Five Arguments for God - by Peter S. Williams

1) A Kalam Cosmological Argument

At a recent conference honouring physicist Stephen Hawking's 70th birthday, atheist cosmologist Alexander Vilenkin affirmed that 'All the evidence we have says that the universe had a beginning.'[1] A *New Scientist* editorial on the conference commented:

> The big bang is now part of the furniture of modern cosmology... Many physicists have been fighting a rearguard action against it for decades, largely because of its theological overtones. If you have an instant of creation, don't you need a creator? Cosmologists... have tried on several different models of the universe that dodge the need for a beginning while still requiring a big bang. But recent research has shot them full of holes. It now seems certain that the universe did have a beginning. Without an escape clause, physicists and philosophers must finally answer a problem that has been nagging at them for the best part of 50 years: how do you get a universe, complete with the laws of physics, out of nothing.[2]

Physicist Paul Davies observes that:

> One might consider some supernatural force… as being responsible for the big bang, or one might prefer to regard the big bang as an event without a cause. It seems to me that we don't have too much choice. Either... something outside of the physical world [or] an event without a cause.[3]

However, a physical event is by nature a *contingent* event, and a contingent event is by definition contingent *upon something beyond itself*.

Quantum mechanics doesn't provide a counter example to this causal claim, even if we grant the controversial Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, for quantum events are set against a background of physical conditions that causally condition, even if they don't causally necessitate, the events in question. As atheist Quentin Smith admits, quantum considerations 'at most tend to show that acausal laws govern the *change of condition* of particles . . . They state nothing about the causality or acausality of absolute beginnings . . .'[1]

One obviously can't posit a *physical* cause for the *first* physical event, but to deny that the first physical event had *a non-physical cause* one must either reject the premise that 'All physical events have at least one cause', or else claim that physical events must have *physical* causes. However, on the one hand, to make an exception to the rule that all physical events have at least one cause when it comes to the *first* physical event is *ad hoc*. On the other hand, the claim that physical events must have physical causes entails an unacceptable infinite regress. It also begs the question in favour of naturalism. Hence we should recognize the existence of a first physical event explained by *a non-physical cause*:

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[1] Quentin Smith, 'The Uncaused Beginning of the Universe', *Philosophy of Science* 55 (1988): p. 50.

1) There was a first physical event
2) All physical events have at least one cause outside and independent of themselves
3) Therefore, the first physical event had at least one cause outside and independent of itself
4) The cause of the first physical event cannot have been a physical cause
5) Therefore, since causes can only be either physical or non-physical, the first physical event had a non-physical cause outside and independent of itself

As Dallas Willard argues:

> the dependent character of all physical states, together with the completeness of the series of dependencies underlying the existence of any given physical state, logically implies at least one self-existent, and therefore nonphysical, state of being.[4]

Moreover, as J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig observe:

> there are two types of causal explanation... explanations in terms of laws and initial conditions and personal explanations in terms of agents and their volitions. A first state of the universe *cannot* have [an explanation in terms of laws and initial conditions] since there [are no laws or initial conditions] before it, and therefore it can be accounted for only in terms of personal explanation.[5]

And this, of course, is an important part of what we mean by 'God'.

2) A Leibnizian Cosmological Argument

The Leibnitzian cosmological argument builds upon the 'principle of sufficient reason':

> 1) Everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in the necessity of its own nature or in an external cause
> 2) The universe exists
> 3) Therefore the universe has an explanation of its existence
> 4) If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God
> 5) Therefore, the explanation of the universe's existence is God

Since the universe obviously exists, non-theists must deny premises 1 or 4 to rationally avoid God's existence.

Many philosophers think Premise 1 – the principle of sufficient reason - is self-evident: Imagine finding a translucent ball on the forest floor whilst hiking. You'd naturally wonder how it came to be there. If a fellow hiker said, 'It just exists inexplicably. Don't worry about it!' you'd wouldn't take him seriously. Suppose we increase the size of the ball so it's as big the planet. That doesn't remove the need for explanation. Suppose it were the size of the universe. Same problem.

Premise 4 – 'If the universe has an explanation of its existence, that explanation is God' - is synonymous with the standard atheistic claim that if God doesn't exist, then the universe has no explanation of its existence. The only other alternative to theism is to claim the universe has an explanation *in the necessity of its own nature*. But this is a *very* radical step and I can't think of any contemporary atheist who takes it. After all, it's coherent to imagine a universe made from a wholly different collection of quarks than the collection that actually exists; but such a universe would be a different universe, so universes clearly don't exist necessarily.

Suppose I ask you to loan me a certain book, but you say: 'I don't have a copy right now, but I'll ask my friend to lend me his copy and then I'll lend it to you.' Suppose your friend says the same thing to you, and so on. Two things are clear. First, if the process of asking to borrow the book goes on *ad infinitum*, I'll never get the book. Second, if I get the book, the process that led to me getting it can't have gone on *ad infinitum*. Somewhere down the line of requests to borrow the book, someone *had* the book *without having to borrow it*. Likewise, argues Richard Purtill, consider any contingent reality:

> the same two principles apply. If the process of everything getting its existence from something else went on to infinity, then the thing in question would never [have] existence. And if the thing has... existence then the process hasn't gone on to infinity. There was something that had existence without having to receive it from something else…[6]

A necessary being explaining all physical reality can't itself be a physical reality. The only remaining possibilities are an abstract object or an immaterial mind. But abstract objects are causally impotent. Therefore, the explanation of the physical universe is a necessarily existent, transcendent mind.

3) The Fine-Tuning Design Argument

In *The Grand Design* Stephen Hawking acknowledges that:

> the initial state of the universe had to be set up in a very special *and* highly improbable way… if the universe were only slightly different, beings like us could not exist. What are we to make of this fine-tuning? Is it evidence that the universe, after all, was designed..?[7]

Well, if it *looks* like a dog, that's a good reason to think that it *is* a dog. Moreover, the combination of a 'highly improbable' event with a 'very special' pattern, seen in cosmic fine-tuning, is an example of 'specified complexity' best explained by intelligent design. That is:

1) If something exhibits specified complexity then it's probably the product of design
2) The fine tuning of the universe exhibits specified complexity
3) Therefore, the fine tuning of the universe is probably the product of design

A long string of random letters is *complex* (unlikely) but it isn't *specified* (it doesn't conform to any independently given pattern). A short string of letters could be

specified - like 'this' – but wouldn't be sufficiently complex to outstrip the ability of chance to explain the match. Neither complexity without specificity, nor specificity without complexity compels us to infer design. However, if you saw a play by Shakespeare written out in scrabble tiles, you'd infer design. A play is both specified *and* sufficiently complex to merit a design inference on the grounds that 'in all cases where we know the causal origin of… specified complexity, experience has shown that intelligent design played a causal role.'[8] Likewise with cosmic fine-tuning.

Given enough time, typewriters, and monkeys one might get the works of Shakespeare by chance; so why does no one explain Shakespeare's works using the 'many monkeys' hypothesis? In the absence of independent evidence for the existence of enough time, typewriters and monkeys, the design explanation is clearly preferable. Likewise, even granting that *if* there were 'multiple universes' *then* one could obtain the fine-tuning of our universe by chance, in the absence of independent evidence for the existence of 'multiple universes' the design explanation is clearly preferable. In point of fact, the multi-verse hypothesis is empirically disconfirmed by the observation of fine tuning on a universal scale rather than on the much more probable local scale. Besides, as Robin Collins observes:

> even if [a] many-universe generator exists, it along with the background laws and principles could be said to be [a fine tuned] system… with just the right combination of laws and fields for the production of life-permitting universes… the existence of such a system suggests design.[9]

4) A Moral Argument

1) If any objective moral value exists, then god exists
2) At least one objective moral value exists
3) Therefore, god exists

It's important not to confuse this argument with the false claim that we must *believe* in God in order to *know* or to *do* the right thing.

What does it mean to say that moral values are objective? Suppose one person thinks the sun goes around the earth, and another thinks the opposite. In this case, we know the earth goes around the sun. Those who believe otherwise, *however sincerely*, are wrong. Moreover, coming to know that the earth goes around the sun is a matter of *discovering* truth, not *inventing* it. Moral objectivism says that ethics is about *discovering* moral truths, truths that exist even if we fail to discern them. According to moral objectivism there are genuine moral disagreements; and the observation that people sometimes hold different moral opinions just shows that our moral *beliefs* can be either correct or incorrect *according to the moral facts of the matter*.

To tackle our second premise first, are there any objective moral facts? Those who point to the reality of evil as the basis for an argument against God certainly think so; for nothing can be objectively evil if there are no objective values.

John Cottingham reports that 'the increasing consensus among philosophers today is that some kind of objectivism of… value is correct…'[10] For example, atheist Peter Cave defends moral objectivism by appealing to his intuitions:

> whatever sceptical arguments may be brought against our belief that killing the innocent is morally wrong, we are more certain that the killing is morally wrong than that the argument is sound... Torturing an innocent child for the sheer fun of it is morally wrong.[11]

The properly basic intuition that torturing innocent children for fun is wrong isn't undermined by the existence of the psychopath who enjoys torturing children. By the principle of credulity, torturing an innocent child for fun clearly isn't *merely* something that stops the child functioning normally (an empirical observation), or *merely* something we dislike because of our evolutionary history, or *merely* something our society has decided to discourage. Rather, torturing an innocent child for fun is *objectively wrong*. So *at least one thing is objectively wrong*. Therefore, *moral subjectivism is false*.

Some moral intuitions are specific (e.g. It's evil to torture small children for fun) and some are general (e.g. it's always right to choose the lesser of two evils). Of course, our moral intuitions *can* be mistaken, but *this very admission* of fallibility *presupposes moral objectivism*; for if moral subjectivism were true, no moral claims could be mistaken! As atheist Russ Shafer-Landau argues: 'subjectivism's… picture of ethics as a wholly conventional enterprise entails a kind of moral infallibility for individuals or societies... This sort of infallibility is hard to swallow.'[12]

Finally, if moral objectivism were false it couldn't be true that we objectively *ought* to consider arguments against objectivism, or that we *ought* to consider them fairly, so the second premise of the moral argument seems secure!

Turning to the first premise, many *atheists* acknowledge that 'if god doesn't exist, then objective moral values don't exist'. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre wrote that it is:

> extremely embarrassing that God does not exist, for there disappears with Him all possibility of finding values in an intelligible heaven. There can no longer be any good *a priori*, since there is no infinite and perfect consciousness to think it.[13]

An objective moral value is a transcendent ideal that prescribes and obligates behaviour; but an ideal implies a mind, a prescription requires a prescriber and an obligation is contingent upon a person. As H.P. Owen argues:

> On the one hand [objective moral] claims transcend every human person... On the other hand… it is contradictory to assert that impersonal claims are entitled to the allegiance of our wills. The only solution to this paradox is to suppose that the order of [objective moral] claims... is in fact rooted in the personality of God.[14]

5) An Ontological Argument

As the 'greatest possible being' God is *by definition* a necessary being. A necessary being is *by definition* a being that must exist if its existence is possible. Hence we can argue:

1) If it is possible that God exists, then God exists
2) It is possible that God exists
3) Therefore, God exists

A 'great-making property' is any property that a) *endows its bearer with some measure of objective value and which* b) *admits of a logical maximum*. A sock isn't more valuable than you because it's smellier than you; and however smelly a sock we imagine, it's always possible to imagine a smellier one. Smelliness isn't a great-making property. On the other hand, *power* is a great-making property, one that has a logical maximum in the quality of being 'omnipotent'. Likewise, *necessary being* is the maximal instantiation of a great-making property. Even if Kant was right to argue that saying something 'exists' doesn't add to our knowledge of its properties, to say that something 'exists necessarily' certainly *does* add to our knowledge of its properties. Hence most philosophers agree that if God's existence is even possible, then, as a necessary being, He must exist. Unlike 'the tooth fairy' God couldn't just happen not to exist *despite His existence being possible*.

To deny the existence of the tooth fairy, one needn't claim that its existence is impossible. However, to deny the existence of God one *must* make the *metaphysically stronger claim* that His existence is *impossible*. But the claim that God exists clearly isn't on a *par* with the claim that there exists a round square!

Many atheists acknowledge that the idea of God is coherent. Indeed, atheist Richard Carrier warns that arguments for thinking otherwise are:

> not valid, since any definition of god (or his properties) that is illogical can just be revised to be logical. So in effect, Arguments from Incoherence aren't really arguments for atheism, but for the reform of theology.[15]

Moreover, humans exhibit non-maximal degrees of great making properties (such as power, knowledge and goodness), and this supports the hypothesis that *maximal degrees* of great-making properties can co-exist over the hypothesis that they cannot.

Finally, by confirming various aspects of the theistic hypothesis, the other theistic arguments provide independent grounds for thinking that the crucial second premise of the ontological argument is more plausible than its denial. The ontological argument thus ties together the thrust of our cumulative case for God.

Recommended Resources

Web Sites

Bethinking www.bethinking.org/

Last Seminary www.lastseminary.com/

Christian Philosophers

Paul Copan www.paulcopan.com/

William Lane Craig www.reasonablefaith.org

Video

Craig, William Lane. 'Leibniz's Cosmological Argument' www.reasonablefaith.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=9174

- 'Can we be Good Without God? (SOAS, 2011)' http://youtu.be/jzlEnrJfDBc

- 'The Ontological Argument' http://youtu.be/dr36HID62wM

Lennox, John. 'A Matter of Gravity: God, the Universe and Stephen Hawking' http://youtu.be/222ihLZlujQ

Audio

Kreeft, Peter. 'A Refutation of Moral Relativism' www.peterkreeft.com/audio/05_relativism.htm

Peter S. Williams Podcast Channel www.damaris.org/cm/podcasts/category/peterswilliams

Papers

Sadowsky, James A. 'Can there be an endless regress of causes?' www.anthonyflood.com/sadowskyendlessregress.htm

Williams, Peter S. 'A Universe From Someone: Against Lawrence Krauss' A Universe From Nothing: Why There is Something Rather than Nothing' www.bethinking.org/science-christianity/advanced/a-universe-from-someone-against-lawrence-krauss.htm

- 'The Design Inference from Specified Complexity Defended by Scholars Outside the Intelligent Design Movement – A Critical Review', *Philosophia Christi*, Volume 9, Number 2, 2007, p. 407-428 http://epsociety.org/library/articles.asp?pid=54

- 'Can Moral Objectivism Do Without God?' www.bethinking.org/right-wrong/advanced/can-moral-objectivism-do-without-god.htm

Books

Beckwith, Francis J. *et al* (ed.'s), *To Everyone An Answer*: *A Case For The Christian Worldview* (IVP, 2004)

Copan, Paul & Paul K. Moser (ed.'s), *The Rationality of Theism* (Routledge, 2003)

Craig, William Lane, *On Guard* (David C. Cook, 2010)

- (ed.), *Philosophy Of Religion*: *A Reader and Guide* (Edinburgh, 2002)

Craig, William Lane & J.P. Moreland (ed.'s), *The Blackwell Companion To Natural Theology* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009)

- *Naturalism*: *A Critical Analysis* (Routledge, 2001)

Moreland, J.P. *Scaling the Secular City* (Baker, 1987)

Nagasawa, Yujin. *The Existence of God*: *A Philosophical Introduction* (Routledge, 2011)

Sennett, James F. & Douglas Groothuis (ed.'s), *In Defence of Natural Theology*: *A Post-Humean Assessment* (IVP, 2005)

Willard, Dallas. *Knowing Christ Today*: *Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (HarperOne, 2009)

Williams, Peter S. *A Sceptic's Guide to Atheism* (Paternoster, 2009)

- *C.S. Lewis vs. the New Atheists* (Paternoster, 2013)

[1] Alexander Vilenkin quoted by Lisa Grossman, 'Death of the eternal cosmos', *New Scientist*, 14th January 2012, p.7. cf. Alexander Vile kin, 'Did the Universe Have a Beginning?' http://youtu.be/NXCQelhKJ7A

[2] 'In the beginning', *New Scientist*, 14th January 2012, p. 3.

[3] Paul Davies, 'The Birth of the Cosmos,' in *God, Cosmos, Nature and Creativity* (Jill Gready (ed.), Scottish Academic Press, 1995), p. 8-9.

[4] Dallas Willard, 'The Three-Stage Argument for the Existence of God' in *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (ed. Douglas Geivett & Brendan Sweetman; Oxford University Press, 1992).

[5] J.P. Moreland & William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundatrions for a Christian Worldview* (IVP), p. 479-480.

[6] Richard Purtill quoted by Charles Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Blackwells, 2001), p. 358-359.

[7] Stephen Hawking & Leonard Milodinov, *The Grand Design* (Bantam, 2010), p. 130 & 144.

[8] Stephen C. Meyer, 'Teleological Evolution: The Difference it Doesn't Make', www.arn.org/docs/meyer/sm_teleologicalevolution.htm

[9] Robin Collins, 'Design and the Many Worlds Hypothesis', http://home.messiah.edu/~rcollins/finetune/Craig7.htm

[10] John Cottingham, 'Philosophers are finding fresh meanings in Truth, Goodness and Beauty', *The Times* (June 17, 2006).

[11] Peter Cave, *Humanism* (OneWorld, 2009), p. 146.

[12] Russ Shafer-Landau, *Whatever Happened to Good and Evil*? (OUP), p. 16-17.

[13] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (Yale University Press, 2007), p. 28, www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm

[14] H.P. Owen, 'Why morality implies the existence of God', edited extract from *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (George Allen & Unwin, 1965), in Brian Davies (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion*: *a guide and anthology* (OUP, 2000), p. 648.

[15] Richard Carrier, *Sense & Goodness Without God* (Author House, 2005), p. 276.