**The Moral Argument**

KANT’S MORAL ARGUMENT
Immanuel Kant analysed Aquinas’ 4th way and devised his proof for God based on morality

INNATE MORAL AWARENESS
Kant’s starting point was that we all have a sense of innate moral awareness:

‘Two things fill the mind with ever new increasing admiration and awe… the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me’

His argument for the existence of God follows:

1. We all have a sense of innate moral awareness – from this we are under obligation to be virtuous
2. An ‘average’ level of virtue is not enough, we are obliged to aim for the highest standard possible
3. True virtue should be rewarded with happiness
4. There is an ideal state where human virtue and happiness are united – this Kant called the ‘Summum Bonum’
5. Moral statements are prescriptive – ‘ought’ implies ‘can’
6. Humans can achieve virtue in a lifetime but it is beyond us to ensure we are rewarded with happiness
7. Therefore there must be a God who has power to ensure that virtue and happiness coincide

Kant’s moral argument does not postulate that God is necessary for morality but that God is required for morality to achieve its end

‘Therefore it is morally necessary to assume the existence of God.’

CARDINAL NEWMAN

“We feel responsibility, are ashamed, are frightened at transgressing the voice of conscience, this implies that there is one to whom we are responsible.”

For Newman, the existence of conscience implies a moral law-giver whom we are answerable to – God.

CRITICISMS
• Moral laws may not be objective or about obeying moral duty. For Joseph Fletcher ignoring individual circumstances will lead to callous and unsatisfactory actions
• The moral argument does not prove the existence of God. Just because our conscience points to a source does not mean that source is God. Could be merely a being that devises laws – “a Kantian-minded angel”
• Kant’s assumption that ought implies can only proves that it is logically possible to bring about the summum bonum – just because it is not a logical contradiction does not means it actually happens

BRIAN DAVIES
Kant assumes that only God can bring about the summum bonum but it could equally be brought about by a ‘pantheon of angels.’

EUTHYPHRO DILEMMA
The theory that morality is absolute and dictated by God is known as the Divine Command Theory. The Euthyphro Dilemma however, which was first proposed in Plato’s ‘Euthyphro’ Dialogue, challenges the Divine Command Theory.

Bertrand Russell’s reformulated Euthyphro Dilemma asks the question:

“Is something good because God commands it, or does God command it because it is good?”

If the former is true, and something is good because God demands it, the content of morality is seemingly arbitrary and dependent on God’s whim – certain moral actions could have been deemed otherwise immoral had God willed it. Furthermore, this reduces God’s goodness to his power – to say that God is good simply means that he is capable of enforcing his commands.

However, if the latter is true and God commands something because it is good, then God is no longer necessary for an ethical system to work – the almighty Sovereign becomes subordinate to a higher law.

**SIGMUND FREUD**
According to Freudian thought our sense of duty and moral awareness can be explained by socialisation. Kant said that our sense of duty was based on reason, whereas Freud argued that our conscience was a product of the unconscious mind or super ego of the human psyche.

Freud distinguished between three components of the human psyche (mind):

1. ID – basic instincts and primitive desires e.g. hunger, lust etc.
2. EGO – perceptions of the external that makes us aware of the ‘reality principle,’ one’s most outward part and personality
3. SUPER-EGO – the unconscious mind which consists of:
a. The Ego-ideal which praises good actions
b. The conscience which makes you feel guilty for bad actions

For Freud, our moral awareness cannot be of divine origin because of the differing opinions on ethical issues – if it were morality would be absolute and we would all come to the same moral conclusions. Rather, our conscience or moral awareness is the super-ego of the mind, a ‘moral policeman’ developed during child hood (more specifically the third stage which is known as the phallic stage between 3 and 6 years old).

If conscience is the voice of God as Kant believes you would expect it to be consistent. Kant’s concept of an absolute moral code enforced by God does not explain the Yorkshire Ripper who claimed to follow voices in his head? or the differing views on issues such as euthanasia and abortion. Conscience is not truly objective and therefore has a human not divine origin.