

The Fulfillment of All Desire: A Case for God's Existence

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In almost every aspect of life, the human person pursues perfection. Most essentially, he or she strives to find: (1) perfect knowledge, (2) perfect love, (3) perfect justice, (4) perfect beauty, and (5) perfect “home.” However, the human person cannot find perfection in this world. The imperfect cannot satisfy the human heart; it cannot compete with the perfect. St. Paul states, “But when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away” (1 Cor. 13:10 RSV CE). These five transcendental desires necessarily provide evidence for the existence of God, the only one who can satisfy all these desires. In this paper, we will first look at each of the five transcendentals. Then, we will examine how they provide evidence of God's existence.

The human person constantly pursues perfect knowledge or truth. This is especially evident in scientific research. Scientists are not content until they have turned over the last rock and solved the last equation. Persons seek perfect knowledge even though no one has achieved it. The human person experiences, “A notion of complete intelligibility that stands as a horizon or backdrop to human understanding, inviting it, as it were, to go beyond what it understands to the goal of complete intelligibility.”¹ Even though humanity is restricted due to its finitude, it constantly looks for a complete understanding (intelligibility) for all that is. In this search, the person seeks to transcend finite knowledge in search of a full and complete understanding.

This search for perfect knowledge has both a positive and a negative consequence. Positively, the human person will constantly search for perfect knowledge which will lead to more advanced knowledge in many disciplines. One will be excited to learn all that there is to know. There is the capacity for a great amount of knowledge. Yet, on the negative side, many will be frustrated because their hard work will never reach a perfect knowledge on this earth. They pursue an object that consistently evades them. In order to find perfect knowledge, the human person must transcend their finite limitations.

The second transcendental is evident in humanity's pursuit of perfect love. The human person longs to be truly loved by another. Clearly, “We have a ‘sense’ of what profound interpersonal connection would be like if it were perfect.”² Each person has an idea of the perfect spouse, often referred to as ‘Mr. Right’ or ‘Mrs. Right.’ Similar to humanity's quest for perfect knowledge, we seek an unconditional and perfect love which we cannot give or receive from other persons. This is fascinating because it demonstrates that humanity longs for a love that humanity cannot satisfy. They must transcend themselves to find the source of perfect love.

¹ Robert Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God*, p. 266.

² *Ibid.*, p. 266.

The desire for perfect love has both a positive and negative side. It leads “us to pursue ever more perfect forms of love...it has the drawback of inciting us to expect more perfect love from other human beings.”³ Positively, this desire leads each person to seek perfect love. They desire to persevere until perfect love is found. It does not allow one to be truly satisfied with the imperfect manifestation of love. On the other hand, this desire can lead us to expect our beloved to be perfect. When our beloved fails to live up to those expectations, disappointment and frustration follow. The beloved cannot bear the weight of the other’s longing for perfect love.

The third transcendental is the longing for perfect goodness or perfect justice. This desire for perfect justice is evident in the various social outreaches and charities. Fr. Spitzer states, “Not only do human beings have a sense of good and evil...they also have a ‘sense’ of what perfect, unconditional justice/goodness would look like.”⁴ Humanity longs for complete fairness. This is very interesting because “this desire for perfect justice/goodness seems to go beyond any experience or knowledge of justice we could possibly have.”⁵ The human person pursues perfect justice even though there is no reference in humanity for it. Humanity looks for perfect goodness, even though all they have ever experienced is the imperfect. Once again, humanity transcends itself in search of perfect justice.

Similar to knowledge and love, this longing for perfect justice has both positive and negative effects. “The positive is its ability to fuel all strivings for an ever more perfect social order...the negative...is that it incites our expectations for perfect justice in a finite and conditioned world.”⁶ On one hand, this longing benefits humanity because it moves the person to not settle for anything less than perfect justice. Throughout history, the desire for perfect justice has led many to establish more just working conditions, fair wages, and even new governments (as evident in the Socialist and Communist regimes of the twentieth century). On the other hand, this desire leads to frustration because a perfectly just society can never be established in this imperfect world. Humanity again goes beyond its imperfect justice in search of perfect justice.

The fourth transcendental is our desire for perfect beauty. As with the other transcendentals, we look for perfect beauty even though there is no such thing in this world. Fr. Spitzer explains, “Human beings seem to have an awareness of what is more beautiful. It incites them to the desire for the more perfect ideal.”⁷ Humans are not truly satisfied with imperfect beauty. In order for a musical composition to be performed perfectly, pianists practice over and over. Even then, they will seek to perform the piece ever more perfectly. Humanity has a “sense” of perfect beauty that they compare all other beauty to. Nothing that is imperfectly beautiful can compare to this notion of perfect beauty.

³ Ibid., p. 266.

⁴ Ibid., p. 268.

⁵ Ibid., p. 268.

⁶ Ibid., p. 269.

⁷ Ibid., p. 277.

This desire for perfect beauty has two effects on the person. “The positive effect is that it incites the continuous human striving for artistic, musical, and literary perfection...The negative effect is that we will always grow bored or frustrated with an imperfect manifestation of beauty.”⁸ This notion of perfect beauty leads artists, musicians, and poets to produce even more beautiful masterpieces than their prior work. This has led to the construction of incredible cathedrals, extraordinary works of art, and countless detailed sculptures. As long as humanity survives, there will be artists seeking perfection in their work. The negative side of this notion of perfect beauty is that artists will even despise their own work because of its imperfections. Humanity will be continuously frustrated and disappointed because they cannot produce that which is perfectly beautiful. This has even led some artists into depression and suicide. Clearly, humanity’s search for perfect beauty leads them beyond this world of imperfect beauty.

The fifth transcendental is perfect home. This is the human desire that seeks to find perfect harmony and peace with all that is. Fr. Spitzer explains, “Human beings also seek a perfect sense of harmony with all that is...at home with the totality, at home in the cosmos.”⁹ No matter how harmonious life is for a person there will always be a desire to be perfectly at home. The person desires to be in right relation to all that is. Many people go from place to place searching for this perfect “home.” They are not content with where they are until they rest in the source of perfect home. They seek a place in which they feel completely at home.

Similar to the previous four transcendentals, the desire for perfect home has both a negative and positive dimension. “The positive side is that it presents a call to seek even greater and deeper forms of harmony...the negative side is the confusion and discontent that it brings.”¹⁰ Positively, this desire leads human beings to seek reconciliation with those they have offended and harmed. It also encourages people to form strong friendships and communities. On the other hand, people experience discontent and frustration when they cannot find perfect harmony. When faced with the reality that perfect harmony cannot be found in this world, some may even resort to acts of violence against themselves (suicide) or others. More often, people will become depressed and frustrated. When confronted with the desire for perfect home, the human person looks beyond imperfect harmony for perfect harmony.

These five transcendentals point to a source of *perfect* knowledge, love, justice, beauty, and home. These longings are focused on their fulfillment. This is important because, as Kreeft and Tacelli state, “Every natural, innate desire in us corresponds to some real object that can satisfy that desire.”¹¹ For the natural desire of hunger, food is the object of satisfaction. Therefore, there must be an object of satisfaction that these five desires correspond to. These desires are not just present so that humanity might be perpetually tortured in search of their object. Humanity longs for these perfections for a reason.

⁸ Ibid., p. 277-78.

⁹ Ibid., p. 281.

¹⁰ Ibid., p.281.

¹¹ Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook of Catholic Apologetics*, p. 84.

In the case of perfect truth, humanity finds its answer in the source of perfect knowledge. According to Father Spitzer, “The presence of the divine essence, therefore, must be the impetus for my awareness of complete intelligibility, the impetus for every question, the impetus for every act of creativity.”¹² God has placed this desire for perfect knowledge in human beings in order that they might seek him. God is the object of humanity’s search because he is truth (John 14:6). God is the fulfillment of this desire for perfect truth. He is complete unrestricted intelligibility. Whether we realize it or not, when we seek truth we are seeking God. For this reason, many people have found God as the answer to their search for perfect truth (a few examples are Justin Martyr, St. Augustine, St. Ignatius of Loyola, C.S. Lewis, and Dorothy Day). Once one has found perfect truth, the tensions mentioned previously disappear.

The quest for perfect love can only be satisfied by Love itself. Ultimately, authentic love is found in God. Pope Benedict XVI states, “Love is indeed... a journey... toward authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God.”¹³ This search for perfect love leads to the discovery of God because he is love itself (1 John 4:16). On this journey, the person discovers more fully who they are and who God is. The beloved is God himself. He is the one who placed in each human person the desire for perfect love. Through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Blessed Trinity has demonstrated their unconditional love (agape) for all humanity. When a person lives in God’s love, there is no longer disappointment and frustration because the beloved is perfect. God is able to bear the weight of each person’s longing for perfect love.

The third transcendental leads one to perfect justice itself. The tensions due to imperfect justice diminish in the presence of perfect justice. There must be a source of this notion of perfect justice. Humanity could not have made it up because there is no reference for it in human experience. “For this reason, philosophers have associated this notion of perfect unconditional Justice/Goodness with the presence of God to human consciousness.”¹⁴ The only answer for this longing for perfect justice is God’s presence. He is the perfect and just judge. God’s very nature is goodness. It is he “...who both guides and invites us to His life of transcendent and perfect goodness.”¹⁵ By placing this desire for perfect justice and goodness in each person, God created humanity to seek and find himself because he is the only lasting answer to this search.

The fourth transcendental leads us to perfect beauty. This search provides evidence for God’s existence because humanity longs for beauty itself, a perfect beauty which they have not experienced in creation. There must be an object that can fulfill humanity’s longing for perfect beauty. In this case, human beings’ search for perfect beauty is finally satisfied in beauty itself. “For this reason, philosophers have associated this notion of perfect beauty with the notional presence of perfect beauty (i.e., God) to human consciousness.”¹⁶ In this statement, God is

¹² Robert Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God*, p. 263.

¹³ Pope Benedict XVI, *God is Love*, p. 9.

¹⁴ Robert Spitzer, *New Proofs for the Existence of God*, p. 270.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.281.

identified with perfect beauty. He has created each person to find him when they seek perfect beauty.

Lastly, the fifth transcendental provides evidence for God's existence because it points to the object that can satisfy this longing for perfect home. The answer to our search for being totally at home is found in one who is home itself. This suggests that there is one who stands above the created order. As Screwtape attests, "The truth is the Enemy, having oddly destined these mere animals to life in His own eternal world, has guarded them pretty effectively from the danger of feeling at home anywhere else."¹⁷ God has made all humanity for himself. It is for this reason that we cannot feel at home anywhere else. We will seek this perfect home until we find it. St. Augustine affirms, "For thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee."¹⁸ When we finally rest in God, there is no longer any tension to find a more perfect home.

In summary, the human person searches for perfect truth, love, justice, beauty, and home. When these five transcendental desires are not satisfied they lead to tension and frustration. The person searches for these perfections even though they have never encountered them in humanity or this world. Clearly, these five transcendentals provide evidence for the existence of a being who is perfect truth, love, justice, beauty, and home; they point to God. The Psalmist proclaims "You open your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing" (Psalm 145:16). Only in God are the longings of the human heart truly satisfied.

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¹⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 143-144.

¹⁸ Augustine, *Confessions of St. Augustine*, p. 3.