

'Why Hume and Kant were mistaken in rejecting natural theology?'

Hume claimed that all our 'ideas' are compounded of simple ideas, and all simple ideas are derived from 'impressions'. Any purported idea not so derived is meaningless. BUT, Hume had no rule for which of the many ideas which could be derived from any particular collection of impressions are meaningful, or how they can be combined in logically possible ways. A proposition which is apparently logically (im)probable is probably logically (im)probable. If intuitions clash, the way to show that some proposition p is logically possible is to show that some more obviously logically possible proposition q entails p ; and the way to show that p is a logically impossible proposition is to show that that p entails a contradiction. Hume applied his principle that all our simple ideas are derived from impressions to conclude that to say 'x causes y' is to say that there are kinds A and B such that x is A, y is B, and all A's are followed by B's. Hence, he claimed, to say that God caused our universe, is to say that all actions of gods willing the existence of universes are followed by the existence of those universes; and of course we have no evidence of that. BUT (α) our understanding of what 'x causes y' means comes most basically from ourselves causing events. And (β) our knowledge that x causes y may be that it is a consequence of a probable hypothesis other than the hypothesis that 'x is A, y is B, and all A's are followed by B's'. A hypothesis H is rendered probable by evidence E insofar as (1) H makes E probable, (2) H fits with background evidence, (3) H is simple, (4) H has small scope. In comparing large-scale hypotheses with each other, only (1) and (3) are relevant. Given (α) and (β) the hypothesis that there is a unique unobservable cause of phenomena may be rendered probable by evidence. Kant held that our categories can provide knowledge only when applied to objects of 'possible' sensible experience. BUT it needs the above criteria to show what is a 'possible' experience, as well as to show what non-experientable possibilities there are. Kant repeated Hume's claim that our knowledge of causation is knowledge of regular succession, and so that – for the same reason as Hume gave – natural theology is impossible; hence the same objections apply to it. Kant supported his view about the limits to knowledge by the arguments in his Antinomies, purporting to show that various plausible philosophical theories which extrapolate far beyond possible experience are just as well justified as equally plausible incompatible rival theories – for example, that the theory that the universe had a beginning is just as plausible as the theory that the universe had no beginning. BUT, having no clear conception of how evidence can render a very wide ranging hypothesis probable, he could not rule out the possibility that one of his alternatives is more probable than the other one.

Kant claimed that other arguments for the existence of God need to be backed up by an ontological argument to show that God exists of logical necessity, and that no such argument can be had. BUT in my view the idea that God's necessity is logical necessity is due to Avicenna, appears in Christian theology only in Scotus, and was taken for granted by Kant through his reading of Leibniz; yet there is no need for any theist to hold it.