

GOD: Cosmological Argument

Lecture 4

Phil 1000, Fall 2008
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Outline

Review

- What is at stake?
- Revealed vs. Natural Theology
- *A priori* vs. *A posteriori*
- Aquinas' "2nd Way" (First Cause)

Rowe: Another look at the cosmological argument

- Restating the Argument
- Dependent and Self-existent beings
- Principle of Sufficient Reason
- Objections and Replies

2

Aquinas' 2nd Way

The second way is based on the nature of causation. In the observable world causes are found to be ordered in series; we never observe, nor ever could, something causing itself, for this would mean it preceded itself, and this is not possible. Such a series of causes must however stop somewhere; for in it an earlier member causes an intermediate and the intermediate a last (whether the intermediate be one or many). Now if you eliminate a cause you also eliminate its effects, so that you cannot have a last cause, nor an intermediate one, unless you have a first. Given therefore no stop in the series of causes, and hence no first cause, there would be no intermediate causes either, and no last effect, and this would be an open mistake. One is therefore forced to suppose some first cause, to which everyone gives the name 'God'.

P1: All things that exist have been caused to exist by something else in an ordered series.

P2: Such a series of causes must stop [begin] somewhere.

C: There exists some first cause, we call God.

3

Criticisms of Aquinas' 2nd Way

- Premise 1:
 - Perhaps some things just appear, uncaused?
 - What reasons do we have to think "everything" has a cause?
- Premise 2:
 - Why not think that the series of causes, itself, is infinite and eternal?
- Inference:
 - Premise 1 and Conclusion may be inconsistent?
 - Is the "first cause" of the conclusion really God?

4

Restating the Argument

P1: Every being is either a dependent being or a self-existent being.

P2: Not every being can be a dependent being

C: There exists a self-existent being, God.

5

Rowe's restatement

A deductively valid argument form (?)

Definitions:

Dependent = a being whose existence is accounted for by the causal activity of other things.

Self-existent = a being whose existence is accounted for by its own nature.

Both premises supported by **PSR**

P1: Every being is either a dependent being or a self-existent being.

P2: Not every being can be a dependent being

C: There exists a self-existent being, God.

6

Principle of Sufficient Reason

- Generally that the existence of everything has an explanation.
- Consider Anselm's options:
 - X is explained by another. (dependent)
 - X is explained by itself. (self-existent)
 - X is explained by nothing.
- PSR denies the last option.

7

PSR has Two Parts

There must be an explanation

- a) Of the existence of any being, and
- b) Of any positive fact whatever

Consider the “man in the room example”, p. 26.

8

Analysis

There must be an explanation

- a) Of the existence of any being, and
- b) Of any positive fact whatever

P1: satisfies PSR(a)

P2: satisfies PSR(b)

P1: Every being is either a dependent being or a self-existent being.

P2: Not every being can be a dependent being

C: There exists a self-existent being, God.

9

Criticisms (& Replies)

1. Fallacy of Composition: argument assumes that the whole (series of dependent beings) needs an explanation in the same manner as the parts (each dependent being). But once the parts are explained there is nothing else to account for. (Russell and Hume)
2. The existence of God as the first cause explanation is redundant. The principle of parsimony suggest that the series itself is the “self-existent” being, not another entity, God. (Alternatively, the “self-existent” being may not be the personal/theistic God we are looking for.)

10

Criticisms

3. PSR is false or unacceptable. Perhaps there are some things that simply have no explanation (Cf. Anselm's options again), or are “brute facts.” The concept of a self-existent being is strange, a brute fact is no stranger...

Where would this leave us?

11

Defending PSR

Either:

PSR is intuitively true or self-evident.

or

PSR is not known to be true, but is a basic presupposition of reason; a basic assumption that rational people make.

12

Concluding Thoughts

- How important is PSR?
- Does the cosmological argument make it reasonable to think there is a God?
- What does it demonstrate about the scope of “natural theology” or our ability to reason about “origins of existence”?

13

Next Time

- Read William Paley, p. 32 on the Teleological Argument.
- Answer reading questions for Paley, posted on the course schedule (pdf).
- Think about any contemporary arguments (in the press, etc.) that look similar to Paley’s.

14

Key concepts

- Restatement of cosmological argument
 - (Aquinas’ 3rd Way...)
- Dependent vs. Self-existent Beings
- Principle of Sufficient Reason

15