INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY
Andreas Teuber

Arguments for God's Existence

ARGUMENTS FROM THE TRADITION
In Western Philosophy any number of philosophers have tried to justify their beliefs. This is no less true for religious beliefs and, specifically, the belief that there is a G-d.

Any number of deeply religious folks, however, may think that proofs for the existence of G-d are beside the point; religion and, in particular, belief in G-d, is a matter of faith and faith is not the sort of thing that is subject to proof. Indeed some have argued that seeking a proof for the existence of G-d is a sure sign of lack of faith.

Nonetheless there have, traditionally, been arguments for the existence of G-d and these arguments have, traditionally (again), been divided into two categories: those arguments whose premises are justified a posteriori (in somewhat fancy Latin terms, meaning, fairly straight-forwardly, premises based on experience) and arguments whose premises are a priori (meaning premises developed independently of experience). Already you may have a view (be of a mind) - whether you believe that there is a G-d or not - that if there is a case to be made for G-d’s existence, it will have to be an argument of the former rather than the latter sort; it will have to be an argument based on experience.

The most famous version of an argument of the latter sort is the argument known as the Ontological Argument for the Existence of G-d and its most famous proponent was St. Anselm, who seems to have invented it in the 11th century. According to the Anselm’s Ontological Argument the Very Idea of G-d, the very conception of G-d, entails G-d’s existence. The ontological argument still has defenders today but among those who think it is a bad argument there is little agreement over what exactly is the matter with it. We shall discuss the argument and I am curious to hear what many of you think.

On the a posteriori side there are the Arguments from Design or as they are sometimes fancily called Teleological Arguments, which was given its classic formulation by William Paley in his Natural Theology published in 1802. Cleanthes, a character in Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (1779) by David Hume (1711-1776) also offers a form of the argument and tries to defend it, without great success, if you follow the dialogue closely.

Then, too, there is the Cosmological Argument which comes in various guises which was given its first systematic formulation by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) in the 13th century in Summa Theologicae (1266-73) and a modern formulation by Samuel Clarke (1675-1729) in 1704. The Cosmological Argument is a "mixed" argument or, rather, it begins with a statement of fact, hence some observation from experience, and then goes on to draw via a set of a priori premises the conclusion that there is (must be) a G-d.

There is then, too, the Argument from Miracles, which, depending on how it is couched, may fall into one of the three kinds of arguments listed above.

Some may also wish to claim that there is an argument for the existence of G-d which does not look or sound like a typical rational argument at all. Some might believe, for example, that G-d’s existence is simply self-evident or so obvious belief in G-d does not stand in need of an argument.
So, too, some might believe that faith itself is its own justification and that believing in G-d is sufficient justification or justification enough or all the justification one could ever want or need. This was William James’ view and Soren Kierkegaards’s, among others.

And then there is the Problem of Evil, so central to religious belief, and the dilemma it creates for anyone disposed to believe in a G-d who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omni-benevolent, i.e., all powerful, all knowing and all good. Gottfried Leibniz was deeply troubled by this problem throughout much of his philosophical life.

So, too, we might wonder what we should make of the fact that the G-d of traditional philosophy bears little resemblance to the G-d of ordinary believers. What does G-d look like to you? Or perhaps G-d, given your faith, does not have a specific “look” at all or is more like a feeling than a thing or more like a spiritual force than a Body in the Sky.

And finally there are those who believe that a belief in G-d is a myth or an illusion. Is there a case to be made for G-d as an illusion?

The existence and Nature of G-d:
1. The Ontological Argument
2. The Teleological Argument
3. The Cosmological Argument
4. The Argument from Religious Experience
5. The Problem of Evil

Some terms:
- a priori, a posteriori
- Inductive, deductive
- faith, reason
- Theism, atheism, agnosticism
- ontology, ontological argument
- cosmology, cosmological argument
- telos, teleological argument