

From Existence to God: A Contemporary Philosophical Argument by Barry Miller

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mined. A new underdetermined truth, Wisdo might say, may prove to be more existentially meaningful. Hence, one's openness is grounded in her quest for meaning. But Wisdo's basic claim seems to be that the greatest meaning that we can know is in the search itself.

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Barry Miller, *From Existence to God: A Contemporary Philosophical Argument*. London: Routledge, 1992, x + 206 pp. US\$ 42.50

This book is likely to contain the most ambitious theistic argument produced by a well-respected, contemporary, analytic philosopher. The argument promised is meant to lead to a much stronger conclusion than the ascription of reasonableness or mere high probability to theism. It is intended to demonstrate that without presupposing even the most widely held principles (e.g. the principle of sufficient reason) the sentence 'The universe exists and God does not' is simply self-contradictory.

The major elements of the argument include (a) existence is a predicate, (b) the sequence of the states of the universe is necessarily a terminating sequence, (c) thus the sequence ends in an uncaused cause, (d) but nothing can be an uncaused cause unless He is a Being who is not distinct from his property of existence.

It may safely be stated that anyone bent upon resisting Miller's argument will be able to do so. Several of the premises do not appear self-evident or necessarily true. For example Miller says that it is a '...purely analytic point that a non-explanatory proposition has no claim to being a causal one' (p. 100).

Now while the point does seem highly reasonable, one is not forced to concede that it is analytically true. There appear to be cases where providing the cause of an event renders the situation less intelligible than it was before. Suppose we are inquiring 'Why is Fred standing on one foot at the middle of this busy highway?' and receive the reply 'Because it is Monday today, and the time around 3 p.m. and every Monday at this time Fred imitates his cousin who is also standing on one foot etc.' Assuming this to be a truthful reply and that it reveals to us the cause of Fred's strange behavior, it nevertheless generates several more puzzlements than we had initially.

One of the most difficult ideas is expressed on p. 135: 'Whatever is distinct from its existence, ... can exist only if caused to do so. Hence the Universe [unlike God] cannot be the uncaused cause.'

There will be readers who will want to question the meaningfulness of the notion of a 'being distinct from its existence'. And many philosophers would insist that the claim 'the world's present state is a part of a causal chain going back to the infinite past' is not incoherent.

Another point which may be seriously questioned is Miller's insistence that Russell's nihilistic thesis is false. Russell proclaimed: 'There is nothing puzzling about the existence of the Universe. It just exists, and that is all there is to it. That is simply a brute fact.'

Miller explains that a brute fact by definition requires no explanation. Subsequently he argues at some length that the existence of a physical object cannot be a brute fact. Let us assume that he is entirely successful in his painstaking efforts to show that the origin of the universe does demand an explanation. It still does not necessarily follow that the explanation suggested by him is the correct one. Furthermore, it does not even necessarily follow that actually there *is* such an explanation. We know, for example, that in mathematics there are some tantalizing problems to which some of the highest intellects have searched in vain for a solution. Some of these, we are told, will forever cry out for a solution and have none.

Admittedly a theist might contend that just as Descartes could not contemplate the possibility of a Divine deceiver, he finds it intolerable that God should permit any inexplicable facts to obtain. But Miller's assertion is intended to be a crucial part of his effort to *prove* the existence of God, thus even this weak argument seems unavailable to him. And it is essential to realize that Miller could not mean that the very fact that the theistic hypothesis does explain what would otherwise be inexplicable, vindicates it: his argument would then be downgraded to a typical non-deductive argument.

Some readers, including theists, might wish to raise a sweeping objection to the very kind of enterprise Miller has undertaken. Is it compatible with Divine Justice, they could ask, that for thousands of years God should have permitted people to be unable to see the existence of a decisive, logically conclusive argument for thousands of years, and then at last granting to a generation like ours – not specially deserving of Divine favors – the insight to discover a deductively rigorous, and hence irresistible proof for His existence?

I do not believe this to be a valid objection. A theist cannot escape the conclusion that at different stages in history, support for religious faith is available to different degrees. Major miracles apparently common in Biblical times no longer seem to occur. In the Middle Ages – unlike in ours – an individual's faith was overwhelmingly supported by the climate of opinion prevailing in which religious faith was one of the axioms of reality.

In short: that the available evidence for God's existence should greatly vary with varying epoches in history, must be compatible with theism. Miller's attempt to introduce a dramatic factor to tip the balance sharply toward theism, is, as such, an assuredly legitimate endeavor.

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