

Introduction

Good morning. I would like to begin by welcoming you to today's debate on arguments for the existence of God. First, let me set the stage for you. Today, we are in another possible world. In this other possible world, I am sitting along side three illustrious philosophers: Mr. René Descartes, Mr. Benedict de Spinoza, and finally Mr. Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz. Each of these philosophers has been given the opportunity to read each other's work. All have written arguments for the existence of God and today, they will have the opportunity to defend their arguments. We will begin by listening to a short statement from each philosopher, defending the superiority of his own argument for the existence of God over the arguments of his peers and perhaps noting shortcomings in the works of the other debaters. Following these statements, there will be a series of questions. However, before we begin, I would like to take an informal straw poll from our audience. Based on your previous reading and understanding of these men's work, who do you feel has the strongest argument for God's existence? Mr. Descartes? Mr. Spinoza? Mr. Leibniz?

Very well, let us begin with you, Mr. Descartes.

Descartes

I will not begin to set forth a lengthy objection to Spinoza's conception of "God," because I do not know if he is truly putting forth an argument for God. His conjecture that we are all parts of God, an infinite and perfect being, is blasphemous to the God I have read about in the Holy Scriptures, and I condemn him as a sinful and foolish Atheist. Moving on... I have read through Leibniz's work, and before I have had the chance to speak with him, I know to which of my arguments he would object. There is one key point on which our ontological arguments for God's existence differ. Leibniz feels compelled to present an argument showing why God must exist, and he would question why I am comfortable merely proving the existence of God to be possible. To him I would respond: is it not proof enough to you that, as imperfect beings, our very conception of a perfect being must be granted to us by the omnipotence of a perfect being? We hold an idea of an infinite and perfect substance, God. But, being finite and imperfect beings, it is impossible that this idea of an infinite and perfect being came from us. Therefore, this idea of God as an infinite and perfect being must have come from an infinite and perfect being: God. A central aspect to my rationalization is the notion that there is more reality in the cause than in the effect; there is more reality in God's existence than in our existence.

So now, I ask you again, have I not provided sufficient proof for the possibility of the existence of a perfect being? If not, I'd be interested in hearing why you, an imperfect being, think you have the capabilities to instill yourself with the idea of a perfect being. This brings me to a similar point, one which I think you will agree upon. Not only does our conception of the possibility of God's perfection come from God, but also our existence is

only possible if one accepts the existence of God. Our existence must have a first cause, and that first cause cannot be our parents nor ourselves, as I have laid out in my third meditation. That only leaves two more possibilities: God, or another unknown cause. The latter is impossible, because that would set me forth on an infinite line of questioning regarding where each subsequent cause received its existence. Therefore, I am left with God. Our very existence is proof enough that God exists.

To Leibniz I hope I have quelled any dissatisfaction you may have had with my argument. To Spinoza, I hope that one day you will come to understand God as he truly is, instead of the muddled, uninformed perception you have of Him.

Thank you Mr. Descartes. And now let us hear from Mr. Spinoza...

Spinoza

After hearing Mr. Descartes and realizing that Mr. Leibniz will most likely be attacking similar concerns, I'd like to offer a defense of my arguments and then quickly return to my quiet life as a simple lens-crafter. I'm afraid that I'll have little luck in convincing my opponents of my unique conception of God, but at the very least, I would like to convince the audience of the errors in their thoughts and the truth in mine. I'm sure you are aware of my idea of God as explored through the phrase "Deus sive Natura" or God, in other words Nature. Although Mr. Descartes and Mr. Leibniz will certainly find it hard to accept this image that I present of God, after considering my arguments for God, it becomes quite apparent for my equation of God with Nature.

My arguments for the existence of God rely on the notion that it is necessary to assert the status of uncaused causes as proper explanation for the existence of one unique substance. My thinking here is in no way revolutionary and instead is accepted by many, most famously by Aristotle many years ago. This uncaused cause, for those ignorant of its meaning, is simply the cause which has always been responsible for the world's existence. In other words more apt to the audience I'm speaking with, it explains the existence of substance. In a manner of speaking, God simply is, always has been, and always will be. Mr. Leibniz and Mr. Descartes fail to understand the idea that everything simply is and talk too much in terms of creation and coming into being. Instead, things just simply are and indeed there is only one thing, one infinite substance that exists. God or nature.

At its core, my argument may seem to take the form of the ontological argument for the existence of God which Mr. Descartes and Mr. Leibniz both have utilized and are quite famous for. My ontological argument hearkens back to the uncaused causes which allow for God's existence. Every substance is unique. Any two substances that exist would have nothing in common, and things with nothing in common cannot be said to cause one another. Therefore, this uncaused cause must be said to come from within the substance. Given substance's infinitude, we are left with a God that must necessarily cause itself and

must necessarily exist while being all that exists. Therefore, God's position as an infinite substance just naturally exists without any reliance on anything else. If there was any other, God would not be infinitely powerful and encompassing. Again, God just simply is and is all that is.

An important separation in my ontological argument is the fact that I do not call on existence to be a necessary mark of perfection. While Descartes focuses on the understanding that for something to be perfect it needs to exist, my argument avoids being bogged down by this claim. Instead of this claim, I'd like to posit that Mr. Descartes and Mr. Leibniz seem to spend a great deal of their time falsely anthropomorphizing God by attributing human traits to his status. Therefore, Mr. Leibniz's discussion of a God as the creator of the 'best of all possible worlds' seems quite flawed in its attempt to argue that God is somehow concerned primarily with what we are arguing as human characteristics of possible worlds. Our human values, although a part of the one and only substance, are not enough to fully understand the complexities of the substance.

In conclusion, I think it is necessary for my argument to acknowledge the difficulty that most will have regarding the uncaused cause of the being which is God, or Nature. It is admittedly difficult to know things through their primary causes because it is not the way we are accustomed to looking upon the world. However, because there only exists one substance with an uncaused cause explaining its existence, Nature or God is the infinite substance that composes the entirety of the world.

Thank you Mr. Spinoza. Finally, we will hear from Mr. Leibniz

Leibniz

Upon listening to these perspectives and analyzing them carefully, it has become quite obvious to me that I have indeed already established the best argument for the existence of God.

I shall begin by explaining why my argument is stronger than Spinoza's, because I take that to be both the clearest and the easiest to explain, for the God Spinoza is discussing is no God at all. After all, the man was expelled from the Jewish community for a reason. However, I rather proceed by using reason and arguments of substance to prove the inadequacies of Spinoza's so called God. Although I grant Spinoza the idea that all living beings are interconnected in such a way that they reflect the entirety of the universe, past and future, I contend that I have proven why there must be something transcendent, and that is God.

My argument rests on the simple and clear premise that all truths must have reasons for their being true and that each individual truth relies on yet another truth to give reason to it. Thus, if the reason for each individual truth is traced back far enough there must necessarily exist a truth that rests outside of the great series of truths; a truth that is

capable of giving reason to all truths that exist thereafter— and that truth is God.

This leads me to my next point: because God as a creator must exist, it follows that he was capable of understanding all possible worlds he could possibly choose from, of being able to will from those infinite possibilities, and of bringing about that world which he willed. These deductions regarding the nature of God's existence allow me to conclude, again through reason, that God, very much unlike that which Spinoza speaks of, is in fact omniscient, omnipotent, and benevolent and therefore must be the creator of the best of all possible worlds. Put more simply, because God has been proven to exist, it can also be deduced that must too be the creator of the best of all possible worlds. My philosophy is neither arbitrary nor anthropomorphic, as my opponents suggest, but rather it follows from reason and has been proven to be true.

Moreover, it is important to note that Spinoza's conception of God as the only substance of the world suggests that God is lived through all living substances of the universe. This seems to imply that I am God in the same way that Spinoza, Descartes and everyone here in the audience is God. However, this must be false. For given that composites exist in the universe, as we can plainly see, there must also exist separate parts capable of creating these composites. Thus, many simple, necessarily unique substances must exist such that they can come together and create composites. These substances, the simplest of all and which cannot be divisible or added to one another, I call monads. Existing as the only genuine substances, monads are the mirrors of God and the representation of the many possibilities of the universe imaginable by God *but* they are not God himself. Therefore, although there are certain similarities between myself and Spinoza the fact remains that God is both transcendent and separate from the world, as I have already proven through the principle of sufficient reason, and that he is the creator of the best possible world, a fact of my philosophy that certainly differentiates me from Spinoza.

Now to move onto Descartes' ontological argument, although I agree that existence is a necessary component of perfection, I still contend that one cannot merely assume the existence of a being composed of all perfections. Instead, a formal analysis of the very *possibility* of such an existence is essential. For, the proof of God's existence arises not in spite of but because of our ability to reason. Therefore, if Descartes would conceded to the fact that that perfections cannot be analyzed given that, by definition, perfections are simple and positive, he would realize that it logically follows that the idea of any two incompatible perfections can neither be proven nor imagined. From this, it also follows that perfections can in actuality co-exist and unite. Therefore, *only* after it has been proven that perfections can co-exist, as I have just done, can an all-perfect God be said to exist. Although Descartes' argument for God's existence is undoubtedly more valuable than Spinoza's, it is flawed nonetheless in that it makes certain assumptions that ought not be made.

Mediator: Thank you Mr. Leibniz. It has become very clear to me that there are both great similarities and differences regarding the views the three of you hold. So, I will now ask a few questions in an attempt to have you further clarify your respective arguments by more specifically engaging and responding to the other arguments that have been presented today.

My first question will be directed at you Mr. Spinoza: Both Mr. Leibniz and Mr. Descartes argue that you are not actually discussing God although you use the name, 'God'. Would you please clarify what you mean by your use of the term 'God' and suggest why this conception is preferable to those conceptions that your opponents present?

Spinoza- Claims at my atheism are unfounded and frustrating when I hear them articulated by Mr. Descartes and Mr. Leibniz. But I understand their complaints in that my argument and ways of thinking differ greatly from their own. I'd first like to rearticulate the error that Mr. Descartes and Mr. Leibniz mentioned throughout their arguments in that they anthropomorphize the idea of God. It would be entirely foolish for us to give human characteristics to because of how minimal our skills at characterizing him are. By only giving God human traits, we are in fact doing a great disservice to just how grand God's true nature is. By identifying God with human characteristics, we are limiting just how powerful a being God truly is.

Furthermore, imagine, if you will, that Mr. Descartes is right and God is something external from the rest of the world. It would then be apparent that God would lack a certain amount of power, mainly the power of being omnipresent throughout our world. Instead, the most powerful God must be assumed to be inherently linked and connected, not separated from our world as well. Thus, God is in nature and nature is God.

Leibniz- Very well, Spinoza. Quite obviously, you have misunderstood my method, if that is what you take my argument to be. For, I agree that God ought not be created in man's image and therefore ought not to have human qualities attributed to him. I do not look inside of myself and then create the image of God, but rather I have used reason to prove first the possibility of God's nature as an all-perfect being and then his existence. I do not by any means suggest that arbitrary characteristics be given to God. Instead, as I have shown through my method of analysis, I contend that God is a being that exists externally to us. Our reasoning is not what gives God the qualities of omnipotence, omnipresence, benevolence or perfection, all of which are characteristics that he always and necessarily possesses, but rather it is our reasoning that allows us to know these truths about God. Therefore, by reasoning that God could possibly exist and by then reasoning why it is that he does exist we are capable of arriving at the necessary Truths concerning his nature.

Descartes - Leibniz, I very much agree with you that our shared propensity towards using logical and rational arguments help us build strong, deductive arguments, hence my establishment of an ontological argument. And, of course, this very rationalization that we speak of Spinoza fails to utilize sufficiently, which I suppose must contribute to his poor and inaccurate conception of God. However, I do think that you, Leibniz, rely far too heavily on using reason to understand the possibility for God's nature. This unrelenting reliance and insistence on employing logic causes you to make unnecessary deductions. I bring this up because you feel obliged to deduce that there could exist a being with all perfections when it is innately evident that God instills within us clear and distinct conceptions that reveal truths. Therefore, it is not necessary for us to prove that God could possibly exist because the very reasoning for proving his existence relies on the fact that we already have a clear and distinct conception of Him. That is, we must simply allow ourselves to reflect deeply enough. It is my conception that in this case, clear and distinct conception is sufficient, and the corollary that Leibniz has added is unnecessary.

Thank you. My second question is directed at you, Mr. Descartes: What exactly is the "problem" of infinite regress? Do you believe that it a problem for Spinoza? If so, how?

Descartes - As I published in my *Objections and Replies*, "we are dealing with causes of being, not causes of coming into being." Infinite regress becomes a problem if one tries to explain our being as the effect of another cause; after one determines what that cause is, I could ask where that cause originated, and so on. Therefore, we would be led on an infinite line of subsequent causes, in other words an infinite regress. I do not think this is an issue for Spinoza, as he has not even come close to being able to address our causes of being; his argument for God's existence is irrelevant, and therefore he has not needed to consider infinite regress.

Spinoza- Infinite regress does appear to be a problem when one analyzes the works of Mr. Descartes and Mr. Leibniz, a problem that they mistakenly believe they solve. When considering their ontological arguments, they argue that we must merely stop with this idea of God as the cause for our existence. On the other hand, when considering my argument for God and the fact that only one infinite substance exists through an uncaused cause, I avoid all problems of an infinite regression, as Mr. Descartes has previously said. I understand that he will continue to disagree with me until he recognizes that God and the rest of the world are not separated but instead naturally and eternally connected. Thus, with my argument for the existence of God, there is no reason to place God as the conclusion to the infinite regression of what things come from: God simply exists as an uncaused cause.

Conclusion: That marks the conclusion of today's debate. I would like to thank the

participants for their contributions. However, before we go I would like to ask you once more, who you think has the strongest argument for the existence of God? Mr. Descartes? Mr. Spinoza? Mr. Leibniz? Thank you very much.