

Phil. 1000

Notes #7: The Ontological Argument

To Discuss Today:

- Background points for arguing about God.
- St. Anselm's Ontological Argument.
- Objections to the argument.

Preliminary points about God

Traditional definition of "God": God is traditionally defined as a being who

- i) is all-powerful,
- ii) is all-knowing,
- iii) is wholly good (morally perfect), and
- iv) created the universe (except for himself).

Note, however, that Anselm uses a different definition.

Faith & reason:

Some theists (people who believe in God) advocate blind faith--this means faith in the absence of reasons or evidence. (This position is called "fideism.") We won't be considering this here.

Other theists claim that their belief can be justified (e.g., the Catholic Church). We will examine their arguments.

Burden of proof: (principle of logic)

"The burden of proof is on who asserts the positive." This means that the person who says God exists should provide positive evidence of this.

Hence, our question is: Is there adequate evidence or arguments for believing in an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent creator of the world (or "O³ world-creator," for short)?

The ontological argument:

Comment: What does "ontological" mean? What is the 'ontological argument'?

St. Anselm:

"We believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. ... [E]ven the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. ... And assuredly, that than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding *alone*. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality, which is greater. Therefore, if that than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the understanding alone, the very being than which nothing greater can be conceived is one than which a greater *can* be conceived. But obviously this is impossible."

Interpretation of the argument:

1. God = that than which a greater cannot be conceived. (definition)
2. A God that exists in reality can be conceived. (premise)
3. A God that exists in reality is greater than an imaginary God. (premise)

4. Assume God does not exist in reality. Then He is a merely imaginary God. (assumption)
5. Something greater than an imaginary God can be conceived. (from 2, 3)
6. Something greater than God can be conceived. (from 4, 5)
7. Something greater than that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-conceived can be conceived. (from 1, 6) But this is absurd.
8. Therefore, God exists in reality. (from 4-7, by *reductio ad absurdum*)

Alternate argument (Descartes):

1. God = a perfect being. (definition)
2. A perfect being possesses all perfections. (premise)
3. Existence is a perfection. (premise)
4. Therefore, a perfect being possesses existence. (from 2,3)
5. Therefore, God possesses existence. (from 1,4)

Objections:

Objection #1: The Perfect Pizza Objection:

If this argument were sound, then one could prove the existence of a perfect pizza. For:

1. Let 'Spizza' refer to the greatest conceivable pizza. (definition)
2. Spizza can be conceived to exist in reality. (premise)
3. A real pizza is greater than an imaginary one. (premise)
4. Assume spizza does not exist in reality. Then it is a merely imaginary spizza. (assumption)
5. A pizza greater than an imaginary spizza can be conceived. (from 2,3)
6. A pizza greater than Spizza can be conceived (from 4,5)
7. A pizza greater than the greatest conceivable pizza can be conceived. (from 1,6) But this is absurd.
8. Therefore, Spizza exists in reality. (from 4-7, by *reductio ad absurdum*)

Alternate version:

1. A perfect entity possesses all perfections. (premise)
2. Existence is a perfection. (premise)
3. Therefore, a perfect pizza possesses existence. (from 1,2)
4. Therefore, a perfect pizza exists. (from 3)

Objection #2: The Extant Unicorn Objection:

If the argument were sound, then one could prove the existence of a unicorn. For:

1. Let "Blog" mean "a unicorn that exists." (definition)
2. Blog is a unicorn that exists. (from 1)
3. Blog exists. (from 2)

Objection #3: Existence is not a property (nor is non-existence)

Kant: "A hundred possible dollars contain not one penny more or less than a hundred real dollars."

Point: God is not 'greater' if he exists than if he doesn't exist. Premise (3) is false.

Objection #4:

Premises (3) and (4) imply that if God doesn't exist, then there is still a God there to talk about (only it's a peculiar sort of God, an imaginary God). This is incoherent. ("God does not exist" does not mean, "God has the property of non-existence.")

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Notes #8: The First Cause Argument (a.k.a. "Cosmological Argument")

To discuss today:

Clarke's version of the cosmological argument.

Objections to the argument.

Basic idea:

We must posit a God in order to explain why the universe exists / where it came from.

Key claim: something must have caused/created the universe. Why must this be?

Metaphysical background:

Metaphysical concepts assumed by Clarke:

Three ways a thing might exist:

- *'Self-existent' being* (a.k.a. "independent"): A thing that exists necessarily; the explanation for why it exists is contained in the very definition of the thing. (Compare: the ontological argument.)
- *Dependent beings*: their existence is caused/explained by *something else*.
- A being whose existence is caused by *nothing*. (Clarke denies that this last is really possible.)

First cause: A thing that causes other things to happen, or causes other things to exist, but is not itself caused by anything.

Clarke's argument:

1. Everything that is not self-existent (or 'independent') must have a cause (or: an explanation for why it exists).
2. The universe we observe (the physical world, including us) is not self-existent. (Why: because everything we observe is dependent on something else.)
3. Therefore, the universe must have a cause / explanation for its existence.

How to get from (3) to God? Two possibilities: (a) Define "God" as the self-existent thing that created the universe. (b) Argue that a God is the only sort of thing that *could* explain the origin of the universe, or is the best explanation for the origin of the universe.

Objections:

Objection #1:

Why call the first cause "God"? Doesn't that imply that it is a conscious being?

Reply: What else could have created a universe, other than a god?

Objection #2:

Why can there not be an infinite series of causes, stretching back into the past forever?

Reply: Because then *the whole series* would be a thing for which we had no explanation for why it exists.

Objection #3:

Why don't we need an explanation for why God exists?

Reply: Because God is 'self-existent.' However, this depends upon the Ontological Argument being correct.

Objection #4:

What caused God? Or what caused him to create the universe? (Russell)

Reply: Nothing caused either of those. (Perhaps God is 'outside time'?)

Objection #5:

Why must everything have a cause/explanation for its existence? Why can't there be things that just exist, without any further explanation? (Russell)

Reply: ?

Further reading on religion & science:

<http://www.meta-library.net/cqinterv/intro-frame.html>

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Notes #9: Pascal's Wager

To discuss today:

- How to evaluate bets.
- Pascal's argument: why you should 'bet on' God's existence.
- Objections to Pascal's wager.

What is Pascal's Wager?

It is an argument intended to show that you *should* believe in God. It is referred to as Pascal's "wager" because Pascal compares believing in God to making a 'wager' (a bet) that God exists. Important distinction: 2 kinds of 'reasons for believing' something:
Epistemic reasons: epistemic reasons are reasons that make it at least likely that the belief is true; i.e., an epistemic reason for believing a claim is evidence for the claim.
Prudential reasons: a prudential reason is a reason why something is in your own interests. Pascal proposes that you have a compelling prudential reason to believe in God.

Background: How to evaluate a bet

When offered a bet, you should consider the following factors:

- a) The probability that you will win.
- b) How much you gain if you win.
- c) The probability that you will lose.
- d) How much you will lose if you lose.

Expected value of the bet: This = [(a) × (b)] - [(c) × (d)]. A bet with positive expected value is good; one with negative expected value is bad.

Note: the same basic idea applies not just to betting behavior, but more generally to making any decision when you're uncertain of the outcome.

Example: You want to decide whether you should buy a lottery ticket. Suppose the prize is \$1 million, the probability of winning is 1/5,000,000, and the cost of a ticket is \$3. Then you can view this as a bet:

Probability of wining:	.0000002
Gain if you win:	\$999,997
Probability of losing:	.9999998
Amount of loss:	\$3
<hr/>	
<i>Expected value of bet:</i>	$(.0000002)(999997) - (.9999998)(3) = -2.8$

Hence, the 'bet' is unfavorable.

The 'bet' on whether God exists

You can either 'bet' that He exists (by believing in Him), or 'bet' that he doesn't exist (by not believing in him).

Note: Pascal only compares Christianity versus atheism. (Doesn't consider other religions.)

According to Pascal:

If God exists and you don't believe in him, then you go to Hell forever (very bad).

If God exists and you believe in him, you go to Heaven forever (good).

If God doesn't exist, and you believe in him, nothing much happens.

If God doesn't exist, and you don't believe in him, nothing much happens.

It's about equally likely that God exists as that he doesn't, because there is no good evidence either way.

Thus, we compare the two possible bets you can make:

Betting on God's existence:

Probability of winning: .5

Gain if you win: ∞

Probability of losing: .5

Amount of loss: 0

Expected value of bet: $(.5)(\infty) - (.5)(0) = +\infty$

Betting against God's existence:

Probability of winning: .5

Gain if you win: 0

Probability of losing: .5

Amount of loss: ∞

Expected value of bet: $(.5)(0) - (.5)(\infty) = -\infty$

Obviously, you should choose the former over the latter.

Objections:

Objection #1:

The probability of God existing is not .5. It's much lower.

Reply:

What happens if you substitute a different number for ".5" in the following:

$$(.5)(\infty) - (.5)(0) = +\infty$$

$$(.5)(0) - (.5)(\infty) = -\infty$$

Objection #2:

The loss from believing in God is not 0. Believers waste time going to church, etc., and unbelievers have more fun. Plus, there is the potential disvalue of having a false belief.

Reply:

What happens if you substitute a different number for "0" in the following:

$$(.5)(\infty) - (.5)(0) = +\infty$$

$$(.5)(0) - (.5)(\infty) = -\infty$$

Objection #3:

The argument incorrectly assumes that there are only two possibilities, atheism and Christianity. What about other religions?

Reply:

This must be granted. The argument favors theism over atheism. But it does not favor Christianity over, e.g., Islam or Judaism.

Objection #4:

The argument incorrectly assumes that we can choose what we believe.

Reply:

You can take steps to try to attain belief.

Objection #5:

The argument assumes that God would punish people for not believing in him. But this is incompatible with his being all-good.

Reply:

The argument succeeds if there is any *chance* that this assumption might be true.

Objection #6:

This might be true: "God hates believers. He will send all who believe in him to Hell, and send all atheists to heaven." So you should be an atheist.

Reply:

There is a better chance that God likes believers than that he hates them.

Objection #7:

"Anyone who doesn't give me \$1000 by next week will suffer eternal torment." This could be true, so you should give me \$1000.

Reply:

There is more evidence for the claim that atheists will go to Hell than for the claim that non-donors of \$1000 to you will go to Hell. (Does this work?)

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Notes #10: The Fine Tuning Argument

To Discuss Today:

- The Fine-Tuning Argument
- Objections to the fine-tuning argument

The basic idea:

The laws of physics themselves appear to be finely adjusted to make life possible, and this is evidence of a creator.

The Fine Tuning Argument

1. The laws of physics are 'fine-tuned' to allow for the possibility of life. *Examples:*
 - ▶ It has been calculated that if the gravitational constant differed by more than $1/10^{40}$ of its present value, stars would either be too hot or too cool to support life.
 - ▶ If the electromagnetic force were stronger or weaker, complex molecules (of the sort involved in living things) could not form.
 - ▶ If the 'density parameter' of the universe differed by more than $1/10^{60}$, then the universe would either have expanded too quickly to form galaxies, or the universe would have recollapsed before intelligent life evolved.
 - (Note: This is what is asserted by those who give the argument. I do not know first-hand that these figures are accurate.)
2. This is highly improbable if there is no God.
3. It is not improbable if there is a God.
4. If E is much more likely given H than given the denial of H, then E strongly supports H.
5. Therefore, the evidence strongly supports the God hypothesis.

Objections to the Fine-Tuning Argument:

Objection #1:

It isn't surprising that we find the universe 'fine-tuned' for life, since if it weren't, we wouldn't be here to talk about it. Therefore (?), we don't need an explanation for this fact. (Perhaps this depends on objection 2?)

Reply: The Firing Squad example.

You are scheduled to be executed by a firing squad consisting of 50 sharpshooters with loaded rifles. They all carefully take aim and fire. You pass out. Later, you awake, and wonder how it is that they all missed. Then you think: "But if they hadn't all missed, I wouldn't be around to wonder about it, so (?) I shouldn't be surprised."

Objection #2:

The multiple-universes hypothesis: Maybe there exist many parallel universes, with different laws. Some are 'fine-tuned' for life and most aren't, but the ones that aren't don't have anyone there to observe that fact. Of course we would be in one of the ones that is--that shouldn't surprise us.

Alternatively: perhaps the physical constants change in different cycles of the universe.

Reply: The Multiple Coins example.

You flip a coin 50 times, and get heads 50 times in a row. You wonder how such an improbable event could have happened. Then you think: “Well, maybe there are a billion, billion other coins out there somewhere being flipped 50 times each, and so it could be expected that *one* of them would come up heads 50 times in a row.”

Objection #3:

The argument assumes that life would have to be roughly like us (chemically). Maybe there could have been other possible kinds of life. We have no way of calculating the probability of this. Also, if we’re imagining different laws of nature, there could have been different laws regarding what is required for life (e.g., such that life didn’t require a warm sun or complex molecules).

Reply:

- a) If we are considering a universe with laws like ours, the suggestion is extremely implausible. If the universe had collapsed 10 minutes after the Big Bang, there would have been no life.
- b) If we are supposed to consider very different laws of nature: The Fly on the Wall example. There is a fly sitting on a very large wall, in the middle of a 4-ft. radius blank circle. You don’t know what lies outside the circle. You witness a bullet come and hit the fly dead on. You conclude: “Someone must have been aiming at the fly.”

Objection #4:

We can’t assign probabilities to the laws of nature themselves, either (a) because the laws of nature were always what they are and were never created, or (b) because the laws of nature are what determine probabilities, or (c) because we simply have no rational way of assigning such probabilities.

Reply: The “Jesus Loves You” example.

Scientists discover a new type of crystal that, when it forms, the atoms automatically arrange themselves in a repeating pattern that looks just like the English words, “Jesus loves you.” This is somehow built into the laws of chemistry. You think this is evidence for the existence of God. But then you remember: “We can’t assign probabilities to the laws of nature, so this isn’t evidence of anything.”

Objection #5:

Why don’t we need an explanation for why God himself exists?

Reply: Because there are no calculations showing the existence of God to be extremely improbable.

Objection #6:

The God-hypothesis is not a good explanation for fine-tuning, because we don’t understand how God could have created a law of nature.

Reply: This misunderstands the argument. The argument is that the probability of laws that allow for life is much greater given the existence of God than it is given atheism. The argument does not say it “is a good explanation.”

Further reading:

<http://www.messiah.edu/hpages/facstaff/rcollins/finetlay.htm>

http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/theodore_drange/tuning.html

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Notes #11: The Problem of Evil

Basic idea:

The 'problem of evil' is a problem for theists: it is the problem of explaining how an all-good God could allow evil to exist.

Atheists argue that the existence of evil is a reason not to believe in God.

The Nature of Evil:

- In this argument, "evil" will refer to anything that is bad, i.e., anything that it would be better if it didn't exist.
- Two kinds of evils:
 - i) Man-made evils: war, murder, slavery, etc.
 - ii) Natural evils: disease, tornados, some famines, etc.
- Some striking examples of evil:
Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, and Mao Tse Tung: These three individuals collectively killed probably over 85 million people (!) by means of executions, extreme conditions in slave labor camps, and man-made famines.

(Source: <<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/economics/bcaplan/museum/faqframe.htm>>)

Animal suffering. Richard Dawkins writes:

"The total amount of suffering per year in the natural world is beyond all decent contemplation. During the minute it takes me to compose this sentence, thousands of animals are being eaten alive; others are running for their lives, whimpering with fear; others are being slowly devoured from within by rasping parasites; thousands of all kinds are dying of starvation, thirst and disease. It must be so. If there is ever a time of plenty, this very fact will automatically lead to an increase in population until the natural state of starvation and misery is restored." (132)

The Argument from Evil

1. There is evil.
2. If there were a God, there would be no evil. For:
 - a. God would be aware of any evil. (For he is all-knowing.)
 - b. God would be able to eliminate it. (For he is all-powerful.)
 - c. God would be willing to eliminate it. (For he is all-good.)
 - d. If a person is aware of an evil, and he is both willing and able to eliminate it, then he eliminates it.
 - e. Hence, God would eliminate (or prevent) all evil.
3. Therefore, there is no God. (from 1, 2)

Alternate version:

1. If God created a world, he would create only the best of all possible worlds.
2. This is not the best of all possible worlds.
3. Therefore, God did not create this world.

Responses to the Argument from Evil

(The first two are common among theologians.)

1. *The Free Will defense:*
Evil is a product of human free will. God gave us free will because free will is a very valuable thing. But he cannot both give us free will and prevent us from doing evil.
2. *The virtuous act response:*
Some amount of suffering is necessary in order for humans to develop important moral virtues. Some moral virtues can only exist in response to suffering or other bad things. Examples: courage, charity, strength of will.

Reply to responses 1 & 2: Is this a good reason for not stopping evil? The murderer example.

(These are common among students.)

3. *Evil is necessary for good:*
Good and evil exist only as contrasts to each other. Therefore, if evil were eliminated, good would automatically be eliminated as well.
4. *Evil is necessary in order for us to understand good:*
Slightly different from #3: If all evil were eliminated, then we wouldn't *know* that everything was good, because we can only perceive things when there is a contrast.
5. *How do we know what good and evil are?*
Perhaps God has a different conception of evil from ours. Thus, maybe he thinks the Holocaust was actually a good thing.
6. *The Lord works in mysterious ways.*
Perhaps there is some underlying purpose served by all the evil in the world, but we humans are not smart enough to comprehend it. Just have faith.
7. *God isn't responsible for the evil. The Devil is.*
8. *Perhaps God is not all-knowing, all-powerful, and/or all-good.*
If we simply weaken the definition of God, then the existence of God may be compatible with the existence of evil. Thus, for example, he might be unable to instantly eliminate all the evil.

Phil. 1000 Review of unit 2

For the test, know these things:

The 'traditional definition' of God
The 'burden of proof' principle
"Theism", "atheism", "agnosticism"

The Ontological Argument:

what it tries to show
St. Anselm's definition of "God"
the main objections to it
the perfect pizza
existence is not a property

The First Cause Argument:

Major premises of it
The conception of "God" used in it
Russell's objections to it
"first cause"
"self-existent being"

Pascal's argument:

The 'expected value' of a bet / how to evaluate a bet
How P. calculates the expected value of believing in God vs. not doing so
What P is assuming.
His conclusion.

Fine Tuning Argument:

"Fine tuning"
The main premises & conclusion
Some objections & replies, including:
The multiple-universes hypothesis
The Firing Squad example

The Problem of Evil:

— "man-made evils", "natural evils"
The main premises & conclusion of the argument from evil
The free will response & what kinds of evils it tries to explain
The virtuous act response

Know what positions/arguments these people defended:

St. Anselm
Samuel Clarke
Gribbin & Rees
Blaise Pascal
Richard Dawkins
Bertrand Russell