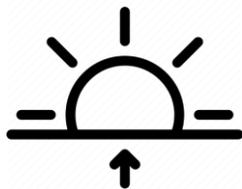


# Can You Prove God Exists?

By Peter Kreeft



*Below is an excerpt from philosopher Peter Kreeft's explanation of two major logical proofs that strongly suggest that there must be a being that we call God to account for what we observe in the world around us.*

## 1. Argument from Design

The argument starts with the **major premise** that where there is design, there must be a designer. The **minor premise** is the existence of design throughout the universe. The **conclusion** is that there must be a universal designer.

Why must we believe the major premise, that all design implies a designer?

Because everyone admits this principle in practice. For instance, suppose you came upon a deserted island and found "S.O.S." written in the sand on the beach. You would not think the wind or the waves had written it by mere chance but that someone had been there, someone intelligent enough to design and write the message. If you found a stone hut on the island with windows, doors, and a fireplace, you would not think a hurricane had piled up the stones that way by chance. You immediately infer a designer when you see design.

When the first moon rocket took off from Cape Canaveral, two U.S. scientists stood watching it, side by side. One was a believer, the other an unbeliever.

The believer said, "Isn't it wonderful that our rocket is going to hit the moon by chance?"

The unbeliever objected, "What do you mean, chance? We put millions of man-hours of design into that rocket."

"Oh," said the believer, "you don't think chance is a good explanation for the rocket? Then why do you think it's a good explanation for the universe? There's much more design in a universe than in a rocket. We can design a rocket, but we couldn't design a whole universe. I wonder who can?"

Later that day the two were strolling down a street and passed an antique store. The atheist admired a picture in the window and asked, "I wonder who painted that picture?"

"No one," joked the believer; "it just happened by chance."

Is it possible that design happens by chance without a designer? There is perhaps one chance in a trillion that "S.O.S." could be written in the sand by the wind. But who would use a one-in-a-trillion explanation? Someone once said that if you sat a million monkeys at a million typewriters for a million years, one of them would eventually type out all of Hamlet by chance. But when we find the text of Hamlet, we don't wonder whether it came from chance and monkeys. Why then does the atheist use that incredibly improbable explanation for the universe? Clearly, because it is his only chance of remaining an atheist. At this point we need a psychological explanation of the atheist rather than a logical explanation of the universe. We have a logical explanation of the universe, but the atheist does not like it. It's called God.

There is one especially strong version of the argument from design that hits close to home because it's about the design of the very thing we use to think about design: our brains. The human brain is the most complex piece of design in the known universe. In many ways it is like a computer. Now just suppose there were a computer that was programmed only by chance. For instance, suppose you were in a plane and the public-address system announced that there was no pilot, but the plane was being flown by a computer that had been programmed by a random fall of hailstones on its keyboard or by a baseball player in spiked shoes dancing on computer cards. How much confidence would you have in that plane? But if our brain computer has no cosmic intelligence behind the heredity and environment that program it, why should we trust it when it tells us about anything, even about the brain?

## 2. The First Cause Argument

If there is no first cause, then the universe is like a great chain with many links; each link is held up by the link above it, but the whole chain is held up by nothing. The most famous of all arguments for the existence of God are the "five ways" of Saint Thomas Aquinas. One of the five ways, the fifth, is the argument from design. The other four are versions of the first-cause argument, which we explore here.

The argument is basically very simple, natural, intuitive, and commonsensical. We have to become complex and clever in order to doubt or dispute it. It is based on an instinct of mind that we all share: the instinct that says everything needs an explanation. Nothing just is without a reason why it is. Everything that is has some adequate or sufficient reason why it is.

Philosophers call this the **Principle of Sufficient Reason**. We use it every day, in common sense and in science as well as in philosophy and theology. If we saw a rabbit suddenly appear on an empty table, we would not blandly say, "Hi, rabbit. You came from nowhere, didn't you?" No, we would look for a cause, assuming there has to be one. Did the rabbit fall from the ceiling? Did a magician put it there when we weren't looking? If there seems to be no physical cause, we look for a psychological cause: perhaps someone hypnotized us. As a last resort, we look for a supernatural cause, a miracle. But there must be some cause. We never deny the Principle of Sufficient Reason itself. No one believes the Pop Theory: that things just pop into existence for no reason at all. Perhaps we will never find the cause, but there must be a cause for everything that comes into existence.

If there is no first cause, then the universe is like a great chain with many links; each link is held up by the link above it, but the whole chain is held up by nothing.

Now the whole universe is a vast, interlocking chain of things that come into existence. Each of these things must therefore have a cause. My parents caused me, my grandparents caused them, et cetera. But it is not that simple. I would not be here without billions of causes, from the Big Bang through the cooling of the galaxies and the evolution of the protein molecule to the marriages of my ancestors. The universe is a vast and complex chain of causes. But does the universe as a whole have a cause? Is there a first cause, an uncaused cause, a transcendent cause of the whole chain of causes? If not, then there is an **infinite regress of causes**, with no first link in the great cosmic chain. If so, then there is an eternal, necessary, independent, self-explanatory being with nothing above it, before it, or supporting it. It would have to explain itself as well as everything else, for if it needed something else as its explanation, its reason, its cause, then it would not be the first and uncaused cause. Such a being would have to be God, of course. If we can prove there is such a first cause, we will have proved there is a God.

Why must there be a first cause? Because if there isn't, then the whole universe is unexplained, and we have violated our Principle of Sufficient Reason for everything. If there is no first cause, each particular thing in the universe is explained in the short run, or proximately, by some other thing, but nothing is explained in the long run, or ultimately, and the universe as a whole is not explained. Everyone and everything says in turn, "Don't look to me for the final

explanation. I'm just an instrument. Something else caused me." If that's all there is, then we have an endless passing of the buck. God is the one who says, "The buck stops here."

If there is no first cause, then the universe is like a great chain with many links; each link is held up by the link above it, but the whole chain is held up by nothing. If there is no first cause, then the universe is like a railroad train moving without an engine. Each car's motion is explained proximately by the motion of the car in front of it: the caboose moves because the boxcar pulls it, the boxcar moves because the cattle car pulls it, et cetera. But there is no engine to pull the first car and the whole train. That would be impossible, of course. But that is what the universe is like if there is no first cause: impossible.

Here is one more analogy. Suppose I tell you there is a book that explains everything you want explained. You want that book very much. You ask me whether I have it. I say no, I have to get it from my wife. Does she have it? No, she has to get it from a neighbor. Does he have it? No, he has to get it from his teacher, who has to get it. . . et cetera, etcetera, ad infinitum. No one actually has the book. In that case, you will never get it. However long or short the chain of book borrowers may be, you will get the book only if someone actually has it and does not have to borrow it. Well, existence is like that book. Existence is handed down the chain of causes, from cause to effect. If there is no first cause, no being who is eternal and self-sufficient, no being who has existence by his own nature and does not have to borrow it from someone else, then the gift of existence can never be passed down the chain to others, and no one will ever get it. But we did get it. We exist. We got the gift of existence from our causes, down the chain, and so did every actual being in the universe, from atoms to archangels. Therefore, there must be a first cause of existence, a God.

If there is no independent being, then the whole chain of dependent beings is dependent on nothing and could not exist.