Hume’s Critique

David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*
Hume’s Criticisms

- Analogy of universe to watch isn’t strong
- Universe may be self-organizing
- Why machine, rather than animal or vegetable?
Hume’s Criticisms

• Taking analogy seriously: God not infinite

• “By this method of reasoning, you renounce all claim to infinity in any of the attributes of the Deity. For, as the cause ought only to be proportioned to the effect, and the effect, so far as it falls under our cognisance, is not infinite; what pretensions have we, upon your suppositions, to ascribe that attribute to the Divine Being?
Hume’s Criticisms

• Taking analogy seriously: God not perfect

• “This world, for aught he knows, is very faulty and imperfect, compared to a superior standard; and was only the first rude essay of some infant deity, who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his lame performance: it is the work only of some dependent, inferior deity; and is the object of derision to his superiors: it is the production of old age and dotage in some superannuated deity; and ever since his death, has run on at adventures, from the first impulse and active force which it received from him.”
Hume’s Criticisms

- Can’t compare to other universes

- “...it is impossible for us to tell, from our limited views, whether this system contains any great faults, or deserves any considerable praise, if compared to other possible, and even real systems.”
Hume’s Criticisms

• Maybe earlier, botched universes: “Many worlds might have been botched and bungled, throughout an eternity, ere this system was struck out.”
Hume’s Criticisms

• Maybe made by committee: “A great number of men join in building a house or ship, in rearing a city, in framing a commonwealth; why may not several deities combine in contriving and framing a world?”
Hume’s Skepticism

- Variability: Many hypotheses are possible
- Undecidability: We have no evidence that would let us select the most probable
- So, we cannot choose among the possibilities; we cannot establish God’s existence
Hume’s Skepticism

• “...we have no data to establish any system of cosmogony. Our experience, so imperfect in itself, and so limited both in extent and duration, can afford us no probable conjecture concerning the whole of things.”

• “...by what phenomena in nature can we pretend to decide the controversy?”
Hume’s Criticisms

- Difficulties in nature

- “For this is not, by any means, what we expect from infinite power, infinite wisdom, and infinite goodness. Why is there any misery at all in the world? Not by chance surely. From some cause then. Is it from the intention of the Deity? But he is perfectly benevolent. Is it contrary to his intention? But he is almighty.”
Three Arguments Against God’s Existence

A Priori:
- Argument from Incoherence

A Posteriori:
- Argument from the Completeness of Physics
- Argument from Evil
Argument from Incoherence

❖ Omnipotence:
❖ Can God make a rock so heavy He can’t lift it?
❖ Can God surrender His own power?
❖ Can God resign and become something other than God?

❖ Omniscience:
❖ “I think, I am.” Can God know that?
❖ Can God forget anything?

❖ Goodness: Can God do evil?
Argument from Physics

- Physics is complete
- It offers a purely physical explanation for everything
- What room is left for God?
- The hypothesis that God exists explains nothing—there’s nothing left to explain
Laplace

• Given the state of the world at any time, if we understand the laws of physics, we can predict its state at any other time

• Napoleon: “Why is there no mention of God?”

• Laplace: “I have no need of that hypothesis.”

• Ockham’s Razor: Don’t multiply entities beyond necessity
Argument from Physics

• Aquinas: “But it seems that everything we see in the world can be accounted for by other principles, supposing God did not exist. For all natural things can be reduced to one principle which is nature; and all voluntary things can be reduced to one principle which is human reason, or will. Therefore there is no need to suppose God’s existence.”

• His reply: The cosmological argument: “all things that are changeable and capable of defect must be traced back to an immovable and self-necessary first principle.”
The Problem of Evil

• If God exists, He is all good, all knowing, and all powerful
• If He is all good, He is willing to prevent evil
• If He is all knowing, He knows how to prevent it
• If He is all powerful, He can prevent it
• But evil exists
• So, God does not exist
The Problem of Evil

- Assumption: If God
  - were willing to prevent evil,
  - knew how to prevent it, and
  - was able to prevent it, then
- Evil would not exist
The Problem of Evil

- Aquinas: “If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore God does not exist.”

- His reply:
Moral Evils
Moral Evils
Moral Evils
Moral Evils
Moral Evils
Moral Evils
Moral Evils
Moral Evils
Moral Evils
Moral Evils
Natural Evils
Natural Evils
Natural Evils
Natural Evils
Natural Evils
Natural Evils
Key Premise

- God is all good, all knowing, and all powerful
- So, God wants to prevent evil, knows how, and can
- But evil exists
- The argument depends on the premise: If God wanted to prevent evil, knew how, and could, evil wouldn’t exist
- What’s the argument for that?
Possible Solutions

God

Form

Matter

Plato, Gnostics, Mani, Avicenna

Building

Philo

Man

Origen

Plotinus, Augustine, Hinduism

Evil

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Possible Solutions

- Efficient Cause
  - Bad Builder?
- Formal Cause
  - Bad Design?
- Material Cause
  - Bad Materials?
- Final Cause
  - Bad Purpose?

Or:

- User Error?
- Not a bug; a feature?
Augustine: Part of the Plan

- We must judge universe as a whole, not part by part
- Analogy: the best life is not one with no adversity, but with adversity overcome
- It is good that there is some evil
Aquinas’s Reply

• “As Augustine says (Enchiridion xi): “Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.” This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good.”
Augustine: General Providence

- General providence of God: system of natural law underlies everything good
- But that system also produces evils
- The good far outweighs the evil
Augustine: Evil as privation

• Plotinus (204-270): Evil is not a thing; it is the absence of good

• God didn’t create evil; he simply created things with differing degrees of goodness

• But that variety is itself good

• Whatever is, is good
Augustine: Corruptibility

- Only God is perfect
- To create, God had to create things that were imperfect, corruptible
- Humans in particular are corruptible
- We have the freedom to choose evil
Evil as a Privation
Augustine: Free Will

• Free will can’t explain natural evils

• Punishment for original sin?

• Who gave us the capacity and sometime inclination to do wrong? God

• In the end, the problem is insoluble

• We cannot understand God
Evil is a problem for the atheist too

If there is no God, then there is nothing but the natural world

But if so, there is no such thing as evil

There is evil

So, there must be a God
Kant’s Moral Argument

- We can’t prove God’s existence rationally
- But we can’t live and act except by assuming that God exists
Kant’s Moral Argument

- Bad things happen to good people; the wicked prosper
- Why, then, be good?
Kant’s Moral Argument

• It’s rational to be moral only if it’s rewarded
• That doesn’t happen in this life
• It must happen in another life
• So, there must be an afterlife, and a just God
Kant’s Moral Argument

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- But we can’t live and act except by assuming that God exists