I. Based on the Problem of Evil [that is, if God is All-Good, All-Knowing, and All-Powerful, then how can evil or suffering exist?]:

David Hume states: “Epicurus’ old questions are yet unanswered. ‘Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?’” [DY: We should add, “If God is both willing and able, but does not realize that evil is occurring? Then he is not all-knowing.”] (In David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Richard H. Popkin, ed., Part X, p. 63, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980.)

II. Various arguments, from: The Impossibility of God, Michael Martin and Ricki Monnier, eds., Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2003. (Notes by Dr. Dave Yount, Mesa Community College.)

In my Philosophy 101 class, we examine and assess seven different arguments in favor of God’s existence. I recently became aware that there are actually arguments against God’s existence, which are not simply the problem of evil. And the problem of evil assumes that God exists, and can conclude that God does not have at least one of the three attributes mentioned: namely, (1) God might be all-knowing and all-good (so that God knows about the evil and does not wish it), but cannot be all-powerful (so God cannot actually prevent it; that’s why it exists); or (2) God might be all-good and all-powerful (so that God doesn’t wish the evil and is powerful enough to stop it), but cannot be all-knowing (so that God isn’t aware that there is evil); or (3) God might be all-knowing and all-powerful (so that God knows evil exists and can stop it), but God wishes for it to exist (so that God is not all-good). In the interest of being fair and balanced on this issue, I thought I would allow those of you who are interested to view and think about these arguments.

To the believers in God and/or the believers in the proposition that we can rationally prove God’s existence (and that the issue of God’s existence is not a simple matter of faith): I present these arguments unanalyzed, and unsupported; in other words, these may or may not be good arguments, and they do not necessarily represent my opinion. Also, keep in mind that the authors of these different arguments raise and respond to many objections, so if you’re really curious, you’ll want to buy the book and read the whole articles. That said, feel free to tell me what you think of them here: david.yount@mesacc.edu. The page numbers are from The Impossibility of God, referenced above [Note that I’ve also seen but do not currently own a book by the same author, entitled, The Improbability of God].

Michael Martin and Ricki Monnier, the editors of The Impossibility of God, have the following introductory point: “Standard definitions of God include:

   God is the perfect being.
   God is the being most worthy of worship.
   God is the adequate object of religious attitudes.
   God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived” (p. 17).

FIRST DISPROOF: NON-VIRTUOUS GOD (WALTON/CARNEADES): Here is the second disproof, based on an argument from Carneades, an ancient philosopher but written up by Douglas Walton:

1. God is (by definition) a being than which no greater being can be thought.
2. Greatness includes greatness of virtue.
3. Therefore, God is a being than which no being could be more virtuous.
4. But virtue involves overcoming pains and danger.
5. Indeed, a being can only be properly said to be virtuous if it can suffer pain or be destroyed.
6. A God that can suffer pain or is destructible, is not one than which no greater being can be thought.
7. For you can think of a greater being, that is, one that is non-suffering and indestructible.
8. Therefore, God does not exist (p. 38).

SECOND DISPROOF: THE MORAL AUTONOMY ARGUMENT (RACHELS): Here is the third argument, from James Rachels:

1. If any being is God, he must be a fitting object of worship.
2. No being could possibly be a fitting object of worship, since worship requires the abandonment of one’s role as an autonomous moral agent.
3. Therefore, there cannot be any being who is God (p. 54).

THIRD DISPROOF: THE PERFECTION V. CREATION ARGUMENT (DRANGE): Theodore M. Drange gives ten disproofs for the existence of God, based on “playing off one another” the different attributes typically given of God (i.e., perfect, immutable, transcendent, nonphysical, omniscient, omnipresent, personal, free, all-loving, all-just, all-merciful, and the creator of the universe, etc. [p. 185]), as follows:

1. If God exists, then he is perfect.
2. If God exists, then he is the creator of the universe.
3. A perfect being can have no needs or wants.
4. If any being created the universe, then he must have had some need or want.
5. Therefore, it is impossible for a perfect being to be the creator of the universe (from 3 and 4).
6. Hence, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1, 2, and 5) (p. 186).

FOURTH DISPROOF: THE IMMUTABILITY V. CREATION ARGUMENT (DRANGE): Again, from Drange:

1. If God exists, then he is immutable.
2. If God exists, then he is the creator of the universe.
3. An immutable being cannot at one time have an intention and then at a later time not have that intention.
4. For any being to create anything, prior to the creation he must have had the intention to create it, but at a later time, after the creation, no longer have the intention to create it.
5. Thus, it is impossible for an immutable being to have created anything (from 3 and 4).
6. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1, 2, and 5) (pp. 187-188).

FIFTH DISPROOF: THE IMMUTABILITY V. OMNISCIENCE ARGUMENT (DRANGE): Again, from Drange:

1. If God exists, then he is immutable.
2. If God exists, then he is omniscient.
3. An immutable being cannot know different things at different times.
4. To be omniscient, a being would need to know propositions, about the past and future.
5. But what is past and what is future keep changing.
6. Thus, in order to know propositions about the past and future, a being would need to know different things at different times (from 5).
7. It follows that, to be omniscient, a being would need to know different things at different times (from 4 and 6).
8. Hence, it is impossible for an immutable being to be omniscient (from 3 and 7).
9. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1, 2, and 8) (p. 189).
SIXTH DISPROOF: THE IMMUTABLE V. ALL-LOVING ARGUMENT (DRANGE): Again, from Drange:

1. If God exists, then he is immutable.
2. If God exists, then he is all-loving.
3. An immutable being cannot be affected by events.
4. To be all-loving, it must be possible for a being to be affected by events.
5. Hence, it is impossible for an immutable being to be all-loving (from 3 and 4).
6. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1, 2, and 5) (p. 190).

SEVENTH DISPROOF: THE TRANSCENDENCE V. OMNIPRESENCE ARGUMENT (DRANGE): Again, from Drange:

1. If God exists, then he is transcendent (i.e., outside space and time).
2. If God exists, then he is omnipresent.
3. To be transcendent, a being cannot exist anywhere in space.
4. To be omnipresent, a being must exist everywhere in space.
5. Hence, it is impossible for a transcendent being to be omnipresent (from 3 and 4).
6. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1, 2, and 5) (p. 191).

EIGHTH DISPROOF: THE TRANSCENDENCE V. PERSONHOOD ARGUMENT (DRANGE): Again, from Drange:

1. If God exists, then he is transcendent (i.e. outside space and time).
2. If God exists, then he is a person (or a personal being).
3. If something is transcendent, then it cannot exist and perform actions within time.
4. But a person (or personal being) must exist and perform actions within time.
5. Hence, something that is transcendent cannot be a person (or personal being) (from 3 and 4).
6. Hence, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1, 2, and 5) (p. 192).

NINTH DISPROOF: THE NONPHYSICAL V. PERSONAL ARGUMENT (DRANGE): Again, from Drange:

1. If God exists, then he is nonphysical.
2. If God exists, then he is a person (or a personal being).
3. A person (or personal being) needs to be physical.
4. Hence, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1-3) (p. 193).

TENTH DISPROOF: THE OMNIPRESENCE V PERSONHOOD ARGUMENT (DRANGE): Again, from Drange:

1. If God exists, then he is omnipresent.
2. If God exists, then he is a person (or a personal being).
3. Whatever is omnipresent cannot be a person (or a personal being).
4. Hence, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1-3) (p. 193).
ELEVENTH DISPROOF: THE OMNISCIENT V FREE ARGUMENT (DRANGE): Again, from Drange:

1. If God exists, then he is omniscient.
2. If God exists, then he is free.
3. An omniscient being must know exactly what actions he will and will not do in the future.
4. If one knows that he will do an action, then it is impossible for him not to do it, and if one knows that he will not do an action, then it is impossible for him to do it.
5. Thus, whatever an omniscient being does, he must do, and whatever he does not do, he cannot do (from 3 and 4).
6. To be free requires having options open, which means having the ability to act contrary to the way one actually acts.
7. So, if one is free, then he does not have to do what he actually does, and he is able to do things that he does not actually do (from 6).
8. Hence, it is impossible for an omniscient being to be free (from 5 and 7).
9. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1, 2, and 8) (p. 194).

TWELFTH DISPROOF: THE JUSTICE V MERCY ARGUMENT (DRANGE): Again, from Drange:

1. If God exists, then he is an all-just judge.
2. If God exists, then he is an all-merciful judge.
3. An all-just judge treats every offender with exactly the severity that he/she deserves.
4. An all-merciful judge treats every offender with less severity than he/she deserves and also with less severity than he/she deserves.
5. Hence, it is impossible for an all-just judge to be an all-merciful judge (from 3-5).
6. Therefore, it is impossible for God to exist (from 1, 2, and 6) (p. 195).

THIRTEENTH DISPROOF: OMNISCIENCE AND IMMUTABILITY ARGUMENT (KRETZMANN): This argument is from Norman Kretzmann:

1. A perfect being is not subject to change.
2. A perfect being knows everything.
3. A being that knows everything always knows what time it is.
4. A being that always knows what time it is, is subject to change.
5. A perfect being is subject to change.
6. A perfect being is not a perfect being.
7. There is no perfect being (p. 198).

FOURTEENTH DISPROOF: DISPROOF OF THE GOD OF THE COMMON MAN (MARTIN): This argument is from Michael Martin:

1. If God exists, God has not had the feelings of lust or envy.
2. If God exists, God exists as a being who knows at least everything man knows.
3. If God exists as a being who knows at least everything man knows, God knows lust and envy.
4. If God knows lust and envy, God has had the feelings of lust and envy.
5. God exists, by hypothesis.
6. God has had and has not had the feelings of lust and envy.
7. God does not exist (p. 234).
FIFTEENTH DISPROOF: THE WORLD WAS NOT CREATED BY A PERFECT CREATOR
(DENIAL OF LEIBNIZ’S CLAIM THAT GOD CREATED THIS WORLD, WHICH IS THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS) ARGUMENT (RESNICK): This argument is from Lawrence Resnick:

1. If God exists then this is the best of all possible worlds.
2. If this is the best of all possible worlds, then worlds worse than this one are logically possible.
3. A logically possible world is any world the existence of which is compatible with logical necessity.
4. If ‘God exists’ is necessarily true, then ‘The world which exists is not the best of all possible worlds’ is necessarily false. (That is, if the proposition ‘God exists’ is necessarily true, then any proposition inconsistent with it is necessarily false. But since God’s existence, in Leibniz’s conception, entails that this is the best of all possible worlds, it also entails that ‘The world which exists is not the best of all possible worlds’ is false. Thus if ‘God exists’ is necessarily true, ‘The world which exists is not the best of all possible worlds’ is necessarily false.)
5. If ‘The world which exists is not the best of all possible worlds’ is necessarily false, then no world which is not the best of all possible worlds is a logically possible world. (That is, if ‘God exists’ is necessarily true and if it is His nature to create only the best of all possible worlds, then it is logically impossible that any lesser world could have come into existence – again, assuming that all things depend for their existence on God.)
6. Given that this world is the one God chose to bring into existence, if no world worse than this one is logically possible, then it is not the case that this is the best of all possible worlds.
7. If this world was created by a necessarily existing Perfect Creator, then it both is and is not the case that this world is the best of all possible worlds.
8. Therefore, it is not possible that the world was created by a necessarily existing Perfect Creator (pp. 275-276).

SIXTEENTH DISPROOF: GOD IS NOT OMNISCIENT (BECAUSE THERE IS NO OMNISCIENT AGENT) ARGUMENT (KAPITAN): This argument is from Tomis Kapitan:

1. To act intentionally presupposes acquiring a specific intention.
2. An agent acquires a specific intention only if there is a time during which that agent is ignorant of some proposition.
3. There is no omniscient agent (p. 311).

SEVENTEENETH DISPROOF: NO DIVINE AGENCY ARGUMENT (MCCORMICK): This argument is from Matt McCormick:

1. It has been widely alleged that God acts or possesses agency.
2. A being has agency when it has goals, conceives of them, acts on the basis of those goals with the intention of achieving them, and it could have done otherwise had it chosen to.
3. The possession of agency is a necessary (but not sufficient) property of an appropriate object of a religious attitude.
4. In order to have agency, a being must recognize some state of affairs in the world (correctly or incorrectly), conceive of another desired state of affairs, and then set about to make the desired/conceived state of affairs real.
5. In order for God to exercise agency, the world must actually be in a state of affairs that is different from what God wills or wishes it to be.
6. If there is an action gap for an agent, then (a) the being desires to close the gap, but it is not possible for the being to do so; or (b) the being has the goal of changing the state of affairs but refrains from doing so because of some other goal; or (c) the being possesses the non-actual state as a goal and acts to make it actual.
7. There can be no restraints, internal or external, on the actions of an omnipotent, omniscient, perfect agent's will.
8. Therefore, it is impossible for there to be a state of affairs in the world that does not accord perfectly with an omnipotent, omniscient, perfect agent’s will. The world always conforms perfectly with God’s will.
9. And since action requires that there be some state of affairs that is different from what an agent wills, God cannot act.
10. In addition to the standard theistic properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection, God must also be an agent in order to be worthy of worship. But a being that cannot act is not worthy of a religious attitude.
11. So it is not possible for any being to have the properties that would warrant a religious attitude.
12. So, God cannot exist (pp. 314-321).

EIGHTEENTH DISPROOF: NO OMNIPOTENCE ARGUMENT (COWAN): This argument is from J. J. Cowan:

1. Either God can create a stone which He cannot lift, or He cannot create a stone which He cannot lift.
2. If God can create a stone which He cannot lift, then He is not omnipotent (since He cannot lift the stone in question).
3. If God cannot create a stone which He cannot lift, then He is not omnipotent (since He cannot create the stone in question).
4. Therefore, God is not omnipotent (p. 337).