

Religious experiences, the cosmological argument & the teleological argument

Religious experiences differ from an ordinary experience as the religious experiences are part of a religious life that includes the ups and downs of faith, doubt, sacrifice and achievement, and caused by God or God's. For one to claim they have had a religious experience we understand that he/she is directly aware of God or God's actions. Such experiences are said to be "veridical" which means that they are experiences of something divine, therefore God exists. According to William James (1842-1910), religious experiences are experimental, like perception. They are quite different from thinking about God or trying to imagine God's nature. A person can feel immediately aware of God, and so connected to him. This awareness tends to block out everything else temporarily, perhaps even to the degree that the distinction between the person and what he/she is aware of disappears. You get certain sensations when encountering religious experiences, such as the feeling of awe, fascination etc. Persons who had such experience could have their lives changed and a noticeable change in behaviour. Many stories of this are in the holy bible.

The cosmological argument questions "why does anything exist? Why something rather than nothing?" The argument is that unless God exists, this question is unanswerable. Like the ontological argument, the cosmological argument is a posteriori; it relies on the fact that something, the universe, exists and we can only know this through experience. Everything that exists (you and I) must have a cause, in a sense that cause is our parents. However we can repeat that question indefinitely, what caused my parents and so on. We can go back to the beginning of the universe, and then ask what caused the universe? If the universe began to exist, then it must have a cause for its existence. Something can't come out of nothing. What we need is something that causes things to exist, but the existence of which isn't caused itself. As Plato said, "There must be a first cause of all this motion." Only God could be this cause.

One criticism is that does god explain it all? Does the cosmological argument support the existence of God, as we normally think of God? For example, it doesn't show that there is only one cause of the universe; nor does it show that this cause is perfect, omniscient, omnipotent or cares about people. The cosmological argument only needs "God" to be able to create the universe. It doesn't say anything else about God and it also fails to explain the cause of God. Also, why does it have to be God? Some argue that's it is matter/energy (in some form) that is a necessary being.

Another criticism from Hume is that we can't know that everything that begins to exist has a cause. Also Russell objects that we can't apply this principle to the universe itself. Other philosophers argue that an infinite regression of causes is possible, so we can't infer that God exists.

The teleological argument is an a posteriori argument for the existence of God or a creator based on perceived evidence of order, purpose, design and/or direction in nature. The word "teleological" is derived from the Greek word telos, meaning end or purpose. Although there are variations in the argument, the main argument is that X (universe, earth, mankind, evolution etc) is too (complex, orderly, adaptive, apparently purposeful, and/or beautiful) to have occurred randomly or accidentally and therefore, X must have been created by a (sentient, intelligent, wise, and/or purposeful) being. Therefore God is that (sentient, intelligent, wise, and/or purposeful) being. This brings us to the conclusion that God is this being, therefore he exists.

The watchmaker analogy is associated with William Paly (1743-1805). He wrote a book called the "Natural Theology: Or Evidences of the Existence and attributes of the Deity Collected from the Appearances of Nature (1802). He compares the universe to a watch, and argues that a watch proves the existence of a watchmaker thus the universe proves the existence of a great Architect. Charles Darwin found Paley's arguments compelling; he later developed his theory of evolution in his 1859 book *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, which puts forward an alternative explanation for complexity in nature. However Darwin's theories opposed the beliefs of the creationism theory which caused him some problems with society.

David Hume (1711-76) was one philosopher that challenged the teleological argument, in his book "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion" he argues his analysis of cause and effect and concluded that our knowledge of things is based solely on habit. For example when I kick a ball, people can predict what the reaction will be because of seeing it beforehand a countless number of times. So the cause is me kicking the ball, and the effect is the projection of the ball. His views also said that "Even if the world was designed, there is no need to suppose either a single or a wholly good creator".

Immanuel Kant (1724-1796) was influenced by Hume's ideas and concluded that conclusions that go beyond observation are invalid. Therefore, arguments such as the teleological, cosmological and creationism are invalid because they go beyond space and time.

By understanding not only the teleological arguments, but the cosmological and creationism arguments I conclude that such beliefs are invalid without proof. We have scientific information which suggests the theory of evolution, and this is backed up with evidence. So this puts the view of creationism invalid from my point of view. However I cannot prove that the teleological argument is true or not, but going by Kant's arguments – such things that go beyond observation are invalid. Hume's arguments on habit do seem realistic, as habit does play a major role in our lives. For instance if I throw a pen in the air, based on habit, I know it will come back down again – without thinking, "will it come down or not?"