

INTRODUCTION

It is one thing to elaborate a coherent concept of God, it is quite another to know, apart from revelation, that a being actually exists. A proof of the existence of God would yield such knowledge and it is the task of natural theology to evaluate arguments that intend to be such proofs. As a prelude to revealed theology natural theology restricts the assumption fit to serve as premise in the arguments to things naturally knowable by humans, i.e. knowable without special revelations from super-natural sources. Many people have hoped that such natural religious knowledge would be universally communicated and would justify a form of religious practice that would appeal to all humanhood because of its rationality. Such a religion would be a natural religion. The history of natural theology has produced a bewildering variety of arguments for the existence of God. The four main types are the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, the teleological argument and the moral argument. Of these we shall be concerned with the cosmological argument which is otherwise known as the argument from Design.

The key premises of various cosmological arguments are statements of obvious facts of a general sort about the world. Thus the argument to a first cause begins with the observation that there are quite a few things undergoing change and things causing change. If something is a cause of such a change by something else, then there is an infinitely long chain of causes of change. But it is alleged there cannot be a causal chain of infinite length. Therefore there is something that causes change but it is not caused to change by anything else i.e. a first cause. Many critics of this form of the argument deny its assumption that there cannot be an infinite causal regress chain of causes. This argument also fails to show that there is only one first cause and does not prove that a first cause must have such divine attributes as omniscience, omnipotence, and perfect goodness.

A version of the cosmological argument that has attracted more attention from contemporary philosophers is the argument from contingency to necessity. It starts with the observation that there are *contingent beings* — beings that could have failed to exist. Since

contingent beings do not exist of logical necessity, a contingent being must be caused to exist by some other being, for otherwise there would be no explanation of why it exists rather than not doing so. Either the causal chain of contingent beings has a first member, a contingent being not caused by another contingent being it is infinitely long. If on the other hand the chain has a first member than a necessary being exists and causes it. After all being contingent the first member must have a cause, but its cause cannot be another contingent being. Hence its cause has to be non-contingent i.e. being that could not fail to exist and so is necessary. If on the other hand the chain is infinitely long then a necessary being exists and causes the chain as a whole. This is because the chain as a whole being itself contingent required a cause that must be non-contingent service it is not part of the chain. In either case if there are contingent beings, a necessary being exists. The critics of this argument attacked its assumption that there must be an explanation for existence of every contingent being. Rejecting the principle that there is a sufficient reason for the existence of each contingent thing, they argue that the existence of at least some contingent things is an inexplicable brute fact. And even if the principle of sufficient reason is true, its truth is not obvious and so it would not be irrational to deny it. Accordingly we may conclude that this version of the cosmological argument does not prove the existence of God in the open but the question of whether it shows that theistic belief is rational is left open.

The starting point of teleological arguments is the phenomenon of bold directness in nature. Aquinas begins with the claim that we see that things which lack intelligence act for an end so as to achieve the best result. Modern science has discredited this universal metaphysical teleology, but many biological systems do seem to display remarkable adaptation of means to ends. Thus as William Paley insisted, the eye is adapted to see and its parts co-operate in complex ways to produce sight. This suggests an analogy between such biological systems and human artifacts, which are known to be products of intelligent design. Spelled out in mechanical terms, the analogy grounds the claim that the world as a whole

is like a vast machine composed of many smaller machines. Machines are constructed by intelligent human designers. Since like effects have like causes, the world as a whole and many of the parts are therefore probably products of design by an intelligence resembling the human but greater in proportion to the magnitude of its effects. Because the form of the argument rests on an analogy it is known as the analogical argument for the *existence of God*. It is also known as the *Design argument*, since it concludes to the existence of an intelligent designer of the world.

Hume subjected the design argument to a sustained criticism in his '*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.' Most scholars suppose that the character Philo speaks for Hume. Hume does not actually reject the argument. He does however think that it warrants only the very weak conclusion that the cause or causes of order in the Universe probably bears some remote analogy to human intelligence. As this way of putting it indicates, the argument does not rule out polytheism. Moreover, the analogy with human artifices suggests that the designer or designers of the Universe did not create it from nothing but merely imposed order on already existing matter. And on account of the mixture of good and evil in the universe the argument does not show that the Designer or Designees are morally admirable enough to deserve obedience or worship. So, since the time of Hume the Design argument has been further undermined by the emergence of Darwinian explanations of biological adaptations in terms of natural selections that give explanations of such adaptations in terms of intelligent Design and stiff competition.

Hume's critique of the argument from Design may be summarised as under. He takes the argument as purporting to show that our well ordered universe must be the effect of a supremely intelligent cause, that each aspect of the Divine creation is well designed to fulfil some beneficial ends, and that these effects show us that the Deity is kind and benevolent. Hume shows that these conclusions go beyond the available data. The pleasant and well defined features of the world are balanced by a good measure of the unpleasant. Our knowledge of causal connections depends on the experience of constant conjunctions. Such connections cause the vivacity of present impressions to be transferred to the idea associated

with it and leave us belonging in the Idea. But in this case the effect to be explained — the universe — is unique and its cause unknown. Consequently we cannot possibly have experiential grounds for any kind of inference about this cause. On experiential grounds the most we can say is that there is a massive mixed effect and that this effect probably does have a commensurately large and mixed cause. Furthermore, as the effect is remotely like the products of human manufacture, we can say that the cause or causes of order of the universe probably bears some remote analogy to human intelligence. There is indeed an inference to be drawn from the unique effect in question the universe, to the cause of the effect but it is not the argument of the theologian nor does it in any way support sectarian pretensions or intolerance.

We shall now turn to Kant's criticism of the proofs of Divine existence as we find in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant's criticism of the theistic proofs is a part of his general treatment of the Ideas of Reason. In the context of Kant's vocabulary, an idea of reason is an *a priori* concept to which no empirical intuition may ever be found to correspond. The concept of God for Kant is one such *a priori* concept for an idea of reason.

We shall take up Kant's criticism of the theistic proofs in greater detail in a later sequence. But in the present context we shall be briefly outlining the general thrust of Kant's criticism. Kant thinks very highly of the argument from design, and appears to take the argument as coming practically near being sufficient to justify belief in God.

Kant calls the argument from Design by a new name. He calls it 'The Physico-Theological proof'. Kant's main criticism is that, if this argument is to be used to establish the kind of God the theologians want, the ontological argument again presupposed. We may summarily mention Kant's own statement of the ontological proof. It consists of three propositions⁽¹⁾ God, by definition is the sum of all positive attributes. The definition means the substance qualified by all positive attributes. By 'positive attributes' Kant means the exclusion of evil attributes since they are negative. (2) Existence is a positive attribute.

Therefore God exists. In general Kant meets the argument by denying the second premises and thus lays down a logical principle which is of great importance that existence is not a real predicate. Now, at the best the argument from design could only establish a very good, very powerful, very wise God but not a perfect and omnipotent God. Nor does it even establish the conclusion that God created the world and did not merely impose form on a pre-existing matter. In order to prove more, the argument from design must be supplemented by the cosmological argument which also, as Kant shows, cannot establish its conclusion without pre-supposing the ontological argument.

The cosmological proof is known as the first cause argument. It involves the notion of a necessary being but it differs from the ontological proof in starting not from the idea of such a being, but from experience. The cosmological proof differs from the physico-theological proof not from the specific nature of certain experience but from the fact that there is some experience. As summarised by Kant, the argument "If anything exists, an absolutely necessary being must also exist. Now I, at least exist. Therefore, an absolutely necessary being exists" (B 632).

The cosmological proof, Kant contends, correctly presupposes the ontological proof and is therefore wrecked by the failure of the latter. For without the ontological proof, even if we could prove the existence of a necessary being we should have no means of obtaining his nature. It is only if we already know by the ontological proof that a perfect being must be a necessary being and assume that no other being can be necessary that we have by the cosmological proof establish the existence of God in the science of a perfect being; but if we have already accepted the ontological proof, the cosmological proof is superfluous.

What could have been the motive behind Kant's criticism of the theistic proofs? It has been suggested what Kant was attacking was not religious but the pseudo-intellectualized abstractions of the 18th century modernism. The supreme cause, regarded merely as such,

is not an object of religion. It is *a priori* of pseudo-science “we might, in strict rigour, deny to the deists any belief in God at all, and regard him merely as the maintainer of existence of a primal being or thing — the supreme cause of all other things” [A 633]. Kant is contending that the deist is missing the religious point and this is brought out by the contrast he makes between ‘God’ and ‘Supreme Cause’. It has also been said that one of Kant’s achievements was to rescue the concept of God from the Deists’s lack of religious interest.

If one takes care of Kant’s assumptions his conclusions should not surprise us. Reason in the ordinary sense produces certainty only within the limits of space and time. Propositions about God do not fall under that heading. Therefore, there can be no certainty in propositions about God. Reason is only regulative, and rules are not existences. Therefore, there is no knowledge of any *existence* other than the spatio-temporal. The argument is conclusive, the detailed disproofs are only expansions and applications of it. To conclude : Kant has shown that *proofs* of the existence of God are impossible. What he objects to is not God but the idea for demonstration. It has been Kant’s conviction that religion will not suffer from the disappearance of theological metaphysics.

The argument from design was the main highway to God in the 18th century. Hume took it seriously and Kant in a well known passage wrote that it “deserved to be mentioned with respect”, as “the oldest, the clearest and the most accordant with the common sense of mankind.” (A 623 and B 651). The argument from design was the contemporary accommodation of science and religion. The 18th century mind found in the laws of nature the decrees of God. It works through the newly discovered amazing evidences of adaptation and found that so far from diminishing God, they added to his glory. The argument may now be summarised as follows :

There is in the world a remarkable order, an arrangement of detail, fit to excite wonder and for excelling the best efforts of human craftsmanship. Everything falls beautifully onto place, at any rate, *as if* it had been disposed by a master planner. In the

dialogues Hume makes Clenthes' talk "The author of nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man though possessed of much larger faculties; proportion to the grandeur of the work which he has executed. By the argument *a posteriori*, and by this argument alone, do we prove at once the existence of Deity and his similarity to human mind and intelligence". Clenthes and Philo argues that this is a fair statement. (*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Part II, edited by Kemp Smith, p.176*).

It has been generally assumed that the argument is to be taken as demonstrated but if it is *a posteriori*, as Clenthes is made to affirm it cannot be demonstrative. That the argument from design cannot demonstrate Divine existence is that Hume and Kant between them have succeeded in showing.

We may take it for granted that there is in the world a very remarkable degree of order and adaptation, and that the natural wonder which it awakens is increased by the discourses of science. The question then is whether it requires an orderer or designer. The analogy of the architect is only an analogy. An analogy is useful as a suggestion and it should prevent unprejudiced people from concluding to a direct negation without closer argument. It may prove to be a lead to an important discovery. But if it is put forward as a demonstration, it is bound to drop a point. It is tempting to treat it as a clarification. Nothing in either Hume or Kant is inconsistent with this policy.

The argument from design might better be described as an argument to design. If it is merely from design, design being one of the premises, it has its conclusion in its pocket. What is at issue is whether there is design. If there is, there is obviously a designer. This is not wholly a triviality, for an argument which does not clearly make the distinction may unfairly make the best of both worlds. At its best it is an argument from order to design and a designer. And it is proper to accept it, and to insist on its being taken in that limited sense.