

INTRODUCTION TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

LECTURE FOUR

For us, belief that there's a God can't be properly basic as it can't be basic (over any extended reflective period); we need arguments.

DEDUCTIVE VALIDITY = impossible for premises to be true yet conclusion false

DEDUCTIVE SOUNDNESS = deductive validity plus all premises true

A deductively sound argument for the existence of God the deductive soundness of which was more obvious than was the existence of God would be a good argument for the existence of God.

INDUCTIVE VALIDITY = improbable that the premises be true yet conclusion false

INDUCTIVE SOUNDNESS = inductive validity plus all premises true

An inductively sound argument for the existence of God the inductive soundness of which was more obvious than was the existence of God would be a good argument for the existence of God.

INDUCTIVE SUPPORT = premises raise the probability of the conclusion

A good cumulative case argument = a good argument built from arguments each of which on its own merely inductively supports the conclusion

In general, a good argument is one the premises of which make the conclusion more probable than not and the premises and reasoning of which are more obviously correct than is the truth of its conclusion. I'm looking for good arguments.

ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Pure Categories A Priori	- Ontological
Indeterminate Experience	- Cosmological
Determinate Experience	- Design, Religious Experience, Miracles, ...

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

- 1) God by definition is a perfect being.
- 2) It is better to exist than not to exist.
- 3) Therefore, God exists.

Premises seem obviously right; reasoning seems obviously deductively valid; the Ontological Argument seems to satisfy our criteria for being a good argument. Does it really?

Premise 1 ambiguous. Is it using the term 'God' to pick something out and then attribute a property to it? If so, we could only know it to be true if we knew that the term 'God' had secured reference, which would require us already knowing the conclusion.

Is it meaning something like, '*If* there is a God, then He is - by definition - perfect'? If so, then whilst we can non-problematically know it to be true, the argument will only support the conclusion that *if* there is a God, then He exists.

Premise 2 assumes existence is a predicate. But it isn't. Saying 'X exists' is not actually saying anything about X. It's saying something of the abstract object that is the set of those things that's picked out by the concept of X - it's saying of it that it's not the set with zero members. - Kant and Frege

Conclusion

The Ontological Argument is not a good argument; nor can it contribute anything to a cumulative case argument for the existence of God.

THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (Contingency Version)

- 1) The universe is contingent.
- 2) Contingency requires explanation – the Principle of Sufficient Reason.
- 3) The necessary God of Theism could explain the contingent universe.
- 4) So the universe is a reason to think there's a God.

Note this isn't claiming to deductively prove that there's a God.

Possible Criticisms:

- 1) How do you get your argument to stop at God? – Substance Dualism?
- 2) Deny Principle of Sufficient Reason
- 3) Deny contingency of universe

In a deterministic universe of infinite age, every contingent bit of the universe is explained in terms of another contingent bit; ipso facto, the whole universe is explained. Or is it? Isn't it contingent that there is an infinitely old deterministic universe?

Is there a non-question-begging way of deciding whether or not universe is ontologically independent (brute contingent fact or metaphysical necessity)? My (controversial) answer: No. One's judgement on this depends on the probability one's already assigned to Theism. Thus ...

Conclusion

The Cosmological Argument is not a good argument and cannot contribute to a good cumulative case argument for the existence of God.

SUGGESTED READING

Bertrand Russell, *Why I am not a Christian and Other Essays on Religion and Related Subjects*, chapter 13. There are other editions in which this radio debate comes as a different chapter. (The full text is also relatively easily findable online as is, I am told, a MP3 of it.)

T. J. Mawson, 'Why is there anything at all?', Y. Nagasawa and E. Wielenberg (eds), *New Waves in Philosophy of Religion* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) goes through a variety of answers to this question.

CAUTIONARY NOTE - OTHER POINTS OF VIEW – ALL AVAILABLE AT THE CLICK OF A MOUSE!

Right at the start of this lecture, I break ranks with a large and much-discussed (esp. in the USA) movement in the Philosophy of Religion, Reformed Epistemology. It's worth looking them up. Kelly Clark gives a good defence of the general view here. http://people.brandeis.edu/~teuber/without_evidence_or_argument.pdf

There's an almost-universal consensus amongst philosophers that the Ontological Argument fails and most would agree that the version I discuss fails for the reasons I give. But there are other versions and, if they fail, they (arguably) fail for other reasons. And there are philosophers who think that versions of the Ontological Argument work. In particular, Plantinga's 'modal' version of the ontological argument has defenders. The entry on 'The Ontological Argument' at *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ontological-arguments/> is worth reading at some stage.

The Cosmological Argument is defended by several prominent philosophers of religion, Richard Swinburne being perhaps the most famous proponent of it. It's also worth knowing that there are variants of the cosmological argument other than the 'contingency' one I discuss in the lecture; I don't count them as cosmological because it strikes me they start from 'determinate' experience, they have as a premise something like the fact that the universe began to exist, but that's a mere terminological preference on my part. William Lane Craig defends the kalam cosmological argument all over the place. Here's one location where he does so. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQ70I7MPMR8>. Find out by going there what he dwelt on as "as a boy, lying in bed". (Spoiler: it was the metaphysical impossibility of the actual infinite.)

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