

Initial Objections

One must be clear, at this stage, that the following objections do not constitute arguments against the existence of God but, rather, are merely objections to arguments advanced for the existence of God.

Objections to The Argument from Design

Let us first examine the cogency of Argument from Design. This argument, as we have seen, suggests that design is as evident in the universe as it is in a watch; from that, we are supposed to infer the existence of a designer and conclude that such a designer is God.

An Irreligious Argument?

The Argument from Design is fundamentally irreligious. Bear in mind that the conception of God for which we are arguing is one who is supremely great: all-powerful, all-knowing and all-good. We, as lowly human beings, have but a fraction of the knowledge and wisdom that God possesses.

However, when we look at the universe, wonder at it and conclude that it must have had a designer, we are making a judgement about it. We are, if you like, judging God's work; Paley, you will note, put himself in this judging role. Thus, in order to make the Argument from Design, we need to judge the design and this implicitly diminishes the God we are saying is so great. Moreover, to say that the universe has a designer is to make a scientific hypothesis and all that comes out of a scientific hypothesis is a scientific conclusion that either corroborates the hypothesis or not. In making the design argument, are we suggesting that we submit our prayers to a scientific hypothesis?

The Universe as a Manufactured Item

The Argument from Design compares the universe to a manufactured item. One might re-work Paley's argument as follows. Suppose I belong to one of the few remaining civilisations not connected to the outside world by phone or internet etc... Now suppose that, whilst walking near where I live, I come across a discarded iPhone. Being an intelligent human

being I infer that the item has been designed. But why should I infer just one designer? – The components of the mobile phone, as we know, are answerable to many different inventions made by many different people. The same can be said for the design of the various pieces of software that such a device runs. Note, that there is nothing in the Design Argument that entails the existence of just one designer – although Paley refers to 'a designer' there is nothing within the argument itself that justifies this assumption. There may have been many creators – not just one all-powerful, all-knowing God!

Moral Character

There is nothing in the Argument from Design that specifies the moral character of God (or many gods). While we may have been designed with a moral psychology, the fact that we commit acts of both moral evil and moral goodness does not imply anything about the goodness or otherwise of our creator.

Does God Still Exist?

If we accept the design argument as true, we do not thereby accept that God still exists. There is nothing in the design argument that suggests God still exists – so, while the universe may have had a creator (or creators), there is nothing to suggest that such a creator continues to exist now (having set everything in motion). Perhaps God was a finite being?

Objections to The First Cause (Cosmological) Argument

The Cosmological Argument is not an argument for theism but merely for deism. In other words (and like the design argument), it says nothing about the persistence of God beyond his role in starting things off. Theism is the position that there is a God; Deism is the position that a god or gods existed at some point – whether they exist now is a moot point.

A Poor Argument

The Cosmological Argument is an example of a poor argument (it is a cheat). It invokes the causal principle

– namely, that every event has a cause. God caused the universe but, if every event has a cause, then the invocation of God in relation to the creation of the universe begs the question: what caused God? Theists insist that God has no cause. Thus, the Cosmological Argument invokes the causal principle as true until it becomes inconvenient. You cannot have a principle that ‘everything has a cause’ which you invoke when it suits you and discard when it doesn’t. Either it is a principle or it is not.

What Does ‘Cause’ Mean?

We can all specify examples of causes. Gravity causes things to fall to the floor, the allied occupation of Iraq caused instability in the Middle East, the news that you would be attending these classes caused me to be happy and so on. We know what causes look like because we can link them to their effects – thus, we know what ‘cause’ means. However, we have no idea what kind of causality is involved when we think about divine creation (no idea about the process – if any – that takes place). Since this is not something we know about, we cannot meaningfully talk about cause at all.

One Step Back?

I started these classes by asking you to think about the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?”

One might invoke the existence of God to try to answer it. However, this just puts the problem one step back as it were. By introducing God into the equation we have merely supposed the existence of another ‘something’ the existence of which, in turn, needs to be explained. If the existence of God is left unsolved then what justification do we have for introducing God?

If the answer is that God is infinite then we are invoking the existence of the very being for which the Cosmological Argument is supposed to supply an explanation. In other words, we need to presuppose the existence of God for an argument that is supposed to prove the existence of God.

Objections the The Ontological Argument

In short, this argument asserts that the definition of a perfect God entails His existence. In other words, God necessarily exists because if you conceive of something not existing then that is not God you are conceiving of. However, notice that it is we who are defining God in this way – consequently, if God exists as a matter of necessity, it is only because God has been conceptualised this way; namely, as something that exists. And that is a circular argument.

Next week we will look at two further arguments for the existence of God before looking at arguments against the existence of God.