

Theodicy and Logical Paradox

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Thesis of the Talk

The contradictions inherent in theodicy follow from speaking of G-d as a **thing**, and are essentially the same as the logical paradoxes, which follow from reifying universals.

Outline

- Theodicy and its paradoxes
- The logical paradoxes
- Theodicy in light of the logical paradoxes

Part One:

Paradoxes of Theodicy

Assumptions

- G-d is:
 - Omniscient
 - Omnipotent
 - Good
- There are other ways to understand 'G-d'
 - They are not the topic of this talk
- Theodicy = arguing G-d's goodness in light of a broken world

Contradictions Inherent in Theodicy

- G-d created a flawed world or flawed creatures
 - Does that not indicate a flaw in G-d?
- A standard answer of theodicy: “letting go”
 - G-d **relinquishes power** to let his creatures **journey** to a state of grace

Two Paradoxes of Relinquishment Theodicy

- Omnipotence paradox
 - G-d becomes not G-d
- Omniscience paradox
 - G-d is ultimately responsible so cannot be all good

Omnipotence Paradox

- G-d relinquishes power means G-d is **no longer omnipotent**
- In what sense are we talking about G-d anymore?
 - He/she/it is **no longer G-d**
 - G-d is no longer present
 - Yet we continue to talk/believe as if he were
- G-d becomes not G-d, but is still G-d

Source of the Omnipotence Paradox

- Thinking of G-d as a parent
- Relinquishment is analogous to the parent who steps back
 - Lets kids settle their differences themselves
- Parents do this to let their kids **learn**
 - But also because parents are **not omnipotent**
 - They don't always have the power to settle things fairly
 - They will **not always be there** for the child

Becoming not G-d

- G-d becoming not G-d is analogous to a child realizing parent is not G-d
 - Except that the parent **never really was**
 - Harold Kushner would say G-d never was either
 - But then in what sense was he G-d?

Biblical Support for the Omnipotence Paradox

- G-d rages at the world and its people
 - Threatens to destroy it
- Perhaps it's really rage that he cannot revert back to being G-d
 - Because he gave up the power

Omniscience Paradox

- G-d created evil so that we have an opportunity to triumph over it (journey to grace)
 - But why would G-d want that?
 - Instead of just everything being already perfect?
- Because it makes him happy?
 - That implies incompleteness (a change of state)
 - Conflicts with omnipotence
 - And why, given the costs, would it make him happy?
 - And in what sense does G-d have feelings?

Omniscience Paradox

- If G-d is omniscient, then he knows the consequences of withdrawing
- If omnipotent, he could have created an all-good world
 - But he didn't
- So he cannot be viewed as all good

Part Two:

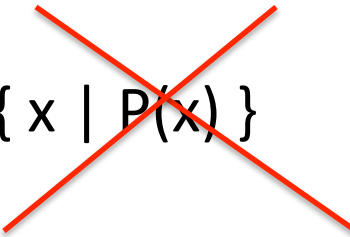
The Logical Paradoxes

Russell's Paradox

- The set of all sets that are **not** members of themselves
 - Is it a member of itself?
 - Yes, if and only if no

How Logic Resolves Russell's Paradox

- Get rid of unrestricted comprehension:

$$\{x \mid P(x)\}$$


- Can't say this, without restrictions on P
- Or, you **can** say it
 - But you can't **use** it in statements the way you use ordinary things
 - (Note to the math-inclined: that's Gödel-Bernays set theory)
- Lesson: can't talk about universals the same way you talk about ordinary things

Tarski's Theorem

- Cannot define **truth** of statements in a language, within that language
 - Without entailing a contradiction
- That is, can't have a predicate $\text{true}(P)$ such that for every specific statement P_0 ,
 P_0 if and only if $\text{true}(P_0)$
- Proven by constructing a statement that declares its own falsity

Paradoxes Illustrating Tarski's Theorem

- Liar paradox: "This sentence is false."
 - This is the canonical self-referential paradox. Also "Is the answer to this question no?", and "I'm lying."
- Card paradox: "The next statement is true. The previous statement is false."
 - Logically this uses self-reference, in the adjectives "next" and "previous."
- Quine's paradox: "'Yields a falsehood when appended to its own quotation' yields a falsehood when appended to its own quotation."
 - An example of diagonalization, which is a form of self-reference
- Curry's paradox: "If this sentence is true, then Santa Claus exists."
 - True if and only if it is false
- Berry paradox: The phrase "the first number not nameable in under ten words" names that number in nine words.
 - Implied truth predicate in "nameable"

Self-reference and Diagonalization

- Diagonalization:
 - Assigning, to a variable within a statement, a value that happens to be the statement itself
- This is a form of self-reference
 - The statement talks about itself
- Russell's Paradox and Tarski's Theorem both use it
- The natural language paradoxes all use some form of self-reference

Lesson of the logical paradoxes

- When talking about universals (such as **truth**, **set of all sets**) we cannot reason the same way we do about things **within** the universe
- “Ordinary” reasoning about universals enables self-reference
- Self-reference enables contradictions

Part Three:

Theodicy and the Logical Paradoxes

Correspondence between theology and logic

- G-d is analogous to logical universals
- The created world is analogous to logical things (members of the universe of discourse)
- Theodicy paradoxes arise when the laws of things are applied to G-d

Talking about G-d as a Thing

- “G-d knows...”
- “G-d has power to...”
- “G-d relinquishes power...”
- “G-d created...”

Example: Consequence of Talking about G-d as a Thing

- How can G-d **create** something other than himself?
 - Of course, he **can** since he is omnipotent
 - But then the **other thing** has an existence of its own
- The creation of an **other** is already an act of withdrawal
 - Unless G-d has complete control over that thing
 - But in that case in what sense is it a thing, other than G-d?

Is it really the Same as Logical Paradox?

- G-d has the power to become not G-d
- G-d allows evil (“not G-d”) so it can be defeated by the journey back to G-d
 - G-d gets angry at creation when this does not happen
- These are forms of self-reference enabled by the nominalization of G-d

Conclusion

- The theodicy paradoxes arise from talking about G-d as a **thing**
 - We can't help it, as long as we use language
 - As soon as G-d is the subject or object of a sentence, we have nominalized him into a thing
 - This leads to contradictions
- Thus, theodicy paradoxes are inevitable as a form of reasoning by creatures
- The Book of Job offers an alternative
 - Acknowledge that we cannot, finally, speak or reason about G-d
 - Which is why I use the hyphen