

The Axiology of Theism

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Existential vs. Axiological question

- The axio. import of God's existence or non-existence.
- The *value impact* of God's existence, nature and activity on actual world/part of the world, the lives of person/s, possible worlds.
- Solely dedicated to the axiological question about God (what axio. difference would or does theism make). A comparative question about the *difference in value* between different possible worlds or state of affairs.
- Not (and neutral) about whether God exists or the value of *belief* in God, nor the value of *religious practices* oriented toward God.
- The value judgment focuses on either the intrinsically or extrinsically/instrumental value and moral effects of God's existence.

Where the debate starts

- Rescher(1990) distinguishes between the belief that God exists and the desire that God exists. The latter reflects an axiological judgment.
- Kahane(2011) inspired by Thomas Nagel's remarks argues that it's rational for someone to prefer that God not exist. Trying to develop Nagel's preference into an (coherent) axiological position.
- The focus to date has been on comparing the axio. implications of theism and atheism (Judeo – Christian/bare theism and ontological naturalism).

Possible answers to the axio. question

- 1- **Pro-theism:** God's existence increases the value of the world.
 - 2- **Anti-theism:** God's existence decreases the value of the world.
 - 3- **Neutralist:** God's existence does not make an axio. difference or neither adds nor detracts from the value of the world (the values are identical or on par).
 - 4- **Quietist:** The axio. question is in principle unanswerable (the impossibility of comparability/ incommensurability of the relevant worlds).
 - 5- **Agnostic:** While the question is answerable we ought to suspend judgment. (concerning the difficulties in making the relevant comparisons)
- Combinations with exis. positions and assessing whether they are coherent.
 - Probabilistic variants: God's existence *makes it likely* that things are better or worse.
 - Rational preference instead of axi. difference.

Divisions

1- **personal** (the axio. implications of God's existence with respect to individual persons) / **impersonal** (without any reference to God's value-impact on persons).

2- **narrow** (refers to just one or certain advantages of God's non-/existence) / **wide or broad** (axio. consequences of God's non-/existence overall).

Defenses of pro-theism

- 1- Any world with God is infinitely valuable (wide impersonal pro-theism).
- 2- God as a morally good agent adds value to any state of affairs in which God exists.
- 3- God prevents gratuitous evil as a logical consequence of the essential divine attributes. (contrary to naturalism God furnishes a guarantee in this regard)
- 4- A guarantee of Cosmic justice and afterlife.
- 5- Objective meaning and morality.
- 6- The possibility of being able to enter into a relationship with God.(divine hiddenness/ the axio. effects of having a relationship with God)

- Whether the goods mentioned only obtain on theism.
- Defining the concept of *infinitely valuable*.
- Afterlife: we should assess if it actually supports pro-theism (they must be *theologically* (hell and heaven), *metaphysically* (personal identity) and *axio.*(tedious) plausible). Rewarding turns it in to a downside.
- Morality: God is needed/ this makes the relevant worlds better.
- Meaning: 1- what meaning amounts to 2- necessary or sufficient conditions for a life to be meaningful. Supernatural component (fulfilling divine purposes).

Defenses of anti-theism

- 1- The meaningful life argument: it could be rational for someone to prefer that God not exist if it turns out that her life would lose meaning if God exists.
- 2- God's existence compromises absolute freedom and
- 3- privacy,
- 4- human dignity, (depending on God and part of God's purposes)
- 5- commonsense morality and
- 6- the intelligibility of the world. (on theism God's intentions are fundamental to universe, fundamental purposes)

- These goods are either *reduced* or *eliminated* on theism.
- Freedom and God's omniscience (how great a good *the ability to do otherwise* is taken to be and if it is axio. significant/ this is the same on naturalism).
- Privacy: God objectionably violates people's right of privacy. (this is not bad)
- What is meant by dignity/ what undermines it.
- God as an additional object of knowledge on theism/ certain phenomena are better explained on theism/ divine revelation as an additional mechanism.
- Limited scope of persons/ meaningfulness depends on the pursuit of these goods/ theism does not render pursuing it irrational in the case of atheists.

The connection between axio. and exis. questions

- The problem of evil supports pro-theism (certain world bad-making properties are incompatible with God's existence).
- Divine Hiddenness: atheistic goods can be experienced on theism if God is hidden, God might hide in order to maximize the axio. value of the world.

Anti-theism and Atheism

- If God exists, God necessarily brings about the better over the worse but if anti-theism is true (which means that God doesn't always bring about the better) then God doesn't exist.
- Any negative feature of theism is evidence for atheism since it's logically impossible that any negative feature be associated with God (due to divine attributes).

Worries

- Comparing counter-possible worlds (metaphysically/ epistemically (or true for all we know) possible worlds)
- Rational preference vs. axio. judgments. It could be rational to prefer a less-than-best state of affairs. The possibility of rational preference despite of the impossibility of axio. judgment.
- Overestimating the probability of a belief being true because of associating positive outcomes with the truth of it.

Expanding the scope of the debate

- Beyond Christian doctrines (theism) and ontological naturalism (atheism). e.g. other conceptions of God/theism, eastern traditions and non-naturalistic worldviews (axiology of worldviews in general), other forms of naturalism.
- Relating to other debates in philosophy of religion such as skeptical theism, Pascal's wager.

Useful References

- 1- Kahane, Guy, 2011, Should We Want God to Exist? Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. LXXXII NO.3
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- 5- Kraay, Klaas, 2021, The Axiology of Theism, Cambridge Elements in Philosophy of Religion, Cambridge University Press.
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