

Philosophy of Religion

Hume, Dialogues concerning Natural Religion (Part 6-12)

Definition of God

- Must be have at least three characteristics:
 - All powerful (omnipotent)
 - All good (omnibenevolent)
 - All knowing (omniscient)
 - Creator of all things?
- This conception of God agrees with monotheistic religions; it is the conception of God in St. Anselm, St. Thomas Aquinas, etc.

3 Views on the Existence of God

- Theism: Knowledge that God exists
 - I have a good reason to believe God exists
- Atheism: Knowledge that God does not exist
 - I have a good reason to believe God does not exist
- Agnosticism: Don't know whether God exists
 - I don't have a good reason to believe God exists and or not to believe.

War, Famine, Pestilence, Death

- Man-made Evils (sin):
 - War (WWI, WWII) - (100 million people die)
 - Slavery
 - Other forms of Injustice
- Natural Evils (suffering)
 - Pestilence (In 1350, Black Death kills 50% of Europe's population)
 - Tsunamis (250,000 people die in 2004)
 - Earthquakes, etc.
- In addition to the extent of suffering, notice the effect on people who are entirely innocent (babies, children, etc)

The Problem of Evil in short

- Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?" [Epicurus]
- Take any natural or man-made disaster, say, WWII
 - God is all-knowing; he knew WWII was going to happen
 - God could have prevented it; he is all-powerful
 - God is all-good – so he always does the right thing
 - So, why didn't God stop this from happening?

The Logical Problem of Evil

1. Suppose God exists Assumption
2. If a being is omniscient, then
it knows about all evil that has or will exist Premise
3. If a being is omnipotent, it can do anything Premise
4. If a being is all good,
it eliminates as much evil as it knows about and as much as it can Premise
5. So, God knows about evil that has or will exist,
and he will eliminate as much as it can From 1-4
6. So, there is no evil from 1,5
7. But, there is evil in the world Premise
8. Therefore, God does not exist

On Logical Inconsistency

- Like the ontological argument this is a proof by contradiction, but this argument proves that God does not exist
 - Assumption: God exists
 - leads to a contradiction
 - So, God does not exist
- This argument establishes that we have conclusive knowledge (as certain as any that we have) that God does not exist -- no view that contains a contradiction can be true
- So, if this argument is correct, it means that both agnosticism and theism are false

God is Less than Omnipotent

- If God is not omnipotent, then evil and suffering are no longer problems; God would like to make them go away (because he's good), and he would if he could, but he's not powerful enough.
- Supposing that God is not all-powerful, how powerful is he?
 - To stop the killing of Franz Ferdinand? [Requires only human powers]
 - Is he powerful enough to prevent a Tsunami? Very easily accomplished – create an early warning system.
 - To stop an earthquake?
- If God is as weak as these examples suggest, then he really is not the kind of God people worship, certainly not the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition

God is Less Than All Good

- If God is not all good, then we solve the problem. Evil and suffering happen, in part, because God lets them happen
- So, God sometimes, though he can, and knows that he should, doesn't do good
 - Why does he not do it? He wants to see suffering or he just doesn't care
- Is this a God worthy of worship? Why confession? Why admit moral failings to God?

Evil is Necessary part of Good?

- Physical Good (pleasure) is impossible without Physical Evil (pain, pests, natural disasters, disease)
 - Disease and insanity are evils, but health and sanity are possible in the total absence of disease
- Possible case:
 - if an individual were born crippled and deformed and never in his life experienced pleasure, that he could not experience pain, not even if he were severely injured? It is clear pain is possible in the absence of pleasure.
 - Sufficient to show that goodness can exist without its
 - Response: Good can exist without evil; by being compared to possible evil; evil that never comes about

Yet another Solution? Freedom

- Evil is the result of humans exercising their own freedom
- There is value in human freedom: a world without evil and without freedom is worse than all the evil that has happened and the existence of freedom
- This is why God created humans as free agents
- Why is having freedom and evil better than no freedom and no evil?
 - It is better for most people to have choices than to be moral 'robots'
- But, why not create human agents with freedom who are better at being good
- God's failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good

Hume: Inductive argument from evil

- Even if evil is (in some way) consistent the existence God; we still have very good reason, (though not certain) to think that God does not exist
- The reason is that the evil does exist which “appear to human reason entirely unnecessary or unavoidable”
 - Why do animals have to experience pain – why can’t they just experience pleasure.
 - Why couldn’t God have provided us with better natures (more talents) for his creation (i.e. a better inheritance for his children)?
 - Why does nature have to be arranged in such a way that extremes are avoided (e.g. hurricanes) and their consequences?
 - Why God doesn’t intervene to prevent catastrophes?
 - Empirically a world where he did intervene would be better