  - Therefore God exists.

- **Addendum: Some Illogical Arguments Against God's Existence**

- **Science has disproven God:**

- God is not a 'scientific object.' A proper scientific object must be (1) material/physical; (2) quantifiable/measurable; (3) allow testable predictions and (4) reproducible test results; (5) falsifiable; (6) limited / focussed.
- God meets none of these criteria. Therefore, any so-called 'scientific' statement about God is self-contradictory and is not scientific.
- The same applies to the claim that a super-natural aspect of existence is scientifically possible.
- **Occam's Razor:** (it's not an axe): we do not add needless complication to an explanation.
- Problem: we can only say a 'complication' is needless if we know everything about something and can see 'We don't need that.' But we don't know everything about the nature of the universe – and, therefore cannot say God is a needless complication. Given that nature does not explain itself, God is, logically speaking, absolute necessary.

-

- **Conclusions**

- Belief in a super-natural entity – God – is rational and coherent and does not depend on faith in revelation to be valid.
- The arguments for God's existence found in the Baha'i Writings are logically valid. Whether or not someone finds them persuasive is a separate matter.
- The fact that nature does not and cannot logically explain itself within the framework of the scientific method, makes the existence of a super-natural ground-of-being a logical necessity.