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GOD'S EXISTENCE

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INTRODUCTION: ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Many questions arise when considering the characteristics of God's nature. According to philosopher Robert Scruton, the existent God known as "God of the philosophers" is described with great consistency by "scholastic logicians, church divines, Islamic, Jewish and Christian theologians, rationalist philosophers (such as Descartes and Leibniz) and modern Thomists."¹ A simplification of the beliefs on characteristics of God by the groups listed above is, God is conceived as timeless, immutable, omniscient, omnipotent, and supremely good². According to modern philosophy, God exists with all the attributes normal attributed to Him.

PROBLEMS WITH THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Timelessness creates a problem in and of itself. If God is timeless, then can He know those truths about the world that are dependent upon its temporality? Answering yes to the prior question raises another question of when did He know it. And, if God has always known something, then are we predestined to carry out specific tasks? J. L. Mackie presents the theists with a dilemma in his work *The*

¹ Roger Scruton, *Modern Philosophy: An Introduction and Survey* (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), 128.

² *Modern Philosophy*, 128.

*Miracles of Theism*³. First, assume God is omnipotent. Following that assumption, it is known that God can make any possible object. Consider God cannot control the object because of free will. Then it concludes that if God can make it, then he is not omnipotent. And, if God cannot make it, he is not omnipotent. As it is shown by the above example, many problems arise from the beliefs about the nature of God when basing conclusions on assumed causes⁴. Philosopher David Hume's view defeats Mackie by breaking down Mackie's argument.

David Hume states in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and the Natural History of Religion*, that assuming a cause creates untrue effects, resulting in invalid conclusions about God. After considering Mackie's dilemma and applying Hume's reasoning, it follows that assuming God's timelessness leads to the untrue effects resulting from this particular attribute of God's character. If God is timeless, then a slippery slope takes effect leading to the conclusion that all human actions are predestined by God. Hume believes no one has the ability to reach a valid conclusion that God knows everything in advance. Hence,

³ John L. Mackie, *The Miracles of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God*, (Oxford, USA: Oxford University Press, 1983), 160-161.

⁴ John L. Mackie, 160-161.

everything each person does is predestined is an untrue conclusion, because the cause was never justified or proven. Overall, Hume is using the reasoning that no one knows the true nature of God, we go on presuppositions about God's character to have effects and conclusions⁵.

Philosopher Thomas Hobbes agrees with Hume. He states that we do not have knowledge about the characteristics of God, but we have faith alone. Our faith, according to Hobbes, should not lead us to conclusions about God's nature but lead us into admiration and adoration of God. Hobbes goes further in stating that trying to extract effects and conclusions from faith is ridiculous and cannot be done to obtain truth about the nature of God and His relation to our world. As Hobbes puts it, "But they who venture to reason of his nature from these attributes of honor, losing their understanding in the very first attempt, fall from one inconvenience into another, without end, and without number..."⁶ Basically, those that try to reach a greater knowledge from faith alone will only be more confused and less knowledgeable than before they started their endeavor.

⁵ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and The Natural History of Religion*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 14-17.

⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, excerpt in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 121.

Spinoza also disagrees that any truth can come of using the attributes of God as a building block to gain knowledge about reality. He discusses his view in two letters. The first letter he addressed to Henry Oldenburg in September of 1661 C.E. Spinoza starts by stating that God is a Being of infinite attributes. Each attribute by itself is infinite and perfect in and of itself. Supporting his assertion, Spinoza states that we know that the previous definition is the true definition of God by the evidence of the fact that by God we understand a supremely, perfect and absolutely infinite Being. The overall argument posed states first, "there cannot be two existing substances differing entirely in essence."⁷ The second assertion is "a substance cannot be produced, since to exist is of its essence."⁸ The third premise is "every substance must be infinite, or supremely perfect in its kind."⁹ Spinoza's point to his argument is that God's attributes cannot be known to humans, because the attributes must have a cause to exist in the universe as we know it. And, since the attributes of God are not

⁷ Baruch Spinoza, "From the Letters to Oldenburg and to Meyer" in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 122-123.

⁸ "From the Letter to Oldenburg and to Meyer," 123.

⁹ Baruch Spinoza, 123.

knowable to us, the attributes are based solely on the faith of the followers.

GOD'S EXISTENCE

Spinoza also gives a proof in his work *Ethics* that expresses that God must exist with the attributes usually attributed to Him. The proposition states, "God, or substance consisting of infinite attributes, each of which expresses eternal and infinite essence, necessarily exists.¹⁰" The proof starts by saying, "If you deny this, conceive, if you can, that God does not exist. Therefore... his essence does not involve existence. But this is absurd... Therefore, God necessarily exists."¹¹ From consideration and study on the attributes of God, we are lead to question how we know God exists like from Spinoza's proof listed above.

René Descartes is one of the most famous philosophers that attempted to prove God exists from a skeptical viewpoint. In the First Meditation in *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes defends why there is just reason to doubt all things, especially the material, as long as science has not created any new foundations on which can provide evidence for not doubting all things. In the

¹⁰ Baruch Spinoza, *The Ethics*, excerpt in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 133.

¹¹ *The Ethics*, 133.

following five of the total six meditations, Descartes reasons why we should believe in the existence of God. Descartes goes as far as to state he cannot even know that his arm or hand exists. He thinks it is exists, but he does not know it exists. There could be an evil genius that is creating this fictitious world deceiving him. Descartes reasons that it is much better to believe there is a God than to doubt His existence. The consequences of unbelief are so horrendous that he concludes that it is in his best interest to believe in God than to risk suffering the consequences of unbelief¹².

Blaise Pascal agreed with Descartes and supported the skeptical position in his 1670 C. E. work "The Wager."¹³ Pascal starts by stating "we know there is an infinite, but fail to know its nature, just as we know it to be false that numbers are finite."¹⁴ From this assertion, Pascal goes on to state that it is possible to know God without knowing what he is. But, assuming there is a God, we cannot comprehend Him because of his infiniteness. Because we cannot comprehend God, we are incapable of knowing or

¹² René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, excerpt in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 22-55.

¹³ Blaise Pascal, "The Wager," in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 94-96.

¹⁴ "The Wager," 95.

not knowing him. Furthermore, God is or He is not. Reason does not provide answer to whether God is or is not.

Infinity separates us from God. As Pascal puts it, "There is an extremity of this infinite distance a game is being played in which heads or tails will turn up. How will you wager?¹⁵" If God exists, there is eternal life and happiness. Pascal states anyone that would not wager that God exists is foolish. There is so much to gain if you wager correctly. I would add there is so much to lose if you wager incorrectly. You would endure an eternity of misery and error. Like Descartes, Pascal finds it much more appealing and reasonable to believe in God because of the possible rewards and consequences. Pascal says that it will not hurt you to believe, and then find out, God does not exist. You will still be a good person and have led a productive life of "faithfulness, honesty, humbleness, gratefulness, generosity, sincerity, and friendliness."¹⁶

David Hume states in his work *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*¹⁷ that there exists no instrument of science or reasoning to use to prove the existence of God. God is unquantifiable. There is nothing in nature for us

¹⁵ Blaise Pascal, 95.

¹⁶ Pascal, 95.

¹⁷ David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 550-551.

to perceive with any of our senses to provide real, tangible evidence of the existence of God. Another form of skepticism stemming from the same assertion above is that everything is in doubt, like Descartes states in his meditations. Truth is only reached by doubting everything and using reasoning to deduct the validity of anything.¹⁸

In order to later understand the assumption in the Teleological Argument favored by Kant, the Cosmological Argument must be understood. The Cosmological Argument in essence is an argument for "first cause." First, consider any event happening in the world: either it is unexplained, or it has a cause. This is also true for that cause, and of its cause. If the series of causes extends forever, we never come to the first cause. Then, the series as a whole is without explanation. If this is the case, all the explanations that occur in the series are insufficient. None of the explanations really tells why the effect occurs. To find an explanation of anything, we must find a cause which is the explanation of everything. The Cosmological Argument states the "world either lacks an explanation, in which none of our attempts to understand it has a foundation and the theological hypothesis is as good as any other, or the world has an explanation which is the

¹⁸ *An Inquiry of Human Understanding*, 550-551.

first cause.¹⁹” Therefore, the argument is only valid if we can “show that there exists a being who is the cause of himself and whose existence requires no further explanation than is contained in his own nature.²⁰”

Philosopher Immanuel Kant was sympathetic to the Teleological Argument to prove the existence of God. The premise of the argument is that the world displays an order that is good and one that shows a manifested design. The natural order of the world did not become that way by accident. The assumption involved in the argument that there is a force outside our world that causes the world to be the way it is. The assumption is drawn from the conclusion of the cosmological argument. And without the conclusion of the cosmological argument, the teleological argument has no weight. A sufficient condition for the creation of our world lies upon the existence of an all powerful, benevolent being motivated by inscrutable purposes.²¹

The Cosmological Argument and the Teleological Argument rest in a last argument, according to Kant, known

¹⁹ Roger Scruton, 135.

²⁰ Scruton, 135.

²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, in *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 579-633; Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, excerpt in, *Modern Philosophy: An Anthology of Primary Sources*, ed. Roger Ariew and Eric Watkins, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998), 634-749.

as the Ontological Argument. The Ontological Argument supplies the deficiencies of the Cosmological and Teleological Arguments. Also, it proves that God has all the attributes known to him through piety and tradition. It says that God is a necessary being with all positive attributes possible, including infinitely powerful, infinitely wise, and infinitely good. The Ontological Argument, which is attributed to St. Anselm-Archbishop of Canterbury, is arguably the only possibly argument for the existence of God and the only one not disposed of.

In the Ontological Argument, we know that God is the greatest possible being. God possesses every possible positive attribute and every perfection. "If the idea of God exists only in our mind, not in reality, there would be an idea of something superior to it, namely of the being that possessed not only all the perfections already conceived, but also the additional perfection of real existence.²²" This is contrary to the hypothesis. The conclusion to be drawn from the discussion is the idea of the most perfect being must correspond to reality. Existence is part of the nature of the most perfect being. Because of the most perfect being's nature, the most

²² Scruton, 136.

perfect being must exist. Therefore, God exists necessarily and not contingently²³.

Norman Malcolm has defended the Ontological Argument by arguing that existence is not a predicate, but necessary existence is a predicate. God is proven to necessarily exist through the Ontological Argument; therefore, God must exist only necessarily is true for the predicate²⁴.

Matson's Argument in Conclusion

Wallace Matson addresses the possible messenger sent by God on His behalf. Applying Matson's theory to Christian leads us to study the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Matson claims that for the crowds who claim to have seen Jesus to have valid claims that their assertions must follow a written text, and it must be that more than one crowd experienced these encounters with miracles at different places at different times. Or, Matson claims, the assertions cannot be valid by the perception alone absent meeting those two conditions. If we apply this to Jesus, the Bible exists and suffices for the written text. In particular, I would reference the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophesized of the coming of Christ before any person

²³ Scruton, 136.

²⁴ Scruton, 136

claimed his existence in our world. The New Testament, as Matson also points out, was written by those that claimed to have witnessed Jesus, or wrote directly from the observances of a witness. The second condition is also met by Christ in that many saw His miracles. There was not just one crowd that witnessed the supernaturally inspired acts of Jesus. Jesus ministered and performed miracles in many different places during His life; therefore, many different crowds witnessed His supernatural gifts. After considering Matson's argument, I find that Jesus Christ meets Matson's conditions for existence. In reference to this argument, God exists as long as the argument is valid²⁵.

In conclusion, God must exist. If the Teleological, Cosmological, and Ontological arguments are considered by themselves without the assistance of the other two, then none of them prove the existence of God. But, taking the Teleological, Cosmological, and Ontological argument as collective three prong argument, proves the existence of God with all the attributes normal given to Him. Matson's argument only adds to strengthening the belief that God exists as He is known to the Christian community²⁶.

²⁵ Wallace Matson, *The Existence of God*, (Cornell University: Cornell University Press, 1965), 128-138.

²⁶ Wallace Matson, 128-138.

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