

LECTURE NOTES XVIII

Religion is a central element in human life, individual and social. We find its manifestations in beliefs, spiritual and psychological experience, and morality. And in social practices and norms, organization, regulation, law, and political conceptions and action in history. It is all pervasive. Thinking about religion raises various kinds of questions that are interrelated in enormously complex ways. These questions can thus be examined from different perspectives. In our discussion in this portion of the course we shall only consider questions that pertain to religious belief and doctrine examining them with respect to their *truth*, not their spiritual, moral or social value.

Some religious thinkers claim that the foundation of belief is revelation, illumination or faith. But others claim that we can find rational bases for these beliefs that establish them as true. The focus of our discussion is the question of the existence of God and we shall examine three traditional arguments that have been given as proofs of the existence of the Divine Being-that the belief that God exists is true. We shall only be concerned with the God of Judaism, Christianity and Islam-the Abrahamic religions. In what follows, I shall present some remarks that are meant to help you by way of orientation to facilitate the reading of chapter five in Blackburn and the handouts that you will receive, that we shall subsequently discuss in detail.

The first argument is the 'Ontological Argument' from St. Anselm. Its basis is a definition of God as a perfect being. He then argues that following the definition God must exist, because otherwise we are led to a contradiction. Blackburn presents the argument and raises some criticism. His discussion involves examples of a dream partner, dream island, turkeys etc. The relevance of these examples is that they illustrate arguments similar to the ontological argument. There are some quotations from Anselm in the discussion and an excerpt from his text is in the handout.

The second argument is the 'Cosmological Argument'. We shall examine two versions

one from St Thomas Aquinas in the handout and the other from David Hume. Blackburn does not discuss Aquinas version and Hume's version is presented in a dialogue. The characters are of no concern to us and you should read the discussion as between two positions, a proponent of the argument and a critic.

The major premise of the argument is that everything that exists is a *dependent* being—has a cause of its existence. That cause, in turn, has its own cause and this one has its and so on. It is then argued that the sequence of causes cannot go back to infinity, therefore there *must* exist a First Cause that has no cause and is the cause of itself. And this First Cause is God who is the cause of everything that exists. The structure of the argument is the same in both versions.

The third is the 'Design Argument'. It begins with the recognition that there is order in the world, everything fits with everything else—there is *design* in the world. There *must* be an intelligence behind any design, therefore there must exist a divine intelligence that is the source of design in the world—this Divine Intelligence is God.

I suggest that you read through Blackburn's discussion of the arguments (pp. 149-68) and then re-read each section as we go along.