

devoted themselves to the worship of whatever they have called 'god', this presupposition may be taken for granted. Moreover, these arguments assume that God – whoever he is and whatever he is like – is the Creator and sustainer of the universe. In so far as God's existence is necessary to provide a sufficient explanation for the existence of the universe, this assumption too may be seen as eminently plausible.

The third presupposition of these arguments is that neither polytheism nor pantheism (monotheism's major competitors) can adequately support the first two assumptions. Though polytheists and pantheists do worship their respective 'gods', they can provide no rational account of why such worship is appropriate. The gods of polytheism are powerful and intelligent, and they may in some sense be partly responsible for the origin of the cosmos, but they are nonetheless finite and fallible. They cannot command our absolute devotion on any principle other than 'might makes right', but, of course, might does not make right. Neither can the finite gods of polytheism explain the existence of the cosmos, since their own existence is in need of a sufficient explanation.

The pantheistic deity is not a person but an impersonal force. Such a force may inspire a degree of wonder, but it is not at all clear why it deserves worship. Regarding the existence of the cosmos, pantheists leave it completely unexplained. Some go so far as to say that the physical world is an illusion created by ignorance, while others claim that it has existed eternally as an unexplainable brute fact.

So, given that God is worthy of our worship and is the Father of creation, and that polytheism and pantheism cannot justify these beliefs, the above arguments make a strong cumulative case for monotheism.

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### MORAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD

The traditional arguments for the existence of God are ontological (based on the nature of God's being), cosmological (based on order in the world) or teleological (based on purpose in the world). The moral argument for God was first propounded by Immanuel \*Kant after he presented what he regarded as fatal flaws in the alternative proofs of God's existence. Kant still believed in God and argued that God's existence is a necessary postulate, even if it cannot be logically and rationally proved. Kant argues that all human beings seek their greatest good. That greatest good is happiness, which can only be properly based on duty. All of us should try to attain that greatest good. Morally we ought to do this and 'ought' implies 'can'. If there is a moral obligation to do something (an ought) then we must have the capacity so to do or else there is no moral sense in the idea that this is a duty. According to Kant, we can only make sense of \*morality and duty if we make certain assumptions. These are that we have freedom, that there is a God and that there is \*immortality in a future life, where the greatest good can be achieved, because it is clearly not fulfilled in this world.

Kant's threefold claim is that for morality to make sense we must postulate freedom, life after death and the existence of God. We must assume freedom to choose to do or not to do an action, otherwise it makes no sense to hold someone responsible and to praise or blame them for what is done. If we are predetermined or simply victims of \*determinism, we have no choice, and morality makes no sense. This life is clearly unfair in that the good are not always rewarded and \*evil is not always punished. For the world and human affairs to be ultimately moral then there must be a time after death when the greatest good is achieved and when goodness and evil reap their just rewards. Kant interpreted morality as a set of moral laws or imperatives. These were both categorical and hypothetical. 'Treat people as ends in themselves and not as means in themselves' and 'Do to others what you would wish them to do to you' are moral rules and laws. They must come from somewhere and have some moral basis.

They are laws and that requires a lawgiver. God is the lawgiver and so we must presume and postulate that he exists, otherwise the whole moral edifice would collapse in nonsense. For Kant, this moral argument 'proves', as far as is possible, that God exists. Without the idea of God, human freedom and immortality, morality would make no sense, for there would be no lawgiver and no reason to obey our moral duty.

This moral argument for God spawned many variations on the theme. Some are more robust than others in claiming that the existence of God can be proved. F. R. \*Tennant and A. E. Taylor stress the remarkable congruity of moral judgments across cultures and history. This suggests that moral order is objectively part of \*reality. Moral standards are seen as binding us objectively. They argue that we cannot judge what is better or worse unless we have some objective standard to which we can appeal. All of this points to divine activity in setting these moral standards.

This is critiqued on the grounds that God is not the only hypothesis. Human needs or desires might be the basis of such morality. The advantage of that would be to avoid the problem of divine agency and causation. A further problem with the God hypothesis is that there is no empirical \*verification or falsification so the proposition cannot be confirmed or denied. While the moral argument for God's existence can make sense of moral demands, it may in fact make the inexplicable intelligible. Existentialists would deny that there is a moral \*law and would claim that morally the world is irrational and meaningless. All humanity can do is to create its own morality.

Austin \*Farrer finds the moral argument for God morally persuasive. Christianity offers a unique means of enabling us to love the neighbour who is unlovable. The moral argument makes Christianity plausible and impressive in its transforming power. Most Christians add that Christianity also makes truth-claims about the moral nature of the world's reality and human reality. C. S. \*Lewis offered a variation of the moral argument, arguing that the moral law is necessary to make sense of our moral disagreements and moral criticism of each other. Without some absolute standard by which to judge, these moral aspects would make no sense. We need a basis for keeping our promises. The fact that we make excuses when we behave immorally and break the moral law in a

perverse way proves that there is a moral law and that human beings have moral awareness. This is usually interpreted as \*conscience, and following Paul's account in Rom. 1 – 3, that is interpreted as God's moral law written on the hearts and minds of each human individual. Humanity itself cannot be the source of morality as we are not perfect. We need a source which is all good, and God alone is that source.

In making apologetic use of the moral argument for God's existence we must consider alternative explanations for the existence of morality, the nature of the moral law, the idea of God as the lawgiver, the nature and basis of moral \*authority, postulates and faith. Apologists have often seized on the moral argument as an answer to the apologetic search for a successful proof of God. It avoids the major problem of the traditional proofs which at best prove the existence of a first cause, prime mover, necessary being – all of whom seem very far from the living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the New Testament. It also offers an account of God as a person of the highest moral stature – the very ground of all goodness. It is a clear step away from the theoretical and deals with the practical realm of our human moral situation.

The apologist must deal with alternative explanations of the source of morality. It is not just a natural human instinct. If that were so, the stronger instinct would always win. We do not always act from instinct. Morality is often in conflict with our instinctual drives, and we control and overcome them to do what is right. Our instincts are not always good or morally correct. The capacity to act selflessly certainly does not seem purely instinctive. Social convention is not an adequate account of the basis of morality. We are able to go against social convention as in conscientious objection in war. The very judgment that we recognize as social and moral progress shows that we are not simply victims of our social conventions, but are able to distance ourselves from and reflect morally on them. These imply that there are some basic moral laws which we recognize and to which we refer.

While some argue that the moral law and the \*natural law are the same, it is clear that there is some difference in that natural laws are descriptive and moral laws are prescriptive. We can always ask whether or not natural laws are morally good.

The main move in the twentieth century was to base morality on some feature of humanity. This might be reason, the emotions or the will. Morality was seen as a purely human function and therefore subjective rather than objective. In fact, morality might be an objective feature of human being, but the stress is often on the subjectivity of morality, implying that we could easily have other moral laws and standards than the ones we actually have. The fact that we cannot easily get rid of moral standards whenever we feel like it suggests that it is not simply our human creation. It rather seems that morality is impressed on us from some external source beyond our human control. In dealing with the various schools of moral philosophy, it is often necessary to recognize that they are right in what they affirm, e.g. that will, emotions and reason matter. They are also guilty of a reductionism which seeks to make their emphasis the total explanation of morality, rather than allowing that morality is a complex, multi-layered reality.

There is also an argument that in fact the reality of \*evil and injustice in the world counts against any divine ground of morality. However, the sense of falling short of what is good reveals that there is some prior sense of goodness and morality. Some perfect standard is assumed and necessary if we are to make sense of what is less than good.

In making the moral argument for God's existence one key step is the idea of the moral law. Morality is presented as a series of commands. It would make limited sense to suggest that the moral law is nothing more than a series of self-commands. Though there are occasions when we have to 'order' ourselves to do what is right. The fear is that the idea of law is in itself insufficient to explain the varied nature of moral deliberation and judgment.

What is rather being recognized is that there seems to be a universality to moral standards and a remarkable consensus about what counts as good and bad in moral terms. That consensus requires some explanation, and so the competing views must be assessed. The hypothesis that God is the author and source of morality certainly requires such an assessment.

The problem is whether reducing the nature of God to that of a moral lawgiver really captures the essence of who God is. In the NT, when Christ gave commands, e.g. to stretch out a withered hand or to get up and

walk, he also gave the power to obey the command. Part of the theological debate is whether God is only a lawgiver and whether he commands what is impossible for humanity and how fair that is. The stress of the moral argument is that if the claims of morality are absolute and universal, then there must be some absolute and all-encompassing basis and that is God. It is as if God has to exist to make sense of the reality of moral experience.

There are two broad explanations of the ground of morality. Either it is simply grounded on humanity or it has a divine origin. We all agree that there is morality and that we need to find some kind of basis for that. Of course, \*existentialism argues that there is no basis, so human beings make morality. This provides a basis. It also shows the heart of the issue is not so much the origin but where the authority rests in moral standards and laws.

This can lead to an important philosophical discussion. Does God command what is good because it is already recognized as good or is it good simply because God has commanded it? The critic argues that Christians, if they are morally aware and sensible, need to ask whether the laws and commands of God are good in themselves before they commit to following God's moral laws. That would require an awareness of moral standards independent from God. Thus morality is grounded not on God but on some prior notions. The real issue here is the source of moral authority. The individual or community may come up with their moral standards and then will judge everything and everyone else in light of those standards. Moral authority then rests in the individual or the human community. In contrast moral authority rests in the God who reveals moral standards. This is summed up in the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac when God commanded him. \*Kierkegaard stressed that this 'suspension of the teleological' highlights where ultimate moral authority rests. Human beings are unwilling to accede to external authority. This independence, or what Christians would call sinful wilfulness, stands in sharp contrast to the accepting of the authority of God. This drives us back to ask what it is about God and God's \*revelation that makes us exercise the step of faith in trusting his authority. It is clear that when \*Jesus taught, he taught as one who had authority. There was a clear sense that this was no ordinary human teacher but someone

who expressed and embodied divine truth. For Christians, the real ground of moral authority rests in the life, example and teaching of Jesus. Experiencing the reality of Christ and his authority calls us in question and replaces our self-confidence with trust and faith in Christ.

Kant argued that we need to postulate the reality of human freedom, immortality and the existence of God to make sense of morality. This has interesting parallels with the practice in science of forming an hypothesis and conducting experiments in light of it. When scientists talk of the structure of reality consisting of atoms, electrons, neutrons or sub-atomic particles they are really offering postulates which are pragmatically useful and necessary to make sense of the world. Scientists recognize that they cannot prove the reality of these constructs but they are heuristic tools to enable us to deal with the world. While it is tempting to follow that line with the moral argument, there must be a point where the Christian claim of truth limits how far we can use the parallel.

Likewise it is unclear that 'ought implies can' in every case. We can easily be confronted with a command or demand which we cannot actually fulfil, but that does not change the reality of the demand. Theologians argue that we are unable to obey all that God requires of us, but that does not undermine the reality of the requirement. Duty is still duty even if we cannot fulfil it. It requires a step of faith in the ultimate victory of good to believe that there will be a final balancing of good and evil beyond the here and now. Faith rather than simple rationality seems necessary for such a belief.

The moral argument does not offer us a full and final proof of the existence of God. If it did it would prove too much, for then faith would be redundant and everyone would be irrational not to believe in God. The evidence is open to differing interpretations and requires faith.

Moral questions confront everyone. The ground of our morality is a natural and fruitful way of opening up apologetic discussion. The moral argument for God may not finally prove God's existence, but it does create an opportunity to confront the questions of what authority we live by and where we find a basis for morality. The final judgment will be between a simply human or divine authority.

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## MORAL DIFFICULTIES IN SCRIPTURE

### General considerations

Moral difficulties arise in Scripture whenever there is a dissonance between the biblical ethic and our own moral understanding. The construction of a biblical ethic is itself far from straightforward, and four relevant problems should be noted.

First, there are conceptual problems. At times the Bible thinks in alien categories. For example, OT law uses oppositions such as 'clean' and 'unclean' (Lev. 11 – 15), and this fact can be used to deny Scripture's moral relevance. But the difficulty can be overstated, for there are continuities as well, not least in the ideas of God, his character and his relationship to his faithful people. Once ethics is located in that context, the possibility of moral relevance is established.

The problem of normative force raises the difficulty that it is not always clear what Scripture is presenting as ethically desirable. Some instances are completely clear: there is no doubt that David's unconventional behaviour in worshipping before the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6) is approved and his adultery with Bathsheba is not (2 Sam. 11 – 12). Many other cases, however, are harder to discern. When the psalmist calls for the destruction of Babylonian children (Ps. 137:9), is this simply an affirmation of the value of honesty about real feelings of vengeance before God, a delight in the \*justice of God which is pictured symbolically, or an approval of what we can only see as cruelty? Just what was so pleasing about Samson (cf. Heb. 11:32)? There is no general solution to such difficulties, and no substitute for careful contextual exegesis.

Then there are problems of situation. At one point \*Jesus commands his followers to evangelize in a spirit of absolute poverty (Luke 10:4); later on he rescinds, or at least modifies, that command (Luke 22:35–36). To one church Paul appears to enjoin silence on