



What “Proof of God” justifies your position? (part three)

This is part three of a four-part series.

Is God all-knowing?



Well, this is absurd on so many levels. If God was all-knowing then why were Adam and Eve punished (kicked out of the Garden of Eden) for eating of the forbidden fruit? Didn't God see that one coming? Is it fair to punish someone for doing something that

was practically built-in to their design by their supposedly perfect, inerrant designer?

And what of free-will? How can we freely choose between options AND have God know what our choice will be before we make it?

From an **information-theory** point of view, there is a LOT of information in the universe. Does God know where each single subatomic particle in the universe is and where it's going?

How does He know this? More importantly, how does He bypass the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle (which states “it’s not possible to know both the position of a particle and the velocity of that particle with perfect precision, not even in theory)?”

Information can be represented as bits, 1s and 0s. Think of it as “information removes uncertainty.” Before you flip a coin, you don’t know if it’ll



land on heads or tails. Your uncertainty is equal to the probability that either choice could come up, one-in-two or one-half (we use a mathematical [formula](#) to convert this to bits of information:). Once you flip it, the coin lands on one side or the other. At that point, your uncertainty drops to zero from one-half. We say the information from that test is one bit.

So, how many bits of information are there in the universe? This is impossible to know, but the number is enormous. A single atom of iron may require 10^{80} bits to fully describe it. Derek Abbott of the University of Adelaide [says](#),

“We know the entropy of a black hole is related to its surface area divided by the Planck length. So what we can do is pretend the whole [known, ed.] universe is a black hole and use the radius of the known universe to get its surface area. And as entropy is related to information, we can calculate the maximum number of bits. Then depending on the details, you’ll get a number between 10^{122} and 10^{124} bits for the whole universe.”

Your modern desktop computer, has something like 10^{11} bits in its hardware. You'd need 10^{113} such computers to store all the information in the known universe, alone. The whole universe only contains around 10^{82} atoms, so it's hard to see how you could ever have enough computers for the task. Especially given that each computer contains around a mole (10^{23}) atoms of material.

"So, what?" a believer might ask. Well, here's the thing. God (if such a being exists) would need to be much bigger than the universe just to contain all the information that is in that universe. "No problem," the believer says. "God is infinite." (another scientific claim, by the way) Now, let's add to God's burden. God is all-knowing so, in addition to knowing everything about our universe, He must know everything about himself.

In addition to encoding all the bits about our universe, an all-knowing God needs to encode all the bits that represent Himself. That includes His representation of our universe. You can see this is going to become a problem very quickly. The omniscient God must contain enough bits to encode all the information PLUS all the information about the bits that encode that information PLUS all the information about those bits that encode that information PLUS...it never ends.

The only reasonable conclusion is that God can't logically be omniscient.

Is God all-powerful?

The Stone Paradox is most commonly used to represent logical limitations to an omnipotent being. Simply, it asks: Could an omnipotent being create a stone too heavy for it to lift? Other variations of this include: Could an omnipotent being make a square triangle?



The basis for the Stone Paradox is simple. If the answer is “Yes” (God **can** make a stone too heavy for Him to lift) then there is something He can’t do, namely lift a stone He created. If the answer is “No” then, again, there is something He can’t do, namely make such a stone.

More recently Pastor Peter LaRuffa has (in)famously stated,

“If somewhere within the Bible, I were to find a passage that said $2 + 2 = 5$, I wouldn’t question what I’m reading in the Bible. I would believe it, accept it as true, and then do my best to work it out and understand it.”

This is the same stance taken by French mathematician and philosopher Rene Descarte. The view that an omnipotent being could do absolutely anything, even the logically absurd, is known as “[voluntarism](#).”

Most theologians and philosophers don’t accept voluntarism but instead resort to “[act theory](#)” interpretations. These take on the form: A being S is omnipotent if-and-only-if S can perform any action A such that A is possible. So, because a square circle, for example, is not possible, it is absurd to believe an omnipotent God can make one.

Act theory doesn’t claim the absolute omnipotence of God, but rather that God is the **maximally powerful** being. That God can do anything that can be done. A logically contradictory state of affairs is not a thing at all, but NOTHING. An all-powerful God can do or make anything, but it’s meaningless to say that He can do or make a “nothing.”

The point is, ‘a rock too heavy for God to lift’ really means ‘a rock too heavy for a being who can lift anything’, so it is a self-contradiction. A ‘square circle’ and ‘ $2+2=5$ ’ are

likewise contradictory states of affairs. Therefore these are all **nothings**.

This immediately leads to the objection, "What sets the constraint about what can be done? Is God forced to obey laws of nature or laws of logic that He has not created? If so, God is not the maximally powerful being imaginable. Why do logical paradoxes lead to NOTHINGS for an all-powerful God?"

Some philosophers have tried to overcome these problems by resorting to the "[result theories](#)" of Leibniz and Ross, where a being is omnipotent if-and-only-if any possible state of affairs, or any possible world. A possible state of affairs is defined as "a way the world could be." For instance, the sky's being blue is a possible state of affairs, and John's being a married bachelor is an impossible state of affairs.

Result theory would say, *there being a stone an omnipotent being cannot lift* is clearly not a possible state of affairs. An omnipotent being could therefore not bring it about. On the other hand, *there being a stone its creator cannot lift* is a possible state of affairs, and could be brought about by an omnipotent being, under the Leibniz-Ross theory, for an omnipotent being could bring it about that some other being created a stone which that being could not lift. Therefore, the Stone Paradox is claimed to not be a problem for the Leibniz-Ross theory.

I have a hard time distinguishing this from act theory; it may be too subtle for me. I would claim that this hasn't got around the Stone Paradox at all. The result theory argument is that there's a possible world where omnipotent being A creates some other being (or version of itself) B that makes the stone that A cannot subsequently lift, at the same time that a different being or version of itself **is** lifting it. That would seem to imply that A can make a possible world where being B can do something A can't. Why would we call A omnipotent in that case?

Here's a [video](#) that demonstrates an interesting attempt to get around the Stone Paradox by making God able to split into two different versions of himself. Version A can't lift the rock, but at the same time version B can lift both A and the rock. That's pretty neat. But, the original claim implied a **single** being we could call God. In this video, God splits into two beings with different capabilities. Is it fair to call either of them omnipotent? Are either of them still God?

This is a cute trick but it seems more like saying, "God's right hand can make a stone too heavy for God's left hand to lift." It's not at all clear this is the same test as the Stone Paradox proposes. Instead of proposing two different versions of God, we could simply say, "God at time x can create a stone that only God at time y can lift." That is, we can split God temporally instead of spatially. I would claim these are not logically equivalent to our initial proposal.

The Leibniz-Ross result theory, leads to other odd or absurd metaphysical consequences, including the implication that an omnipotent being exists necessarily. According to Leibniz's formulation, an omnipotent being would be able to actualize any possible world, but it is absurd to suppose that an omnipotent being should actualize a world in which it never existed. It follows that no such world is possible. Of course, this assumes that an omnipotent being existed in **any** possible world.

If there is no world (not any) in which an omnipotent being could possibly exist, then it wouldn't exist in all possible worlds. Either God exists in all possible worlds or in none.

There are easily enough paradoxes in the idea of an omnipotent being that can't be logically dismissed that we should be very wary of the whole concept.

In the next post, I'll examine the "Creator claim" made of the Abrahamic God and draw my final conclusions.