

Philosophy Essay

Q1a) Explain Copleston's version of the cosmological argument. (33)

▲1a) Fredrick Copleston a catholic priest is famously known for his BBC radio debate with agnostic philosopher Bertrand Russell. Copleston reformulated Aquinas's cosmological argument and based his argument on contingency.

▲As we all know, that contingency is something which relies on something else for its existence. So he believed that all things in this world are contingent e.g. us as humans, we would not have existed without our parents. Therefore there must be a cause for everything in the universe that exists outside of it. He makes this cause God as it has to be a necessary being which contains in itself the reason for its own existence.

He strengthens his argument by using the idea of sufficient reason which was first developed by Leibniz which basically means that every cause has an explanation. Copleston says that nothing in this world or any known object has within itself the reason for its own existence e.g. a plant doesn't have within in it a reason for its own existence. So therefore all these objects must have a reason for their existence external to themselves. He concludes that this reason must be an existent being. This being is either itself the reason for its own existence or it is not. If it is not then we go into an infinite regress, i.e. a series of beings each dependent for its existence on a previous being, a series that goes on forever. In order to avoid this, Copleston claims, we must conceive of a being which contains within itself the reason for its own existence, that is to say, "which cannot not — exist." He states:

'Cause is a necessary and reflection. Only contingent beings can have cause. God is his own and reflection and is not the cause of himself and reflection in the universe, which is not an explanation of the existence of some being.'

Copleston's principle of sufficient reason explains a lot for this world. Putting this into practise it becomes clear as if God did not exist or if He was contingent, than we would not exist as He is the overall reason for our existence as if we go back to our cause we get to our parents and then they go back to their parents and so on we eventually get to God. But as we are sure of our existence it can be said that we have a reason external to our self for our existence as explained before which is God.

Copleston also takes another route to formulate his cosmological argument for the existence of God. He does this by explaining more deeply why we can't have infinite regress. E.g. 'If you add up contingent beings you get contingent beings. No matter how many you add up, you still get contingent beings. Similarly if you add up contingent beings to infinity you still get contingent beings, not

a necessary being. In conclusion there has to be either a cause for this series of contingent beings or there is no cause for them. Having no cause can easily be ruled out as each being is contingent i.e. it relies on something else for its existence. Therefore there must be a cause to the series external to itself as the contingent beings rely on something else for their existence already. Therefore it is easy to conclude that this cause is God.

Q1b) 'Copleston does not prove that God exists.' Discuss. (17)

▲1b) Firstly to begin with I would like to explain an error in one of Copleston's quotes. He stated '~~---the explanation of the existence of some things is not adequate to the existence of some other things.~~' How much is adequate? ▲An adequate amount for one person will not be adequate for another e.g. for an adult, eating 4 times a day is adequate whereas for a child eating 3 times a day is adequate. The same question was raised by Bertrand Russell in the live BBC debate and his reply was that by adequate I mean a total explanation.

To prove the existence of God Copleston used the principle of sufficient reason meaning that every cause has an explanation. In theory it is correct but there are some things which simply do not have an explanation. For example we as humans have an explanation but it is external to ourselves but what about energy. It can never be created nor destroyed only transferred from one place to the other, what is its explanation? If it doesn't rely on anything, then isn't it necessary? Similarly if there is a being external to us which is the reason for our existence and that this being must be necessary, then why can't it be energy; it is also necessary. This is a major flaw to Copleston's argument but on the other hand it is arguable that it's just our lack of knowledge that we don't have an explanation for the cause of energy. ▲As Leibniz's explained sufficient reason, he also explained that even though we don't know the explanation it doesn't mean that there is no explanation; everything has an explanation.

Continuing from this why does there have to be a reason or a sufficient reason for everything. David Hume who studied human psychology explained that it is human nature to create an explanation for everything. He explained that it is sufficient to say that the world has just existed and therefore human nature has created God. Russell reduced the universe to a mere, creature, of which its existence does not demand an explanation. This is reasonable but Hume also said that just because we can't conceive something than this does not mean that it doesn't exist. He was talking about infinite regress but similarly if we can't conceive God than this does not mean that He doesn't exist.

Copleston then explains infinite regress by using the series of contingent beings. ▲According to Bertrand Russell this is a fallacy as for example human has a mother does not mean the entire human race has a mother similarly if each contingent being has a cause than this does not mean that the whole

series of contingent beings has one cause. Therefore the whole argument falls apart. David Hume also explained this problem when he was criticizing the cosmological argument. He stated:

~~How you can justify a series of events or a collection of events or a series of events is no longer a question. It is a question of whether or not you can justify a series of events or a series of events. This is a very explicit explanation of the cause of events.~~

In conclusion I can say that Copleston does not prove the existence of God but in Hume's words that does not mean that He doesn't exist. An event happened a few days ago and it was regarding a close friend of mine who is an atheist and when I explained this argument to him he said that it is really good and that he believes that it proves Gods existence. Then I asked him that therefore this must means that he believes in God, he replied no giving a reason; '...just'. This means that even though it might have been proved it still didn't change his faith. Similarly I believe in Gods existence and if there was a theory that proved that there was no God I still wouldn't believe in it as my faith is that there is a God. Therefore I will always say that Copleston proves Gods existence as I am already bias as I believe in God. Similarly an atheist would believe that Copleston did not prove that God exists for the same reasons to why I agree with Copleston.