

# **Philosophy of Religion** **(morality is impossible)**

Mainly Christianity, but also applicable to other monotheistic religions that postulate the existence of a single creator who is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect

- Ontological Argument
- Argument from Design
- Problem of Evil
- Argument from Freewill
- Pascal's Wager
- Argument from Miracles
- Atonement
- Homoiousion

# Anselm's Ontological Argument

Non-empirical argument:

- 1) It is conceptually true that God is a being than which none greater can be imagined
- 2) It is greater for God to exist in reality and conceptually than for him to exist conceptually
- 3) Therefore God exists in reality

Assumption: existence in reality is a necessary part of greatness/perfection

# Critiques of Anselm I

- 1) Why is existence in reality greater than existence conceptually? Giving ontological superiority to materialism rather than idealism – Western dualistic thinking
- 2) Kant: greatness/perfection is an ontological property, but existence is not. Existence must precede essence!

E.g. This apple would be better if it is sweet than it is not. But does this mean that this apple would be better if it exists in reality than it doesn't? Meeting the 'real thing' is sometimes disappointing.

# Critiques of Anselm II

- 3) Different people have different conceptions of God. This argument therefore only works to convince those who already conceive of God as that which no other can be greater. But that's begging the question
- 4) What exactly do we mean by 'perfect' or 'great'? Internal contradictions between God's ontology and other theological issues

# Argument from Design: Paley's Watchmaker

An empirical argument (once it is empirical it is likely faulty):

1. The material universe resembles the intelligent productions of human beings in that it exhibits design.
2. The design in any human artifact is the effect of having been made by an intelligent being.
3. Like effects have like causes.
4. Therefore, the design in the material universe is the effect of having been made by an intelligent creator.

# Critiques of Argument from Design

- 1) Etiology: if God made the world, who made God?
- 2) Epistemology: how do we know God made all this? Why not Big Bang? What caused the Big Bang?
- 3) Over-warranted analogy: The world is the same as human artifact, and humans the same as God
- 4) How do we know the world has design? We have not seen it in its totality yet!
- 5) Why must 'order' be created? Hume: psychological habit imposed upon nature

# The Problem of Evil

A central theme in Theodicy: the argument for God's goodness in spite of the existence of suffering

- 1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect
- 2) Evil exists

Premise 1 and 2 contradict each other: God knows evil exists, he has the power to get rid of it, and he is morally perfect so he would get rid of it, but why does evil still exist?

# Responses and Counter-responses

- 1) Deny the existence of evil
  - What then are sufferings?
- 2) Evil is merely the absence of good
  - Good music is merely the absence of bad music?
  - Why not good is the absence of evil? (ontological primacy of good)  
Famous blurb on Einstein → the heat and cold analogy on youtube.



# Responses and Counter-responses II

- 3) Evil is necessary for good to exist.
  - Why so much evil then? A little is enough.
  - This dualism is only necessary conceptually.
  - Perhaps good and evil is merely a conceptual distinction (moral philosophy → no absolute criterion for what is good or what is evil)

# Responses and Counter- responses III

- 4) Evil caused by Satan.
  - Why does God allow Satan to exist?

5) Evil caused by humans

What about natural evil?

Are all moral evils caused by humans?

How about unintended harm executed through humans? E.g. biological instinctive reaction to threat

# Argument from Freewill

- 6) God has reasons for creating or allowing evil to exist → so that humans can exercise their freewill to choose between good and evil.

Assumption: Freewill is a greater good than all the sufferings in the world.

# Responses and Counter-responses

- 1) Evil must exist in order for humans to choose
  - In order to choose between good and evil, humans must have the knowledge or experience of evil. Much evil exists without human knowledge. E.g. slow death of animal, plants, and human in deserted area
  - If it is merely the knowledge of evil, God could just create simulation of evil
    - But simulation is not real enough
    - God is omnipotent enough to make simulation real enough

# Responses and Counter-responses II

- 2) Soul-development argument: evil exist as a means towards developing higher virtues
  - Higher virtues can also be means towards evil, e.g. Courage to kill
  - Evil can result in worse behaviors, e.g. war causes holocaust
  - If higher virtues are important, then believers should spend all their lives imposing pains on themselves and experiencing all sorts of sufferings.
  - What are virtues anyway? (moral philosophy)

# Responses and Counter- responses III

## 3) Evil as a test.

- Test of what? If God is omniscient, then he already knows the results  
→ The results are for you to know.

What if I would rather not know than go through so much suffering. E.g. I don't really want to climb Mount Everest just to know the threshold of my endurance. If God still forces me to do it, then he is impinging on my freewill. If he's going to impinge on my freewill, might as well take away all evil.

- I need to know that evil is a test and not a punishment before I can even take the test. → All evils are trials.  
If all evils are trials then God is not just in not punishing the immoral.  
If all evils are trials then humans must have knowledge of them. Some evil exist without human knowledge.
- If it is knowledge that matters, God could've just simulated evil.  
→ Nothing compares to the real thing.  
But God is omnipotent, he can make simulations super real  
→ But that is lying to us.
- If it is a trial, it means that only the results matter, so it doesn't matter that God lies.
- We won't know if God is already lying to us about many things in the first place. Maybe the bible is a biggest lie.

# Problems with Freewill I: Freewill in Heaven

- 1) If evil exists so that we can have freewill, which is that which makes us humans, does that mean that evil exists in heaven?
- 2) If it doesn't, then we are no longer humans in heaven.
- 3) If we can exist as un-free humans in heaven, why not do it on earth?
- 4) If there is indeed evil in heaven, why bother going to heaven?

# Problems with Freewill II: God's freewill

- 1) From Argument from Design and monotheistic theology: God is also a free being and he is morally good so/because he always chooses to do the good
  - If God can have freewill and always do good, and that he is omnipotent, why not create humans that have freewill and always do good? Why bother creating moral evil?



# Problems with Freewill III: God's omniscience

- 1) If God is omniscient, he knows the past, the present, and the future, i.e. he knows what I have done, what I am doing, and what I am going to do.
- 2) If he knows what I am going to do, then I will definitely do it. I have no choice but to do it.

E.g. from Minority Report and Matrix II

# Problems with Freewill IV: moral illegitimacy

- 1) Freewill is so important that God does not interfere when he sees one man killing another man.
- 2) Therefore, I should not interfere when I see one man killing another man.

If it is morally wrong for me not to interfere, God is also morally wrong not to. God is therefore not morally perfect.

# Problems with Freewill V: Epistemology

How do I know that I have freewill?  
Perhaps God or Satan is making me  
think and say all this.

# Pascal's wager: a pragmatic argument

We can never know if God exists or not, but let's play it safe:

- If I place a wager on God and God exists, I gain eternal bliss, but if God doesn't exist, I don't lose anything. If I don't place a wager on God and God exists, then I am screwed, but if God doesn't exist, my gain is the same as the theist or even less compared to the sense of security from the act of believing

# Counter-arguments to Pascal I

Can we choose to believe in something because of pragmatic reasons?

- E.g. I pay you \$10, 000 to sincerely believe that unicorns exist, would you?
- Does God merely reward those who believe, regardless of whether they sincerely do or not?
- If he does, then he is not a good God

# Counter-arguments to Pascal II

## Problem of Infinite Utility

- There are infinite sets of religions and sub-religious principles out there, so even if I put a wager in one, the probability of this one religion or principle being true is zero  
→  $1 \text{ divided by infinity} = 0$
- The Professor's God option: a God who rewards those who do not believe

# Argument from Miracles

Miracles exist so some great being must be the one who brought about them.

Hume: What are miracles? Miracles are merely phenomena that violate natural laws.

But we don't even know what natural laws are, how can we talk about miracles? Miracles are due to our ignorance, e.g. magic shows.

# Argument from Atonement 1

God sent his only son Jesus to die for the sins of humans.

- Do I and should I always reciprocate a kind act?
- Is it a kind act? Perhaps God has an ulterior motive
- And Jesus was resurrected, so did he really 'die'?
- If he didn't, then God lied to us, then he is not moral
- So what if he lied to us? A utilitarian God would see lying as merely a means to ends!
- A moral philosophical question

Homoiousion: Who exactly is Jesus? Is he the son of God or God?

- Some pastor: The holy trinity is just like three copies of the bible.
- Fails to distinguish between form and content.
- Or that God came in the form of his son. Then God is lying to us.



# Argument from Atonement II

Sacrifice of Jesus is some kind of payment for human sins

- 1) Ransom to the forces of evil.
  - But the son has been reunited with the father. So forces of evil have been cheated by God and that's not what a good God would do
- 2) Restores God's honor which has been insulted by sin.
  - But the insult goes on
- 3) God accepts this as human repayment to him for their sins.
  - But why not accept something less traumatic?
- 4) Jesus suffered on human's behalf.
  - Using a scapegoat is not something a good God would do
- 5) Jesus sent to exemplify for humans the perfect life.
  - Bad timing, should have chosen a better time so that it can be recorded and broadcasted real time

# Final theistic response: God works in mysterious ways

- 1) If he does, then maybe he is the professor's God. Atheists are the ones going to heaven. The bible is used to trick us. Satan is actually his son. Etc..
- We cannot use human tools and criteria to judge God
  - Then how can we claim to have chosen anything at all? We use human consciousness and values to judge before choosing!  
The bible is written in human language too, does that mean that the bible is meaningless?
  - If we cannot judge God's actions then we cannot even argue that what God does is good or that he has a reason for letting evil exist
  - If we cannot judge then we cannot choose. This means that God's sacrifice of his son is meaningless.

# Miscellaneous notes

1) God bless us all.

- This is impossible because resources are not enough for all to be blessed. So some people will be cursed.

→ Those who do not believe are cursed.

- Why does God need me to believe in him in order for me to be blessed? There are believers who are assholes and non-believers who are saints.

2) Why existence and not nothingness? i.e. why did God create the world in the first place?

3) If God is not perfect, then I have equal reasons to believe in Satan. It becomes a pragmatic issue of serving the stronger master. Since the criteria for being a good theist are so strict it is almost impossible to be a good believer, there are probably more souls in hell than heaven. On judgment day, by sheer numbers, Satan would win the war. Then I have chosen wisely.

# Why religion?

- Freud: the desire for a father figure
- Marx: a product of social stratification
- Durkheim: society's way of maintaining it's own health
- Bioanthropologist: neurological hard-wiring
- Phenomenologist: solution to absurdity of ephemeral existence, the nature of consciousness to seek eternity
- Existentialist: solution to existential loneliness

# Conclusions

- Philosophy pushes the limits of reason, which leads to nihilism
- Reason can disprove anything
- Reason cannot prove anything
- Reason is not the foundation of any belief, regardless of whether it is the belief in science, morality, or God
- We cannot choose to believe.
- Our socialization has registered within us certain dispositions that makes us believe in A rather than B: culture is the background that can never be known, i.e. the incognito that makes me believe
- We are not very different from one another. We are all bounded by non-reason in our beliefs
- Non-reasonable beliefs cannot be universalized. It is thus pointless to impose our beliefs onto others.