GOD: Teleological Argument
Lecture 5

Phil 1000, Fall 2008
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Outline

Review
• Cosmological Argument
  • Origins: Why is there something rather than nothing
  • Two versions: causation & dependency

The Teleological Argument
• Some Preliminaries
• Paley's Watch: Version 1
• Paley's Watch: Version 2

Teleological Argument

• "Telos" = the purpose or end goal of something
  – Also known as "argument from design"
  – Has a long history...

• Attempts to do more than show merely that God exists, but
also that God has certain characteristics: intelligence or
intention

• Starting point is that the universe appears to have some goal
or organization and so must have a designer...

• Several versions – We will discuss three.

Paley's Watch Version 1

Summary: In crossing a heath, suppose
I pitched my foot against a stone and
were asked how the stone came to be
there. I might possibly answer that for
anything I know to the contrary it had lain there forever... But suppose I had
found a watch upon the ground and it
should be inquired how the watch
happened to be in that place, I should
hardly think of the answer which I had
before given, that for anything I knew
the watch might have always been
there... when we come to inspect the
watch, we perceive – what we could
discern in the stone – that is
several parts are framed and put
together for a purpose... the inference
we think is inevitable, that the watch
must have had a maker... Every
observation which was made... concerning the watch may be repeated
with strict propriety concerning... the
works of nature. (Thus an intelligent
creator exists, God.)

Version 1: Abduction

• Abductive Argument (inference to the best explanation):
  – A phenomenon needing explanation (order of nature)
  – (At least) Two possible explanations (chance or design)
  – Supports the best of those explanations. (?)

• Chief point of evaluation: How well does the explanation
accounts for the phenomenon compared to other plausible
explanations?
  – Criteria: Simplicity (Principle of parsimony), Predictive success,
    coherence, fruitfulness. (We will discuss these more later.)
  – Are there alternative explanations not considered?

Version 1: Abduction

Two points to consider:

• P2: Is there a third plausible explanation?
  – (Cf. fallacy of false dichotomy)
  – Evolutionary Theories (Natural Selection).
  – Neither pure chance nor design.
  – Complexity of nature may require "simple" explanation.

• P3: Is the watch example good support for P3?
  – Watches are artifacts... designed, we know from
    experience...
  – Stones?
Paley’s Watch
Version 2

Summary: In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a stone and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer that for anything I knew to the contrary it had lain there forever... But suppose I had found a watch upon the ground and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place. I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that for anything I knew the watch might have always been there... when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive — what we could not discover in the stone — that is several parts are framed and put together for a purpose... the inference we think is inescapable, that the watch must have had a maker... Every observation which was made... concerning the watch may be repeated with strict propriety concerning... the works of nature. [Thus an intelligent creator exists, God.]

P1: If something exhibits purpose/order, then some intelligence must have designed it – watch example.

P2: The works of nature exhibit purpose/order.

C: There exists an intelligent designer, God.

Version 2: Deductive

- Deductively Valid Form: Modus Ponens (MP)
- P1 states a principle of reasoning (appealed to by Paley) that there is some necessary connection between order and design.

Version 2: Questions

Underlying Assumption: order = purpose/design?

- Is this a good principle of reasoning (assumption)?
  - Whence do we derive this principle?
  - Watches: artifacts vs. natural phenomena

- Why think the order in nature is purposeful, not random?
  - Is order in the “eye of the beholder”?
  - Also, plenty of “mistakes” or “inefficiencies” in nature, and plenty of bad things, too.

God?

- Do either of the versions considered today support the existence of God?
- Do either of the versions considered today support the characteristic of God as “benevolent designer/creator”?

Next Time

- Read David Hume, p. 38 (Parts II & V only)
  - Version 3: Argument from Analog
  - And criticism... (Cleanthes vs. Philo)

- Answer reading questions for Hume, posted on the course schedule (pdf).

- Think about how convincing analogies are or aren’t.

Key concepts

- Teleological Argument
- Version 1: Abductive Argument
- Version 2: Deductive Argument (MP)
- Criticisms