

Reading Guide #1 - Philosophy of Religion

These questions are provided to assist you in your reading. I encourage you first to read the material through, then go back to answer the questions. You are not expected to hand in written answers. You are expected to have responses ready for class discussion. References are to pages in Steven M. Cahn, ed., *Philosophy for the 21st Century*, Oxford University Press, 2003.

Saint Anselm, "The Ontological Argument," pp 24-5.

1. How does Anselm characterize God?
 2. Who is the fool? What does the fool believe?
 3. "But surely, when this same Fool hears what I am speaking about, namely, 'something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought,' he understands what he hears and what he understands is in his mind, even if he does not understand that it actually exists" (25). Explain.
 4. How do we know that the idea of God exists in the fool's thought?
 5. Why is it impossible for God to exist only in thought?
 6. Why is it impossible to think that God does not exist?
 7. How can the fool say that God does not exist?
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Gaunilo, "In Behalf of the Fool," pp 26-7.

1. How does Gaunilo characterize his Lost Island, similar to Anselm's characterization of God?
 2. How is Gaunilo's Lost Island a counter-example to Anselm's ontological argument?
 3. What, according to Gaunilo, is Anselm's ontological argument is lacking?
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Immanuel Kant, "Critique of the Ontological Argument," pp 27-8.

1. What is Kant's distinction between a logical predicate and a determining predicate? Why is 'is omnipotent' a determining predicate, while 'exists' is merely a logical predicate?
2. "A hundred real thalers do not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers" (28). Explain. Why not?
3. How does Kant's distinction between logical and determining predicates demonstrate a flaw in the ontological argument?

G. E. Moore, "Is Existence a Predicate?" pp 28-31.

1. What is the Kneale/Moore distinction between logical predicates and grammatical predicates? In which sense is existence a predicate?
 2. How does Moore think that Kneale can mark the difference between predicates which stand for attributes and predicates which do not stand for attributes?
 3. How is 'tame tigers growl' ambiguous? Is 'tame tigers exist' ambiguous in the same way? Explain.
 4. What is wrong with 'some tame tigers don't exist'? What does Moore conclude about that sentence?
 5. According to Moore, why do 'all tame tigers exist' and 'most tame tigers exist' lack meaning?
 6. What, according to Moore, is the difference between the predicates 'growls' and 'exists'?
 7. Can we see 'some tame tigers do not exist' as meaningful? Does such an interpretation undermine Moore's point that 'exists' and 'growls' are different kinds of predicates?
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William L. Rowe, "Why the Ontological Argument Fails," pp 32-5.

1. How does Rowe's criticism of the ontological argument differ from the Kant/Moore criticism?
 2. How does Rowe define 'magican' and 'magico'? Why can't Merlin be a magican? Why can't Houdini be a magico?
 3. Does it follow from the definition of 'magican' that a magican exists? Explain. How does the magican example demonstrate a flaw in the ontological argument?
 4. "All that follows from [Anselm's reasoning] is that no nonexisting thing can be God..." (33). Explain.
 5. How does the possibility of God's existing undermine Rowe's response to the ontological argument? What must Rowe conclude? (Consider the impossibility of non-existing magicans.)
 6. How does granting the possibility of God, as Anselm characterizes God, already settle the question of God's existence?
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Saint Thomas Aquinas, "Five Ways to Prove the Existence of God," pp 35-6.

1. Why can't objects change themselves? How does this principle lead to an argument for God's existence?
 2. What is an uncaused cause? How does Aquinas's second way differ from his first?
 3. "For a thing that need not be was once not; and if everything need not be, once upon a time there was nothing" (36). Explain.
 4. How does human goodness lead to Aquinas's fourth argument?
 5. How are natural bodies goal-directed? What does this goal-directedness show?
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Michael Martin, "The Cosmological Argument," pp 37-9.

1. According to Martin, what problem arises for the cosmological argument for God's existence, even if we assume that there must be a first cause?
2. How is the existence of a first cause a "non-empirical assumption"?
3. How does the difference between dominos and chains point to a flaw in Aquinas's second argument?
4. What is a fallacy of composition? How does Aquinas seem to commit a fallacy of composition?
5. Why does Martin's version of Aquinas's third argument seem implausible at premise 4?
6. What flaw does Martin find in Aquinas's claim that there could not be anything brought into existence by nothing?

David Hume, "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," pp 39-72.

Part II

1. What does Demea want to discuss? What does he not think worth discussing?
2. What does Demea think we know about the nature of God? What argument does Philo provide for their conclusion?
3. How does Cleanthes argue for God's existence, "and his similarity to human mind and intelligence" (41)?
4. What flaw does Demea find in Cleanthes' argument?
5. What flaw does Philo first find in Cleanthes' argument? How does Cleanthes respond? What does Demea think about the disagreement between Philo and Cleanthes?
6. Philo restates Cleanthes' argument and states, "From similar effects we infer similar causes" (42). What are the similar causes and the similar effects?
7. How does Philo argue that we should not consider thought to be the essence of God?
8. What is an argument from experience? Why is Cleanthes' argument an insufficient argument from experience?
9. How do Cleanthes and Philo disagree about the analogy of the Copernican system?

Part III

10. Who denies motion? How can one respond?
11. How does Cleanthes use the case of the articulate voice in the clouds to try to show that Philo's argument leads to absurdity?
12. Cleanthes says, "Assert either that a rational volume is no proof of a rational cause, or admit of a similar cause to all the works of nature" (46). Explain, including Cleanthes' appeal to the workings of the eye.
13. What specific support does Demea offer for his assertion that God is incomprehensible?

Part IV

14. Why does Demea call Cleanthes an "anthropomorphite"(48)?
15. Why does Cleanthes reject the perfect simplicity of God?
16. "What do we gain by [Cleanthes'] system, in tracing the universe of objects into a similar universe of ideas? The first step which we make leads us on forever" (49). Explain both the aspect of Cleanthes' position which is the source of Philo's accusation as well as Philo's argument.
17. How, according to Philo, is Cleanthes' position a confession of ignorance? How does Cleanthes respond? How does Philo counter Cleanthes' response?

Part V

18. How do astronomical and microscopic discoveries undermine Cleanthes' argument?
19. Why does Philo accuse Cleanthes of failing to be able to ascribe infinity to the mind of God?
20. Why does Philo accuse Cleanthes of failing to be able to ascribe perfection to God?
21. Explain the analogy of the unintelligent mechanic who builds an excellent ship.
22. Why might Cleanthes be forced to posit several deities, instead of one God?
23. Why might Cleanthes be forced to think of God as corporeal?

Part VI

24. What evidence does Philo present in favor of the hypothesis that the universe is an animal, with God as its soul?
25. What disanalogies between the universe and an animal does Cleanthes present?
26. How does Philo's hypothesis that the world is an animal imply that the world is eternal? What arguments does Cleanthes present to show that the world is not eternal?
27. Why, according to Philo, do Cleanthes' principles leave him unable to decide among skepticism, polytheism, and theism? What, according to Philo, does this inability show?

Part VII

28. "The effects of these principles are all known to us from experience; but the principles themselves and their manner of operation are totally unknown..." (56). Explain.
29. Does Philo really believe that the world is like a big vegetable (or animal)? What is the point of his argument?

Part VIII

30. What is Philo's adjustment of the Epicurean hypothesis? How does Demea criticize it? How does Philo respond?
31. Philo proposes a view of the universe that has both "perpetual agitation" (constant motion) and "constancy in the forms" (an appearance of order). How is this like our world?
32. How are ideas normally ectypal, not archetypal? How does Cleanthes' cosmology reverse this order?
33. Why, according to Philo, do all religious systems prepare a complete triumph for the skeptic?

Part IX

34. Describe Demea's "a priori" argument for the existence of a necessarily existence being.
35. "Nothing is demonstrable unless the contrary implies a contradiction" (61). Explain. How does this principle undermine Demea's argument for the existence of God?
36. How does Cleanthes propose to accept that something exists necessarily, but deny that God exists?
37. How, according to Cleanthes, is asking for the cause of the entirety of a sequence of effects otiose?
38. Philo asks, "Is it not probable... that the whole economy of the universe is conducted by a like necessity, though no human algebra can furnish a key which solves the difficulty?" (62). How is this a rebuttal of Cleanthes' argument?

Part X

39. Why, according to Philo, is eloquence more important than reasoning in bringing people a true sense of religion?
40. According to Philo, what is different about Leibniz' philosophical system?
41. Why is Demea concerned to establish that human life is miserable? Why, according to Philo, do people continue to live?
42. What are Epicurus's old questions (the problem of evil)?
43. How does Philo account for misery (and happiness)?
44. Why does Cleanthes deny that there is more misery than happiness?
45. Why does Cleanthes' view lead to skepticism, according to Philo?

Part XI

46. What are the advantages, according to Cleanthes, of assuming God to be finitely perfect?
47. Explain Philo's use of the decrepit house analogy. How does he distinguish between the consistency of the hypothesis that there is a benevolent God and our inference to the existence of God?
48. Why, according to Philo, does pain seem unnecessary?
49. How do physical laws contribute to pain and misery? How might such misery be preventable by God?
50. Why might a benevolent God create people with better natural attributes?
51. How are the parts of the universe inaccurately adjusted?
52. What is the Manichean hypothesis? Why does Philo reject it?