

Can Swinburne Convince Cosmologically?

PHIL 223 - Science and Religion

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1 Introduction

After reading chapter seven of Richard Swinburne's 'The Existence of God' we are asked the question as to whether we find it convincing or not. Swinburne, up against formed and hardened beliefs fails to convince me of his position. In this discourse care is taken to provide as fair a review of his arguments, however, I have been unable to review them in isolation but as an addition to my existing view on philosophy.

2 Arguments

2.1 Science provides an incomplete view of the Universe

Swinburne claims that science can never give the full cause of the existence of the Universe because this is something 'too big' for it to explain. My response to this is shaped by my views on the anthropic principle¹. Some people use this argument against the need of a Higher Being who fine tuned the universe, but this argument is both deeply disliked by both physicists [3] and theologians alike. Physicists put their sweat and blood into trying to find out exactly why the universe is as it is. They search for what were the initial composition and laws at the time of the Big Bang that caused our particular universe to end up like it is today. Simply saying it exists because we are here to observe it deeply undermines this effort to uncover the reasons for the laws of the universe. If God exists and he is present at every instant in time to give a personal cause to the existing laws of the Universe then this may make it more likely that we come to detect his influence. I believe if science encounters the supernatural then it will only be natural for it to move from the natural to the supernatural to explain the supernatural. If the Babel Fish [4] or rabbits in the pre-Cambrian², scientists may be justified to use supernatural justifications as theories to explain the phenomenon. Even now some molecular biologists who believe there is too much complexity in science to occur as chance use science to explain the existence of a supernatural God. Perhaps after uncovering the Theory of Everything: "Imagine a world in which everything is explained, in which human beings would know why they act, how they think, and how they came to be." [9] science may be in a position to answer some of these deeper questions. Swinburne should realize that perhaps science today may not explain why laws are how they are but science is working very hard towards it.

A figurative view, with respect to the S-P-L theory, of this outlook is shown in Equation 1 and Equation 2 where science alone is responsible for each connection.

$$G \rightarrow S_1 \rightarrow S_2 \rightarrow S_3 \rightarrow \dots \quad (1)$$

$$G \xrightarrow{G} S_1 \xrightarrow{G} S_2 \xrightarrow{G} S_3 \xrightarrow{G} \dots \quad (2)$$

¹According to the weak anthropic principle, 'the universe may appear to sustain life perfectly but in fact life simply fits the existing conditions in the universe.' [2]

²Rabbits in the pre-Cambrian will be a deal breaker for the theory of evolution. The evidence could also be a rock found 3000 km under the Earth surface that states that the Earth is really ten thousand years old in twelve different languages

A very crude analogy of what \xrightarrow{G} can be that of a catalyst without which the state can never go from S_1 to S_2 . This view is oddly similar to subscribing the reason for chemical reactions simply to the will of God, but I reiterate this inclusion is only necessary if science comes across some phenomenon so unlikely (see example above) that invoking God finally makes sense. Of course, this leaves open the question what unlikely is as well as the possibility of deceit as toyed with in Dan Brown's Deception Point.

One can infer that this means that I further am not convinced about his claim that the cause for a finite sequence has a cause outside the sequence, my position being that if God is the cause of the sequence He can then be placed at the start of it (or in every point).

2.2 Inductive Probabilities

I haven't been able to properly understand how one is justified in building up to a C inductive argument by just using arguments and not empirical data. To be fair, I have not read the first few chapters of 'The Existence of God' where Swinburne develops and justifies several concepts that he uses in his development of his inductive cosmological argument. Nevertheless, one can still analyze an interesting example about explaining Mary's virgin birth [1]. One theory states that God through the Holy Spirit led Mary to become pregnant. The other would dare to say that her husband helped her in this regard. As we were not present at the moment to truly verify the theories we can but assign probabilities to our theories. And it seems to me more probable that ancient texts have been mistaken rather than positing a whole string of miraculous events. I may choose to not believe this but as far as this Bayesian Scheme is concerned the decision should seem, 'I urge' [6], obvious. Swinburne would surely agree as he keeps his books almost free of biblical quotations.[11]

It seems that we can reach some conclusion as to which theory is more probable but even here are decision is based greatly on empirical data. We observe pregnancies happening daily and have never observed virgin birth in humans. And maybe it will never be possible to get data regarding the creation of the Universe because it has happened only once i.e it is unique. Swinburne then argues for the uniqueness of all things by ascribing a specific description to them³. And so he says that just as unique objects can be grouped and analyzed we should be able to do the same with the universe. The Universe can perhaps be grouped with things that 'exist'. I am still skeptic that whether the Universe which itself defines space, time and really everything affords the luxury of such parallels to be drawn. Certainly the fact that Swinburne's desk has intricate scratches does not seem reason enough for this extension.

In any case I must agree on this account with Swinburne (although to be fair this is not his work) that inductive arguments can at most give a probability as to whether a theory is correct as there is always a possibility that we can come across an anomaly. In any case, I have trouble assigning some 'probability' to theories without the use of any statistical data. Swinburne says that if it is 50 percent likely that John commits a murder and there is a 50 percent chance that anyone else on the planet committed the murder, then since it is much more probable that John committed the murder we should by a C - inductive argument conclude that it was probably John who committed the murder. I think he is acting more like the judge and jury rather than the detective that he claims he is. As an inquisitive detective, or a scientist, one must not just always be wary of unlikely results but rather search for them.

Moreover, I feel more favorably to the Kalam cosmological argument. I feel that the deductive form of the cosmological argument holds more meat. The Stanford Encyclopedia entry [8] on the Cosmological Argument has four to five points for the deductive argument and as many against but just an explanatory paragraph on the inductive argument. The argument just doesn't claim anything solid. His final claims STATE CLAIM HERE are so modest and meager that even if he had me convinced of them he wouldn't have convinced me of much. In the end however, his use of his C inductive arguments, (namely: the cosmological argument, the argument from design, arguments from consciousness and morality, the argument from providence, arguments from history and miracles, the argument from religious experience) [7] for the development of a much stronger P inductive argument seems questionable. As I haven't read this I cannot comment further but I'm guessing I wouldn't be convinced.

³He says that his desk has a scratch in the left corner and is placed in some specific position in his room and in this way his desk his unique. And yet it comes under the category of desk, or thing with four legs, or thing that weighs under a ton.

2.3 Depth

Perhaps it is just my bias but I think Swinburne tries to build a false sense of authority around him by arguing for accepted or unquestionable things unnecessarily. For example he spends three pages arguing that the universe is either infinite or infinite depending on what science will say in the future. I sincerely, think that he should spend more time stating critical parts of his arguments such as why the existence of a physical universe without God is not incoherent. There is a footnote which points to another of his books [7] for this. On looking up the reference I was unable to find the given proof but it is more of a general guideline as to how one might frame an incoherent proof. Given the length of his other footnotes I am lead to believe he does not mention it because he has no valid point to make and hence is forced to elaborate on other already well established points. Perhaps in truth if done properly, philosophy moves at a slow pace [5] and this is the reason Swinburne has chosen to present the fewest arguments for his position. However, he has often left me wanting for more information at several points and hence unconvinced. Unfortunately, Swinburne's work has been celebrated as 'the best and most philosophically interesting among recent defenses of theism' [10] and so I fear I maybe grossly mistaken on my account of its incompleteness.

3 Conclusion

There are many more arguments against Swinburne's move for God, such as whether a single omnipotent God is the simplest explanation, and whether then God requires an explanation or not etc, but I find them to be rather subjective accounts that no one really can reach the truth about so do not feel I am in a place to pass my own value judgments about them. I disagree with several accounts of his book as mentioned earlier. Surprisingly, Swinburne's God is surprisingly

References

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- [4] The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Douglas Adams
- [5] <http://www.jimpryor.net/teaching/guidelines/writing.html>
- [6] The Existence of God, Richard Swinburne
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- [8] Cosmological Argument. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- [9] <http://www.galactic-guide.com/articles/6R102.html>
- [10] <http://www.amazon.com/Existence-God-Richard-Swinburne/dp/0199271682>. Taken on 13, April 2011
- [11] <http://scepticalthoughts.blogspot.com/2009/07/richard-swinburne-existence-of-god.html>