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Thinking Philosophically About God

by Gregory E. Ganssle

Suppose someone has died and we think that a murder may have been committed. The detective examines the scene and begins a long investigation. She seeks to identify the responsible person by gathering facts at the scene and determining in which direction these facts point. Some of the evidence will point to the fact that the death was caused by some person without identifying who the person is. Other lines of evidence may go far towards identifying the person. Sometimes what first appears to be a promising line of evidence turns out to be a dead end. Other times, some fact that appears to be insignificant at first winds up providing the key.

It is unusual for a detective to find a single piece of evidence that will provide absolute certainty about the identity of the criminal. Rather, detectives try to build what can be called a *cumulative case*. The various lines of evidence work together to make it more and more reasonable to think that a particular suspect is guilty. If the cumulative case is strong enough, the suspect may be convicted of the crime. The evidence needs to establish his identity beyond a *reasonable* doubt. It does not need to provide absolute certainty.

You cannot prove God's existence

It is common for thinking people to insist that it is impossible to prove the existence of God. In fact this claim has been elevated to the level of dogma in American

intellectual culture. The reason I know this is considered unquestionable dogma is the reaction I get when I call it into question. When someone says "You cannot prove the existence of God" I want to ask "How do you know? You just met me! How do you know what I can do?"

What do most people mean when they recite this claim? Most people mean that I cannot provide a philosophical argument for the existence of God that will convince all thinking people. It is impossible, so the story goes, to provide an argument that will compel assent. If my argument will not convince the most ardent atheist, I have not proven God's existence. Since I cannot convince such an atheist to believe, my arguments do not count as proof. If they do not count as proof, what good are they?

I agree that I cannot provide an argument that will convince all thinking people. But what does this tell me? Does this tell me anything about God? No. This tells me more about the nature of proof than it does about whether God exists. I cannot provide an argument which will convince everyone, without a possibility of doubt, that God exists. That is no problem. You see, I cannot provide an argument for any interesting philosophical conclusion which will be accepted by everyone without possibility of doubt.

I cannot prove beyond the possibility of doubt in a way that will convince all

philosophers that the Rocky Mountains are really there as a mind independent object. I cannot prove that the entire universe did not pop into existence five minutes ago and that all of our apparent memories are not illusions. I cannot prove that the other people you see on campus have minds. Perhaps they are very clever robots.

In fact, there is no interesting philosophical conclusion that can be proven beyond the possibility of doubt. So the fact that arguments for the existence of God do not produce mathematical certainty does not by itself weaken the case for God's existence. It simply places the question of God's existence in the same category as other philosophical questions such as that of the existence of the external, mind independent world and the question of how we know other people have minds.

It turns out that there is a great deal of similarity between the strategy of the detective and the strategy we pursue as philosophers. We do not expect one line of evidence by itself to be strong enough to prove that God exists or to make the case undeniably strong. Rather, different lines work together to strengthen or weaken the case for God's existence. We try to assess all of the evidence to see in which direction it points. In this article, I will look at two lines of evidence that provide good reason to think God exists. There are, of course, other lines of evidence for the existence of God. Some of these are significantly strong. For the purposes of this article, however, I will focus on two. The existence of the universe is the first line of evidence. The second is the nature of moral reality. These lines of evidence point to the existence of God, although they do not prove it.

The Existence of the Universe points to God.

Why is there something rather than nothing? Have you ever thought about this question? It does not seem as though there had to be something. If you consider most of the things you see every day, they are all pretty much things that do not have to exist. In fact we can imagine very easily how they might not have existed. If my parents had never met (If my father had not gone to college in Boston, for instance) I would not have existed. My children would not have existed and there would be much less junk in our basement.

Why do things come into existence? Well there are always various reasons. Nothing comes into existence without some

reason. Or, at least it seems like nothing comes into existence without some reason. Something coming into existence is what we call an *event*. It is something that happens. Anytime something comes into existence, an event happens. Some events are cases of things coming into existence. Sometimes they are changes in something already existing. Other events are the going out of existence of things. Events of all kinds happen. In fact, events are the only things that happen. Usually they are caused to happen by other events. Sometimes one event is both a change and a coming into existence. For example, if you make a hunk of modeling clay into a statue, you cause a change in the shape of the hunk of clay and at the same time you cause the statue to come into existence. So, many of the things we see are the kinds of things that come into existence. Part of any complete answer to the question of why something exists will include the things that caused it to come into existence.

Think about the question of why there is anything at all. Let us begin to think about this question by taking the universe as a whole. Why is there a universe in the first place? If the universe came into existence, then part of the answer to this question involves the event that brought it into existence. If the universe did not come into existence (that is, if it always existed) then the answer to why it exists will not involve any cause that brings it into existence.

You can probably see where I am heading. If we can show that the universe came into existence, then we have to think about what caused it to come into existence. This may be a clue to the question of whether or not God exists. Let us follow this line of thinking. Things that come into existence, we have said, are caused to exist by something else. Let's put this claim out in the open so we can see what might follow from it.

1. Whatever comes into existence is caused to exist by something else.

There are lots of things that come into existence so we will have lots of causes. It will not do simply to have a pile of causes randomly scattered about. We need to have chains of causes or series of causes. The coming into existence of the statue was caused by the clay being molded into the right shape. The molding of the clay was caused by the fingers and palms of the person exerting the right kind of pressure. The

hands exerting the pressure was caused by the arm muscles and nerves operating in the right way. The operating of the muscles nerves was caused by the person himself. You can see that we get a series of causes. Notice that in the series of causes, some involve changes and some involve things coming into existence.

How far back will a series of causes go? Either it can go back forever or it cannot. In other words, either the series of past causes is infinite or it is finite. If it is infinite, then for every part of the series, there is something else in the series that is previous to it and which is its cause. If it is finite, then there is some point where the whole series began. In other words, the series itself came into existence. We can capture these thoughts and what follows from them by forming an argument:

1. Whatever comes into existence is caused to exist by something else.
2. If the series of past causes is not infinite, then the series of past causes came into existence.
3. There cannot be an infinite series of past causes.
4. Therefore, the series of past causes came into existence.
5. Therefore, there exists a cause for the series of past causes and this cause did not itself come into existence.

How do we think about this argument? Does the conclusion follow from the premises? It is a deductively valid argument. In other words, if the premises are true, the conclusion is true. You can see that there are no loopholes. If everything that has come into existence is caused to exist by something else and if this chain cannot be infinite, there must be some first cause that did not come into existence in the first place and thus it did not need to have something else cause it to exist.

Are the premises true? Let us take them one at a time. What of premise one? It seems as though things that come into existence are caused to exist by something else. After all, nothing can cause itself to come into existence. In order to cause itself to come into existence, something would have to exist before it exists. We all know that nothing exists before it exists. So it looks like premise one turns out to be true.



Why is there something rather than nothing? Have you ever thought about this question?

Premise two seems to be true as well. *If the series of past causes is not infinite, then the series of past causes came into existence.* What it means to say that the series of past causes is not infinite is that it began somewhere along the way. If it never came into existence, then it always was and it is infinite.

This leaves us with premise three. *There cannot be an infinite series of past causes.* Is this statement true? Is the series of past causes infinite? Can the universe have an infinite past? There are good reasons to think it cannot. That is, there are good reasons to think that this premise is true. First, there are philosophical reasons to think the past cannot be infinite. Second, there are scientific reasons that support this view.

The philosophical support for this premise is a bit complicated so I will state it right out and then explain it the best way I know how. The past cannot be infinite because *it is impossible to complete an infinite series by successive addition.* What does this claim mean? Think of this mathematical question. Why is it impossible to count to infinity? The problem is not that you get bored with the counting procedure or that you eventually grow old and die. The problem is much bigger than these problems. It is impossible because, no matter how long you count, you will always be at a finite number. It is impossible to count to infinity even if you count by tens or thousands or millions. It is impossible to complete the task of counting to infinity. Once we get this in our minds, we can see two things, I think. We can see what I mean when I say that it is impossible to complete an infinite series by successive addition and we can see that there are good reasons to think that it is actually impossible to complete an infinite series in this way.

One thing we must notice about the past is that it is complete. The series of past events is complete. This claim means that the entire series of past events ends now. It ends today. Tomorrow is not part of the series of past events. (It *will be* part of the past series, of course, but it *is not yet* part



of it.) The series of past events does not extend into the future. It is complete at the present. If it is impossible to complete an infinite series by successive addition (as it is impossible to count to infinity) the past cannot be infinite. If the past is finite, that is, if it had a beginning, then the universe had a beginning. We have good philosophical reason, then, to reject the claim that the universe has always existed.

How good is this line of reasoning? I do have to admit that there are smart philosophers who are not persuaded by it. Some think that if we have an infinite amount of time, it might be possible to complete an infinite series by successive addition and that it is not, therefore, impossible for the past to be infinite. I do not think that this challenge works because I think completing an infinite duration of time is impossible for the same reason that counting to infinity is impossible. Yet if the past is infinite, then an infinite duration of time has elapsed.

There are some scientific reasons as well as philosophical reasons to think that the series of past causes is not infinite. I will not develop these. Rather, I will simply point them out. First, Big Bang theory seems to support the claim that the universe began to exist. If the origin of the universe was anything like what current theories in physics claim, the universe is not infinitely old. Rather, it had a beginning. Of course, there are lots of disagreements within or between current theories about the origin of the universe (and theories change with new ideas and new evidence) so it is wise not to rest too much on what looks like scientific support for the idea that the universe had a beginning.

The second scientific reason is the second law of thermodynamics. The second law of thermodynamics is claim that the amount of usable energy in any closed system always decreases. Another way to state this law is that the

disorder in any system (entropy) always increases. The second law of thermodynamics explains why you need electricity to run your refrigerator and gas to run your car. Without a supply of energy, these things will stop running and then you will have to stay home on Saturday night and drink warm coke. Now let us think about the second law and the universe as a whole.

The total amount of usable energy in a closed system always decreases. A closed system is one that does not get any extra energy from outside it. Since the universe, if there is no God, is a closed system, it cannot be infinitely old. The fact that there still is usable energy in the universe shows that entropy is not complete. Therefore, these physical processes must have begun some finite amount of time ago.

We can see that we have good philosophical and scientific reasons to reject the idea that the universe has always existed. As a result, we have good philosophical and scientific reasons to think that the premise we are discussing (“There cannot be an infinite series of past causes”) is true. If it is true, then it looks as though the argument is a good one. Remember, we already agreed that the first two premises are true. So we have given a good argument for the claim that the universe was caused to exist by something outside it and that this thing itself did not itself come into existence.

Must the Universe have a cause?

The argument we are discussing aim to support the claim that the universe was caused to exist by something

outside of it that did not itself come into existence. I want to look over that argument one more time. I want to look at it again to make sure we have not been too hasty in concluding that the universe must have been caused to exist by something outside of it.

Even if there are good reasons to believe that no series of causes can be infinite, perhaps there is another weak spot in the argument. I think the weakest spot is the second premise. (*Whatever comes into existence is caused to exist by something else.*) We saw that nothing can cause itself to come into existence. Perhaps, there is another alternative that we did not consider. Maybe it is possible for something to come into existence from nothing *without any cause whatsoever*. Can a thing just pop into existence with absolutely no cause? It is safe to say that we do not expect, in our every-day lives, to encounter things that have popped into existence without any cause whatsoever. We fully expect there to be causes for things. This expectation is pretty deep and constant. It is worth asking if there any exceptions at all to this expectation. Second, could the universe itself be such an exception?

The reason we want to keep these two questions separate is that having something that counts as an exception will not affect our argument very much. Even if it is reasonable to think that there are some exceptions, our argument could be adjusted to take account of these things. In order to show that our argument fails, we need for the universe as a whole to be an exception to our deep and constant expectation.

What kinds of things might happen without any cause? Physicists tell us that *quantum events* can do so. A quantum event involves something like the movement or spin of a very small sub-atomic particle. Current quantum theory indicates that some particles can jump from one quantum level to another in a way that is uncaused and not otherwise determined. If they are correct, then some events occur without being caused to occur. This discovery is pretty amazing since it overthrows the view of the universe that most people held throughout the first three hundred years of modern science. Some things can happen without being caused to do so.

These facts about quantum physics undermine the premise we are discussing in the form we are thinking about it. Remember, the premise claims that, “Whatever comes into existence is caused to exist by something else.” If the physicists are right about quantum theory, this premise is false. There are states that do come into existence without being caused to come into existence. It still remains to be seen what these facts about quantum physics have to do with whether the universe itself can come into existence without a cause. The universe, after all, is not very like the quantum states of sub-atomic particles. They are typically quite small and the universe is a very big thing. Simply pointing out that some event does not require a cause will not give us reason to suppose that we do not need a cause for the universe. It does give us a reason to reword the premise, though. Perhaps we should say that “Really big things that come into existence are caused to exist by something else.” If we think the phrase “Really big things” does not sound technical enough we

might try something like, “Supra -atomic things and events that come into existence are caused to exist by something else.” A “supra-atomic” thing is the opposite of a “sub-atomic” thing. Sub-atomic things are smaller than atoms. Supra-atomic things are bigger than atoms.

Granting the sub-atomic exceptions to our expectations about causes, are we confident that supra-atomic things that come into existence are caused to exist? Well, I want to hesitate at this point. All of the supra-atomic things I encounter on a daily basis seem to be the kinds of things that are caused to come into existence. I do not, however, encounter a lot of things that are like the universe *as a whole*. In fact, I do not encounter the universe as a whole at all. I only encounter small chunks of it at a time. Can I go from all the different things I do encounter that are caused to come into existence and conclude that this other thing that I do not encounter also is most likely caused to come into existence? Remember, we have already agreed that the universe as a whole came into existence. Here we are worried about whether it was caused to come into existence. The universe has a lot in common with the everyday things that are caused to come into existence. It is big and it is physical, for instance. It is not something abstract like a number. It differs in striking ways from the ordinary things, however. For example, it exists but does not exist anywhere. It is spatial but it is not in space. It would be more accurate to say that space is in it. Similarly the laws of physics do not act on it as a whole. They act within it. Furthermore, although the universe is a very big thing now, it was not always so big. At the moment and slightly after the big bang, the universe was very small. In fact, it was something, at least for an instant, about the size of a sub-atomic particle.

So I have to grant that it is at least possible that the universe popped into existence without a cause. I can't see strong enough reason to make the claim that such a thing would be either impossible or so unlikely that it is irrational to believe. I think that it is still more reasonable to hold that the universe was caused to exist than that it popped into existence without a cause, however. The universe as a whole is a physical object that is pretty big and has lots of different properties. Even though it began quite small, apparently all of the matter and energy present in the universe today was concentrated in that small object. The history of the

universe is a history of the expansion of all of that matter and energy. So, although it was briefly similar in size to a sub-atomic particle, its properties were quite different. Granting that it is possible that the universe might have come into existence without a cause, it seems difficult to claim that it actually was uncaused *unless you have some reason* to think that this is what happened. There may be reasons for thinking that the universe came into existence without a cause, apart from its relatively small degree of similarity to a sub-atomic particle. I do not know what any of the reasons could be.

We have seen that we have pretty good reasons to think the universe came into existence, but we have also seen that we cannot rule out the possibility that it came into existence uncaused. I have suggested, however, that it is more reasonable to reject this alternative than to accept it. If we do so, then we conclude that the universe was caused to exist by something outside it. There was a first cause. This cause existed eternally. It initiated the big bang and caused the universe to come into existence.

Must the first cause be God?

Supposing, then, that there is a first cause, why think that the cause is God? This question is important. Showing that there was a first cause is not enough to show that God exists. It may seem obvious that if there was a first cause, that cause was God. This step, though, needs some justification. I do want to point out briefly, however, some reasons to think that this inference is a good one. First, the first cause caused the entire universe to come into existence. Because of this fact, we know that the first cause is not part of the universe. The first cause is not physical. Everything physical is within the universe.

There is good reason to think that the first cause is a *person*. It is not simply a force but it must have aspects of personhood; namely, that it wills. It acts. The claim that the first cause is a personal agent provides the best answer to the question of why the universe began to exist when it did. Why not sooner? Why not later? Suppose the universe was caused to come into existence thirteen billion years ago. The question that naturally arises is, why did it happen then and not some other time? Why did it not come into existence fifty billion years ago? If we ask these kinds of questions about events within the universe, we can always come up with a reason. The event happened when it did because it was not

until then that all the conditions were gathered at the right place for it to occur. Once all of the conditions are gathered together, the event happens.

If the universe was caused to come into existence, all of the necessary and sufficient conditions for it coming into existence were present thirteen billion years ago. Why did the universe not come into existence fifty billion years ago? If all of the conditions were present thirteen billion years ago, they would have been present fifty billion years ago.

We can make a distinction between types of causes, here. The distinction is between event causation and agent (or personal) causation. Most causes are cases of event causation. One event causes another. Most events are caused by other events. It seems that some events - quantum events - are not caused at all. Others, I want to claim, are caused but not caused by other events. They are caused by persons. Personal agents are able to initiate various series of events simply by willing them. If you raise your arm in the air, you initiate the action by willing it. All of the conditions are present, but the event does not occur without the trigger of your intention. If the universe was caused to exist by something outside it, it makes sense that that thing will involve the will of a person.

In this section, we have argued that the universe came into existence and that it was more likely to be caused to come into existence and that it was caused to do so by a person. How good is this argument? Is it a proof? I do not think that this argument comes close to being a proof that carries mathematical certainty. We have not shown that it is *impossible* that the universe popped into existence from nothing without cause. Nor have we shown that the first cause has to be God. We have argued that it is more reasonable to hold that it has a cause and that this cause is a non-physical personal agent. So it seems that this argument is fairly strong, as philosophical arguments go. The existence of the universe points to the existence of God.

Moral Facts Point to God

Most people today think there are certain actions that are morally wrong. For example, most people think that it is wrong to torture a cat to death just for fun. The fact that such an action is wrong can be called a moral fact. Most facts are about the way the world is. Moral facts are about the way

An evolutionary theory of morality may explain why we feel it's wrong to torture a cat. It explains moral feelings, but cannot explain that it's really wrong to torture the cat.

the world ought to be. It ought to be the case that no human being tortures a cat to death just for fun. Whether or not any human being ever actually tortures a cat in this way is not what makes the moral fact a fact.

Although most people believe in moral facts, many are not comfortable with them. They are too odd. Several of the more popular ideas about morality are attempts to tame moral facts. Not all of these ideas are strategies to get rid of moral facts altogether but, for example, relativism reduces the moral fact to facts about the preferences of individuals or cultures. They are still moral facts but they are tamed. There are lots of good reasons to reject relativism in its various forms.

Others defend the idea that morality can be explained through a Darwinian sort of analysis. What an evolutionary theory of morality does explain (that is, if it is true) is why we may feel like it is wrong to torture a cat just for fun. It explains moral feelings but it cannot explain that it is really wrong to torture the cat. Some people think that if we explain the moral feeling, we explain away the moral fact. In other words, they think that moral facts reduce to moral feelings. There are no moral facts apart from facts about our moral feelings. The evolutionary theory of morality itself does not show that all there is to morality is our moral feelings. We need an *argument* for this claim. Such arguments are difficult to make plausible.

Another reason to reject the Darwinian theory of morality is that there is no evidence that it is true. We may have evidence that prehistoric people did travel and hunt in groups but we do not have (and we cannot have) any evidence that our sense of moral obligation comes from the feelings of loyalty and guilt and so forth. This claim is not the sort of claim that lends itself to physical evidence. So while the theory sounds like an established scientific theory, it is really a philosophical claim in disguise.



One other point worth considering is that if morality originated because it had survival value- that is if the evolutionary theory of morality was true- what do you and I do now? We are in a difficult spot. You see, the human race has survived. Nothing that you and I do will make any difference to its future survival. If the whole purpose of morality is to help us survive and you and I know that this is the whole purpose, then why should we be moral? Why should we be or feel obligated to act a certain way? If the evolutionary theory of morality is right, then I do not think there is a good answer to this question. The reason for morality has been fulfilled and it will continue to be fulfilled whether or not we act morally.

So we can see that some of the attempts to tame moral facts are not too promising. In what follows, proceed on the assumption that there are moral facts, since most people think there are. I will argue that the existence of moral facts points to the existence of God.

I do not think that I am giving a tight argument or proof that the existence of moral facts shows that there is a God. Rather, I am going to press the idea that the existence of a God who created us and cares about us is the best explanation for the existence of moral facts. Of course what counts as the best explanation depends upon what all of the alternative explanations are. I am not going to check out every possible explanation. Rather I am going to compare the idea that God exists with the idea that God does not exist. These are the two major competing explanations. Actually the claim that God exists and the claim that God does not exist are not, by themselves, explanations at all. The claim that God exists may provide the resources for some explanations. These explanations will rely on particular ideas about the nature or purposes of God. The claim that there is no God is a position that rules out certain explanations. That is, it rules out explanations that appeal to the nature or purposes of

God. There are many different and incompatible explanations that fit into the “No-God” side of the fence. So, to be precise, I will argue that God’s existence provides better resources for an explanation for moral facts than the idea that the universe and everything in it is the product of purposeless processes.

Starting from the assumption that there are moral facts, we can get to the hunch I am pressing rather quickly. One of the things that make moral facts strange is their *oughtness*. They are facts that include the notion that we ought to so or refrain from doing some sorts of actions. So we need to look into oughtness. We should begin by observing that there are areas of life other than the moral area that also exhibit oughtness. Activities such as playing a game and doing homework both involve oughtness.

Think of the game of chess. There are two different ways oughtness applies to chess. The first involves the simple rules of the game. You are allowed to move your bishop only on the diagonal. If you move your bishop across the horizontal, you break the rules and, in some sense, you are no longer playing chess. The other sense of oughtness is a strategic oughtness. You ought to protect your king. If you do not protect your king adequately you will lose. You will not be violating any rules. As far as the rules are concerned, you will be playing fine. You might not be a very good player, though. The oughtness that applies to doing your homework is largely a strategic oughtness. If you do not do your homework, you will not do well in school. If you do not do well in

school, your future options will most likely be more limited than you want them to be.

If you challenge one of these rules in game-playing there are two different replies. These replies correspond to the type of oughtness being challenged. If it is a strategic rule you challenge, the response will be a prudential one. If I tell you that you must protect your king and you question me, I will appeal to your goal of winning (or, at least, of not losing so quickly that it is embarrassing.) If you try to violate a fundamental rule of chess, such as moving your bishop along the horizontal, I will say, “You can’t do that.” If you challenge me, I will appeal to the rules. If you say, “Why should I follow the rules?” My only response is that if you don’t you are no longer playing chess. So *if* you want to play chess, you have to follow the rules. If you ask me why you should do your homework, I will also give you a prudential reply. You will not do well on the test, if you do not prepare.

So we can see that playing chess and doing homework are *arenas of oughtness*. What clues do these arenas of oughtness give us about the nature of moral facts? In game-playing, you have to act in a certain way. There are rules that govern your behavior and you must follow them. As far as homework is concerned, there are things you must do. In this way, these arenas are similar to the moral area of our lives. We are under real obligation to act in certain ways.

In the case of chess, you are free to reject the rules of the game. The consequence is that you are no longer playing chess.

In school, you can decide that you do not care to do very well. In both cases, you avoid the oughtness. Some philosophers have called obligations like these hypothetical imperatives. They are imperatives because they are rules or commands. They are, however, only hypothetical. That is, they are binding only in particular circumstances. The circumstances in which you are bound by hypothetical imperatives are those in which you have a certain desire and that desire requires that you follow the rule. We could also call them *conditional commands*. They are commands but they are only conditional commands. If you do not want to fulfill the condition, then you do not have to fulfill the command. *If* you want to play chess correctly, you must follow the rule about not moving your bishop across the horizontal. *If* you want to graduate or get a good job, you have to pass math. *If* you want to pass math, you have to do your homework. Are moral facts also hypothetical imperatives? Are they conditional? Let us think about this question.

Suppose you accuse one of your friends of doing something morally wrong. What kind of response will you get from her? I think you are likely to get a couple of kinds of responses. First, she may argue with you that she did not do the morally wrong action. She did not tell a lie after all because she was truly mistaken. In order to count as a lie, she must have deceived you intentionally. Or she may argue that she did it but she had a good reason to do it. Yes, it was a lie but if she did not lie, then your other friend’s feelings would have been hurt. In other words, there are special circumstances that apply that make the lie something that is not morally

wrong to do. What you are not likely to hear her say is something like the following. “Yes, I lied but so what? I do not want to be moral anyway.” Now you might get this sort of response but I think it is not likely. Most of us think that we do not have a choice about whether we are going to “play the morality game” like we do with the homework strategy or a chess game. We are stuck with the morality game. We cannot opt out.

One major difference between conditional imperatives and morality lies precisely at this point. If you decide not to play chess, then the rules do not apply to you. You are under no obligation to keep them. If you decide that you do not want to do well in school, then the obligation you would otherwise feel to do your homework is undermined. Whether or not moral rules apply to you, however, is not up to you. Deciding that you do not want to be a moral person does not get you out of the moral obligation. If you cannot opt out of the morality game, then morality is not about hypothetical imperatives. It is not conditional. Morality consists in what philosophers call categorical *imperatives*. We could call them *unconditional* imperatives or unconditional commands. You simply must obey. No one thinks you are excused if you tell them you decided not to obey the dictates of morality.

Two points must be made here. First, if there are no moral facts, or if morality is relative, then this claim about the unconditional nature of morality is not true. If we can reject relativism, as I suggested, and if there are moral facts, then it is reasonable to think that moral obligations are unconditional imperatives. If they are not conditional, then you cannot opt out.

Second, it is certainly up to the individual whether she will care about acting morally or not. Even if there are moral facts and these are unconditional, she can decide that she will not try to act morally. Her decision, however, does not remove the real moral obligations that she has. She still did something really wrong, even if she does not care.

So it looks like we have an arena of oughtness that is unconditional. We are not free to reject the condition. The command is binding on us whether or not we want it to be. What is it that makes morality binding on us? It must be something that is not up to us because if it was up to us, we could, perhaps, opt out. I want to pursue one line of thought about this question.

In each hypothetical arena of oughtness, the oughtness is related to a purpose. In chess, the purpose is to play the game or to play it well. In homework, it is to do well enough in your class that you can move on to your next step in life. Moral imperatives- unconditional imperatives- have something to do with purpose as well. At least, this is the claim I want to make. The purpose of an unconditional imperative itself must be unconditional. It must be a purpose that holds for each person regardless of his particular circumstances. It is a purpose that we are not free to reject. If there is such a purpose, it is easy to see how we could be under unconditional imperatives. We are under imperatives because there is a purpose. They are not conditional because this purpose is not something we choose. It is given to us. So my first conclusion is that the nature of morality is good reason to think that there is a purpose for human existence.

I want to pause and make clear the relation between the imperatives and the purpose. It might seem like I am going in two different directions here. It may help to distinguish between the order of *reality* and the order of *knowing*. I can explain this best with an example. If I am going to drive into Boston, I will need a good map. There is a relation between Boston, the city, and the map of Boston. The city itself comes first in the order of *reality*. It was there and the streets were arranged in that particular sort of disorder for which Boston is known before the map was made. Later, someone drew up the map to show how the streets of Boston work. It is a good map only if it represents accurately the relevant features of the city of Boston. As far as the order of *knowing* is concerned, the map comes first. I need to study the map first in order to get the right clues about navigating the city.

When it comes to purposes and rules, the purpose comes first in the order of reality. The objective of the game of chess is what determines what the particular rules are. The rules might come first, though, in the order of knowing. I learn chess by learning the different pieces and the moves they are allowed to make. From there I move on to the goal of the game. The same relation holds in the area of morality. In the order of knowing, the existence and nature of moral facts comes first. These then give us a clue that there is a purpose and that this purpose is unconditional. In the order of reality, however, the purpose comes first.

Let's get back to the main discussion and try to see in another way how moral facts give a clue to the purpose of morality. Suppose there is no unconditional purpose for human existence. In this case it is difficult to see how there can be categorical imperatives. The question that is lurking here is, "Why should I feel like I must obey the moral rules?" When we were investigating chess and home work, we saw that any answer to this kind of "Why?" question will be an answer in terms of purpose. If I can reject any purpose that I consider, then whatever obligation I am under is not unconditional.

Perhaps I should mention that I do not want to argue that some particular moral rule is itself absolute and unconditional. I am not saying, for example, that we are never allowed to lie. It may be the case that a lie is never morally justified or it may be the case that there are circumstances in which you are morally justified to lie. Remember, if you do lie in one of these circumstances, you have not rejected the moral game. You have applied your best thinking and concluded that the unconditional moral obligations you have do not prohibit you from lying in that particular situation. You are clearly still in the moral game. What I am arguing is that your obligation to follow the moral imperatives- whatever these turn out to be- is itself unconditional.

The difference between the purposes of hypothetical imperatives and that of categorical imperatives is that we are free to reject the former but not the latter. We are free to reject them because they are, in a sense, conditions that were invented by ourselves or by other human beings. Someone invented chess and made up the rule about not moving your bishop across the horizontal. If the purpose that grounds moral obligations is one we cannot reject, it is probably not one that was invented by any human being or group of people. It is not one we choose; it is one that we find that we have whether we like it or not.

So, our reasoning to this point can be summarized in this way. Moral facts involve unconditional or categorical imperatives. These imperatives are not invented by people or by society. One very plausible way to understand imperatives is in terms of purpose. Unconditional imperatives require an unconditional purpose. So the nature of morality is good reason to think that there is a purpose to human beings and that this purpose is not invented by people or society and it is not optional.

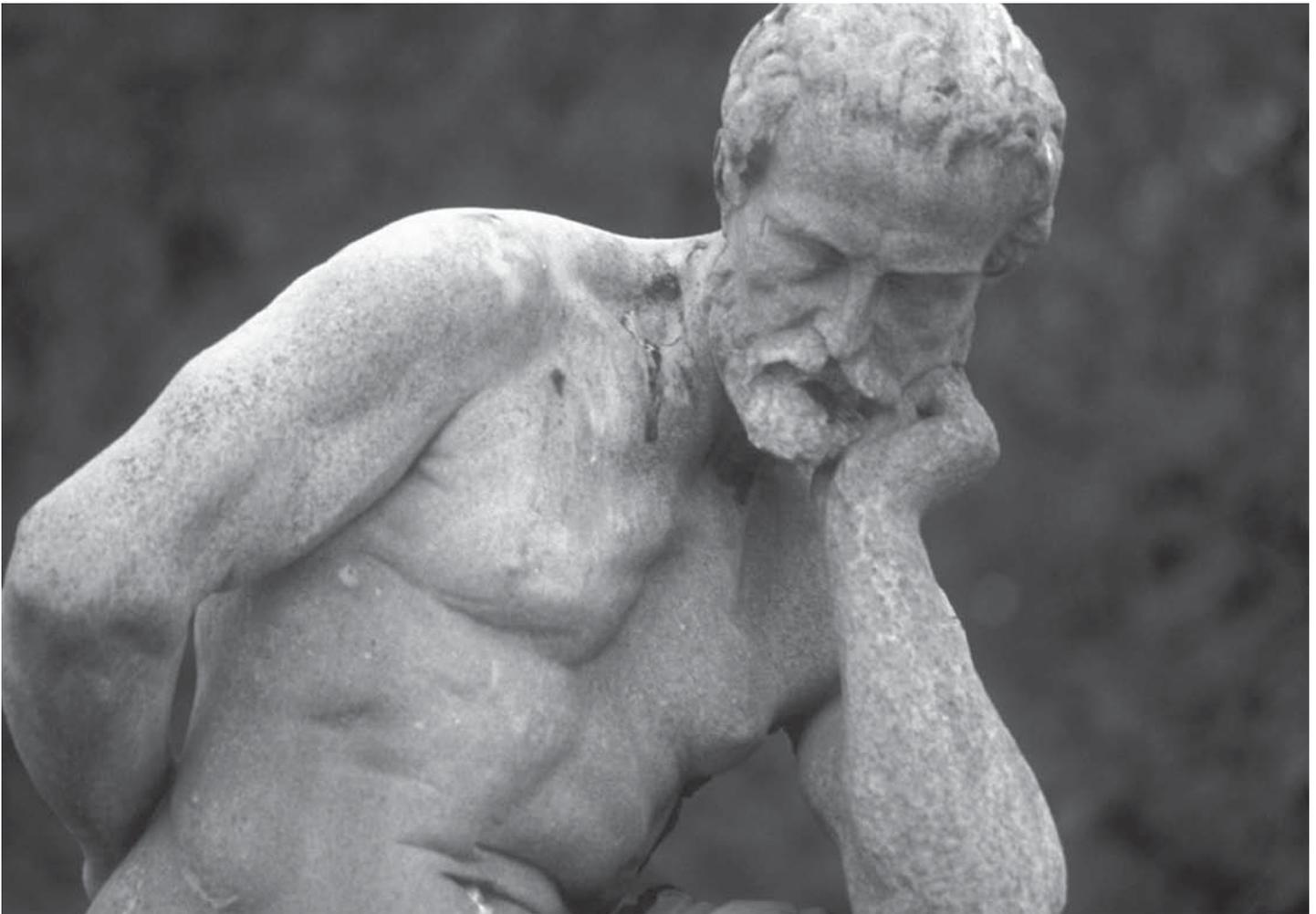
Neither of these lines of evidence provides certainty, but certainty of this kind is attainable only in mathematics or logic. Every other domain is evidential.

The final step in defending the claim that moral facts point to God is to point out that the existence of this kind of purpose for human beings is pretty surprising if there is no God and human beings are, in the end, simply the accidental by-products of accidental processes. Yet such a purpose is not at all surprising if God exists and created human beings. If God invented human beings, he did so for a reason or reasons. Some of these reasons may ground moral truths. For example, if God made us with moral ends in mind- if he made us so that we would embody certain virtues, for example- his setting up moral reality the way he did makes a good deal of sense. If God has spiritual purposes for us- that we would find a relationship with him and experience him as our highest good- he may set up moral rules as guidelines for how best to do that.

Whatever God's purposes are, it makes sense that he would make us the kinds of beings that are subject to moral truths and that can understand and act on them. If God's purposes are for our good, as many religious traditions affirm, then the fact that following moral reality tends towards our flourishing also makes sense. God's existence, then, is a better explanation for the nature of morality than any view that does not include an unconditional purpose. Morality, then, points to God's existence.

Conclusion

I have presented two lines of evidence that supports the claim that God exists. First, the existence of the universe points to God. Second, moral facts point to God. Neither of these lines of evidence provides certainty, but we know that certainty of this kind is attainable only in mathematics or logic. Every other domain is evidential. How strong is the evidence I have presented? Different readers will assess its strength differently. Some may be persuaded to believe in God based on the evidence. Others might still not be convinced. They might find the case for God not as strong as they would like. They might look for more evidence. The case for and against the existence of God is much more detailed and varied than I can present in a short article. There is plenty out there for the interested reader.

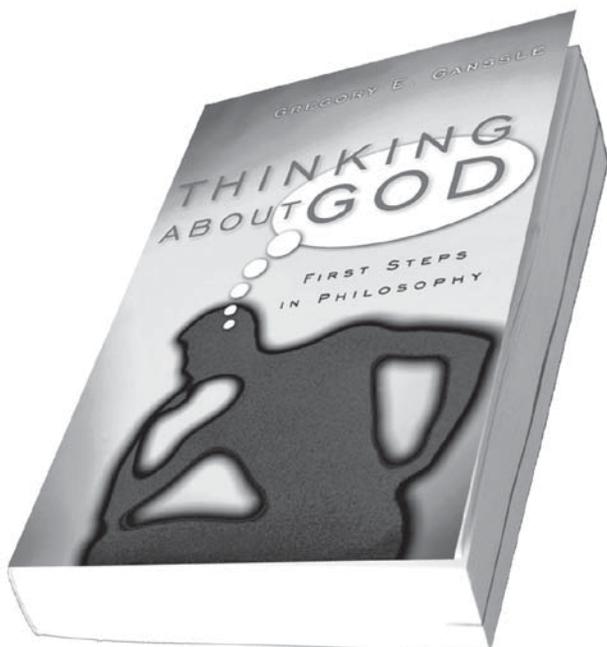


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