

OCCC ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL -20 JAN 1991

TOPIC TWO: ARE THERE REASONS FOR BELIEVING IN GOD?

1) The Model of Reasoning

1) **Blind Alley:** exclusive reliance on deduction & a narrow concept of induction (enumerative induction). This model is not adequate either for common-sense reasoning or scientific reasoning. (Refer to notes of last week.)

2) **Abductive Reasoning** is a more realistic model which has the following structure:

- a) Some evidence E is surprising/ unlikely/ unintelligible.
- b) If hypothesis H were true, E would become unsurprising, likely & intelligible.
- c) Hence H is probably true. **AT LEAST:** H is confirmed by E.
- d) A more formal characterization: Let K be the background knowledge. E confirms H iff $\text{Prob}(E/H \ \& \ K) > \text{Prob}(E/K)$.

3) **The Presumption of Intelligibility** = all else being equal, we should assume that an unexplained event has an explanation. This can't be proved exactly because almost all rational activities depend on this. The consequence is that we shouldn't appeal to "brute fact" (i.e. that something just is the case & there is no explanation) prematurely. If someone refutes an abductive reasoning by just saying that E is a brute fact, you better ask him:

- a) Why do you think it is a brute fact?
- b) If no answer is forthcoming to the above question, do you reply in the same way to all other pieces of abductive reasoning?

4) **The Importance of a Cumulative Case:** abductive reasoning is not always conclusive. It is most secure when different pieces of abductive reasoning based on diverse strands of evidence converge to the same hypothesis & no other hypothesis can do the job as well as it does. Exs: the unfaithful husband (everyday reasoning), the murder case (legal reasoning), existence of Mao (historical reasoning), atoms (scientific reasoning).

5) **Kinds of explanation:**

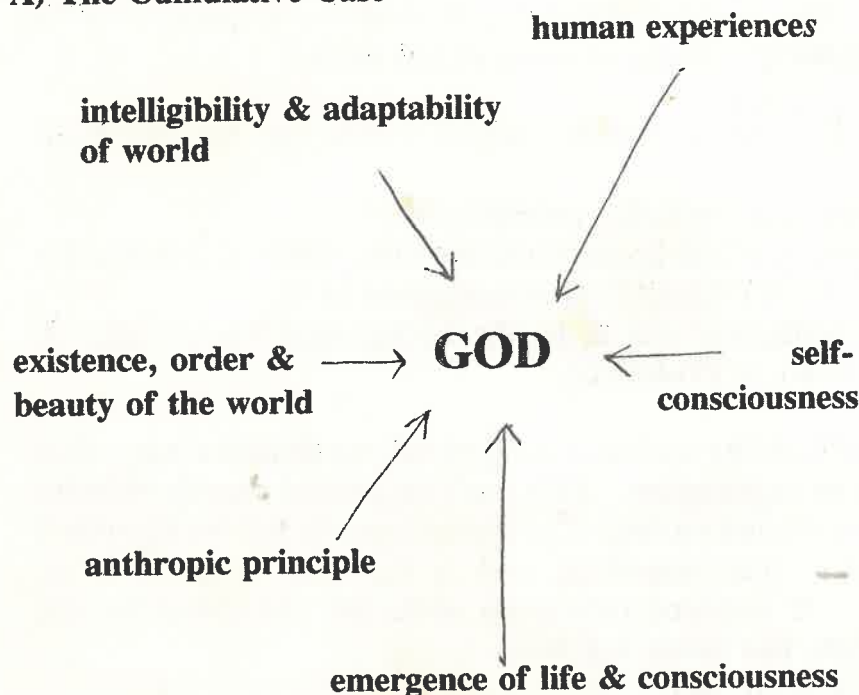
- a) **Scientific explanation:** an event is explained by some laws L together with some initial conditions C.
- b) **Personal explanation:** an event is explained with reference to the action of a person who exercises his power in achieving his purpose. Human behaviour or animal behaviour.

6) **The main alternative to theism:** naturalism which asserts that the nature is all there is, & everything can be explained by science & reduced to matter. The naturalistic story: Big Bang, Cosmic evolution, formation of solar system, evolution, ... heat death. (Second Law of Thermodynamics) Everything is the product of the interplay of chance & law. There is no inherent purpose in the

world.

The Case for God's Existence

A) The Cumulative Case



B) The Thirteen Indicators

1) *The existence of universe* (Cosmological argument): why is there a universe?

Several possible answers:

- a) there is no explanation. The universe just exists.
- b) The universe is self-explanatory. Maybe it causes itself to exist.
- c) The universe is caused to exist by God.

a) is not a good answer because it violates the presumption of intelligibility. This presumption is further reinforced by i) intuition that the existence of matter is contingent. We can imagine the whole universe just crumbles & vanishes into nothing.

ii) the universe is a large & complex entity & its properties are highly specific.
iii) As far as we know, every part of the universe is subject to a lot of changes & is perishable. iv) To accept the universe as the stopping point is not satisfying because it can't fully answer the "why" question concerning its purpose.

b) is not coherent. c) seems to be the only satisfying answer. The familiar objection is that a similar question arises with respect to God: "Why there is a God?" Reply:

i) Even if there were no answer to this question, the above argument still holds. We can postulate atoms to explain the phenomena even if we can't explain why there are atoms.

ii) Actually God is a natural stopping point because:

-He is by nature eternal. He has no beginning or end. There is no time when the

question of his origin can arise. Nor is there the possibility that He can vanish. -He is by definition all-knowing & all-powerful. It is just *impossible* for God to be caused by other being to exist. So we can understand here why we can't seek a further answer.

-He is by definition supremely perfect. He is the End (Purpose) of all things. There is nothing higher that He can exist for. In this aspect He alone is the ultimate answer.

2) *The beginning of the universe (kalam cosmological argument):*

- a) Whatever begins to exist has a cause.
- b) The universe began to exist.
- c) Therefore, the universe has a cause.
- d) Creation is best explained as the free decision of a personal Creator.

3) *Order of the universe (Design or Teleological Argument):*

- a) Scientific explanation presupposes the existence of laws of nature & hence also presupposes: i) the world has an intelligible structure; ii) the world has temporal regularity. So these conspicuous aspects of our world *can't* be explained by science but they do demand explanation. Creativity of the order too.
- b) It is common experience that various kinds of order are created by mind, e.g. bus system, music.
- c) a) points to the fact that only a personal explanation of the order is possible & b) shows that this hypothesis is inductively confirmed by our experience. Hence the hypothesis that the order is brought about by God is eminently plausible.

4) *Beauty of the universe:*

- a) This is observable from many perspectives & at many levels: sunset, flower, earth from satellite, snowflake under microscope, nebula, starry sky, animals (including human beings), music, laws of nature, ...
- b) Given naturalism, there is no reason why the universe should not be very ugly. There is no reason why such concept should arise from evolution- a person too absorbed in contemplating beauty may be easily preyed upon. Also beauty seems to belong to the realm of the mind. The quality of the experience totally eludes the grasp of science.
- c) If the world is created by God- the source of truth, goodness, & beauty, then the above facts are not surprising at all. So they confirm the existence of God.
- d) Serious contemplation of nature sometimes leads to "mystical" feelings as if we are facing a mystery, Something Greater, ... This experience reinforces the above argument.

5) *Anthropic Principle:*

- a) It describes the modern scientific discovery that the process of cosmic evolution & the laws of nature are very finely tuned *as if it is designed to give rise to life*. A eminent physicist Paul Davies said, "It is hard to resist the impression of

something- some influence capable of transcending space-time & the confinements of relativistic causality- possessing an overview of the entire cosmos at the instant of its creation & manipulating all the causally disconnected parts to go bang with almost exactly the same vigour at the same time, & yet not so exactly coordinated as to preclude the small scale, slight irregularities that eventually found the galaxies, & us." Given naturalism, this is wildly improbable & unintelligible. The explanation by the intelligent control of God is initially very inviting.

b) Alternative explanations: World Ensemble Theory, selection effect of observers. Criticisms.

6) *Emergence of Life:*

a) The prima facie impossibility of evolution of life

i) The complex biochemical molecules needed for life are very complex and their sequences have to be specific for proper functioning.

ii) To form life from non-life, these molecules have to be built by random processes from simple molecules.

iii) Assuming we have all the building blocks needed and we give the most generous conditions to this random process, the probability of random formation of these molecules are vanishingly small. For example, Hoyle & Wickramasinghe estimate the chance formation of an enzyme anywhere on earth through random ordering of amino acids is 1 in 10^{20} . For a cell which contains about 2000 enzymes, chance of getting them all in a random trial is 1 in 10^{40000} then. This is "an outrageously small probability that could not be faced even if the whole universe consisted of organic soup." (p.24)

iv) They add further that: "Nothing has been said of the origin of DNA itself, nothing of DNA transcription to RNA, nothing about the origin of the program whereby cells organize themselves, nothing of mitosis or meiosis." (p.30)

v) Hence "any theory with a probability of being correct that is larger than 1 part in 10^{40000} must be judged superior to random shuffling. The theory that life was assembled by an intelligence has... a probability vastly higher than 1 part in 10^{40000} of being the correct explanation.' This means belief in Intelligence is more reasonable than chemical evolution.

vi) A transcendent God is not strictly required by this argument (and Hoyle does not accept that.) However it can be further argued that any higher natural Intelligence is not adequate because we just push the problem one step further back. So an ultimate explanation must be an Intelligence which accounts for the whole universe. This is supported by the considerations in last chapter.

vii) It can be further added that in fact on earth the time available for this random formation is too short: "it now seems that life originated very rapidly- within a few hundred million years at most, and perhaps much more quickly." (Luria, Gould & Singer, p.692) (The authors, however, draw the conclusion that life is inevitable!) - If the basic line of argument is correct, life is virtually impossible to arise by chance in such a short time.

b) Only plausible alternative explanation: new laws of nature. Yet it only escapes the fire of this argument at the expense of adding fuel to the design argument *qua* order.

7) Emergence of Consciousness:

a) How can matter in motion alone can produce consciousness is a mystery. It is not clear any reduction of consciousness to matter is possible. Behaviourism. Functionalism. Absent qualia & inverted spectrum arguments. Chinese room argument. Nor is the emergence of consciousness required by Darwinian evolution. Mindless "intelligent" behaviour is enough for survival.

b) That mind is irreducible to matter & yet emergent from matter can only be explained by the hypothesis that matter is created by Mind & designed to give rise to minds.

8) Emergence of Self-consciousness:

a) Uniqueness of man lies in his selfhood, his personhood, his essentially self-conscious & self-directing spiritual nature. Capacity of conceptualization, thought & language. Freedom.

b) The nature of man poses problems for naturalism again in 2 ways: the categories of matter, field, motion are inadequate to capture the mental life of a self-conscious being; & the Darwinian evolution of self-consciousness again is a mystery. It does not seem that facts mentioned in a) can be fully explained by science. Yet human self seems to be finite & it demands causal explanation. The only plausible one seems to be the Absolute Self who gives existence to both nature & self.

9) Moral Experience:

a) Objective moral values & facts are given in our experience. Moral relativism is impossible to live by. Voice of conscience; sense of guilt; human value & rights. Moral obligation- categorical & hypothetical imperative. The queerness of all these in a naturalistic & ultimately valueless world.

b) The objectivity of moral obligation & values can be grounded in a transcendent good God while the moral nature of man is nicely explained by the *imago dei* (image of God) in man. The confusion & diversity of moral norms are explained by the Fall.

10) Horrendous Evil:

a) Fact of horrendous evil: Hitler, Stalin, Mao, etc.

b) Moral intuition: such evils ought to be punished & victims vindicated. *Ought* implies *can*. These evils can be punished.

c) They can't if there is no God as Judge. So there is a God.

11) Religious Experience:

a) This is widespread in almost all times & all eras. There is a core of

agreement. Many of the experiencers are highly intelligent people with integrity. That they are all subject to illusions is implausible. This witnesses the reality of the Transcendent Realm.

b) Alternative explanations: need to believe; projection theory.

12) *Transcendence in man:*

a) Man is a curiously restless animal. He constantly seeks for fulfillment, identity, satisfaction, wholeness but nothing in this world seems to be ultimately satisfying. Man is constantly over-reaching himself: the drive to self-transcend.

b) This drive in man has to be dismissed by naturalism as an illusion again. Also it is hard to explain how such impractical urge can be evolved in the jungles!

c) Again nicely explained by the *imago dei*.

13) *Intelligibility of Nature:*

a) Science itself is a miracle. Christian origin of science. Given naturalism, no reason whatsoever to expect man can understand the world by developing science. The ability to do highly abstract mathematics, e.g. differential geometry, is definitely not contributing to the struggle in the primitive jungles.

b) Why we can unravel an ancient language but not expected to interpret the Martian one? All hinges on similarity of concepts & cognitive structure. The fact that the "Book" of Nature can be read & interpreted by man shows that they have similar cognitive structure. This can't be explained by science, but rather presupposed.

c) The most appealing explanation is that there is a common Author of both the "Book" of Nature & the human mind.

d) Besides, the nature is adaptable to the human self in other ways. The order of the world is essential for the development of personhood & human intellect. The world is open to aesthetic appreciation & it contains many extravagant possibilities for human enjoyment. These considerations reinforce the above argument.

III) Conclusion

The above discussion has to be brief. No single argument is conclusive. There are always counterarguments. We shouldn't expect a knockdown argument here & we better remind ourselves that our faith is ultimately dependent on the revelation in Christ. Yet the above arguments demonstrate how reason can be used by faith to seek understanding. I personally think that the above case is quite convincing. All the strands are mutually supportive & theism is illuminating in almost every aspect of human experience. There are indicators towards the existence of God sufficient for those who are willing to see. As the Bible says, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge." (Ps 19.1-2)