

GOD: Faith & Reason

Lecture 8

Phil 1000, Fall 2008
Prof. Bryan Benham

Question for Today

Is belief in God rational?

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Our Background

What is at stake?

- What God are we interested in?

Three arguments about existence of God:

- Cosmological Argument
- Teleological Argument
- Problem of Evil

Is it reasonable to think that God exists?

- Given the shortcomings of the cosmological and teleological arguments to show God exists, and the seriousness of the problem of evil for the existence of God...?

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Faith

General Definition: The belief in a God without complete rational support ("proof"?) for that belief; a trust that the God we are interested in exists and...

Three senses of "faith":

1. Confident belief with some rational support but not wholly convincing: **RATIONAL**
2. Belief in the absence of evidence/reasons in support (or against); belief without evidence. **NON-RATIONAL**
3. Belief even in the face of convincing evidence/reasons to the contrary. **IRRATIONAL**

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What shall we say about the ship-owner?

A ship-owner was about to send to sea an emigrant ship. He knew that she was old, and not over-well built at the first; that she had seen many seas and climes, and often had needed repairs. Doubts had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. These doubts preyed upon his mind, and made him unhappy; he thought that perhaps he ought to have her thoroughly overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him to great expense. Before the ship sailed, however, he succeeded in overcoming these melancholy reflections. He said to himself that she had gone safely through so many voyages and weathered so many storms that it was idle to suppose she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss from his mind all ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy; he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their strange new home that was to be; and he got his insurance money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales. (pp. 101-102)

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Clifford: Ethics of Belief

It is important not just what one believes, but why (reasons) one believes.

- P1:** Beliefs are action guiding
- P2:** Beliefs are character forming
- P3:** Beliefs demonstrate to others what is reasonable.
- C1:** Thus, we have a duty to question all that we believe; it is never good to stifle doubt.
- C2:** Thus, "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."

Discuss

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Clark: Without Evidence...

Two Part Argument

- Undermine Clifford's claim that if a belief (any belief) is unsupported by evidence, it is irrational to believe it.
- Further, belief in God does not require the support of evidence or argument in order for it to be rational.

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Clark's Argument(s)

Negative: Clifford's universal demand for evidence cannot meet its own demand. **Some** beliefs require evidence, but not **all**.

P1: Reasoning has to start from somewhere.

P2: We are finite/limited cognitive creatures – a great deal of what we believe is (must be) based on faith: trust in authorities (e.g., teachers...)

C1: If we can't meet Clifford's demand, we cannot be obligated to do so.

C2: Some truths we can just accept and reason from (God)

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Clark's Argument(s)

Positive: Why not start with belief in God?

P1: Few people come to belief in God via argument/reason; few people have access to theistic arguments.

P2: It seems that God has given us an awareness of himself that is not dependent on theistic arguments; why make it so difficult?

P3: Belief in God is more like belief in a person than belief in a scientific theory; not appropriate for belief in a relationship (first example).

C: Rational people may rationally believe in God without evidence or argument (i.e., as a starting point from which to reason).

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Some Critiques of Clark

- **Negative:** Clifford's claim need not be universal, but it still points to a strong need for rational support in beliefs and in determining which beliefs we should or shouldn't expect evidence for...appealing to reliable authority is evidential (rational).
- **Positive (P1):** Popularity of a belief is not itself good reason to accept that belief as true or a good starting point; most people come to believe through acculturation (cf. racist beliefs).
- **Positive (P3):** Equivocates on "belief", we may want a relationship with God, but evidence for that entity, and for remaining in a relationship with God (like any relationship) doesn't completely disregard evidence or reasons, especially if that evidence suggests the person is not trustworthy.
- **Positive (C):** Confuses "rational" with "non-rational" beliefs which is a significant difference; and ignores reasons against belief in God, thus more like "irrational" belief. Is that belief revisable on further evidence?

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Closing Thoughts

- God, Reason, and Evil
 - Exam #1, Next Thursday
- Recent history:
 - Genocide: Rwanda, Darfur
 - Natural Disasters: Hurricanes, Earthquakes, Famine
 - Terrorism: 9/11
- The question of God's existence is not merely an academic exercise. How should we think about God in light of recent history? **Tuesday Video:** "Faith and Doubt at Ground Zero"

In class assignment!

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