

## **2. Ontological Argument.**

Ontological argument seeks to link thought and existence. The idea is that logic and the a priori can prove or indicate what exists. In the particular example of God, logic and existence are linked in the concept of necessary existence. There is strenuous opposition from the empiricists to this kind of link. Knowledge by logic (or reasoning) and knowledge by experience (or the senses) are two ways of knowing. The empiricist, for instance, claims that there is no factual (or empirical) a priori. What is decided by logic is prior to the fact (a priori), not relying on experience, and what is decided by experience is after the fact (a posteriori).

### **2.1 Ontological Arguments**

Kant, who used the terms a priori and a posteriori, also divided propositions about knowledge into analytic and synthetic. For Kant, analytic propositions were propositions true by virtue of their meaning only. There was no reference to experience to ascertain their truth. A synthetic proposition would require something outside of its form to determine its truth. Kant divided all propositions into a subject and a predicate. An analytic proposition is one whose predicate is contained in the concept of the subject. A synthetic proposition is one in which the predicate is not contained in the concept of the subject. Kant explored the concept of the synthetic a priori, which lead him to give an account of the proposed way that forms of thought structured the intuitions of the senses. This kind of argument locates the structuring and

organizing of knowledge in the mental structures of the perceiver. This suggests that the perceiver superimposes their perceptual structures on external reality. I want to argue that the structures are already external to the perceiver and that the conceivability of reality is part of the (objective) creation. The empiricism of Schlick, who was a leading logical positivist, claimed that there was no factual a priori and that the a priori was purely tautological. To Schlick synthetic a priori propositions were a logical impossibility. Another way to express this is to say that the a priori can give no information about the contingent world.

The polarity between thought and existence (logic and experience) is also brought out by Hume in his analysis of human understanding. Hume claims that reliable knowledge is based either on 'abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number', or 'experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and experience' (Hume (1996), p 165). Anything else is but 'sophistry and illusion'.

Those philosophers of a more rationalist frame of mind, see a link between thought and existence and argue that, in the case of God, rational thought can lead to a conclusion about existence.

Descartes (Plantinga (1968), p32) finds the idea of God in his mind. He can, initially in his mind, separate the essence and the existence of God. But he realises that he cannot properly separate the essence of God from the existence of God, even as he cannot conceive of a mountain without a valley. For although his thought does not impose

any necessity upon things, his thinking recognises that God's existence is necessary, whereas the existence of a flying horse is not necessary. Of necessity Descartes attributes every perfection to God which includes existence.

Leibniz claims (Plantinga (1968), p55) that the possibility of God implies the existence of God, 'which is the privilege of deity alone'. Leibniz reasons about simple quality, perfection and non-contradiction. An all-perfect being implies no contradiction because all perfections are compatible with one another. Escaping incompatibility, an all-perfect being can be known and can exist 'since existence is contained in the number of the perfections'.

These arguments of Descartes and Leibniz are examples of ontological argument (about God) reasoning that the conceivability of God implies the existence of God.

It is interesting to note modern support for the ontological argument given by Malcolm (Plantinga (1968), p146). Discussing Anselm's ontological argument, Malcolm takes up the concept of God as an unlimited being. If God is an unlimited being then God cannot come into existence or have happened to come into existence. Since God cannot come into existence, if He does not exist then His existence is impossible. But if God exists His existence is necessary. 'Thus God's existence is either impossible or necessary'. God's existence can only be impossible if the concept of such a being is self-contradictory. Assuming that the concept of God is not self-contradictory then God exists necessarily.

Both Plantinga and Henle disagree with Malcolm. I mention this argument to illustrate the continuing strong attraction that ontological argument has had. Philosophy is about the strong attraction of the a priori. Consider this quote from Bertrand Russell.

This brings us to a second characteristic of philosophical propositions, namely, that they must be a priori. A philosophical proposition must be such as can be neither proved nor disproved by empirical evidence. Too often we find in philosophical books arguments based upon the course of history, or the convolutions of the brain, or the eyes of shellfish. Special and accidental facts of this kind are irrelevant to philosophy, which must make only such assertions as would be equally true however the actual world were constituted. (Russell (1963), p84)

Russell, at least in this article, is arguing for the analysis of logical forms with various types of facts creating 'an inventory of abstractly tenable hypotheses' (ibid, p 85). The attraction of the a priori is basic to the philosophic nerve. Russell sees the a priori expressed through logic. I want to make the connection between logic and existence through the conceivability that is an attribute of the creation.

Despite this love of the a priori, a modern philosopher such as Quine, who rejects the analytic/synthetic distinction for propositions, attempts to argue from the ground up to arrive at concepts from 'neural intake'. In a

philosophical self-portrait written in Mautner (Mautner, p465) Quine gives an account of knowledge as follows.

1. Neural intake is information from the outside world over time.
2. There is perceptual similarity in intake.
3. Induction on similar perceptual intakes is the basis of all learning.
4. Natural selection has moulded innate standards of perceptual similarity in favour of survival.
5. Groups of neural intakes, organised by perceptual similarities are associated with vocal signals (words) called observation sentences.
6. Humans learn to combine observation sentences into observation categoricals, which are 'generalised expressions of conditional expectation'.
7. Words, first learnt as observational sentences, combine to become observational categoricals which combine to become theoretical sentences of natural science.
8. The empirical test of theory by experiment is when theory is implied by recombined observational categoricals.

Quine makes the sequence

Sets of theoretical sentences logically imply observational categoricals which are built of observation sentences which are conditioned ranges of neural intakes (ibid, p466).

My comments on this brief ontology are as follows.

This is conceptual bootstrapping whereby that which is not information becomes information, that which is perceptual

becomes conceptual by induction on perceptual similarity and signals become language, which becomes theory. The task of this evolutionary model is to show how the simple becomes complex, the independent becomes organized (interdependent), the observation becomes the theory and the concrete becomes the abstract. This whole process or set of processes is only possible because of prior ordering of the possibilities. There needs to be a conceptual context to organise the neural intake. The neural intake has no information to organise itself. If it did it would not just be raw neural intake. What turns the digital neural signal into information other than a mind already organizing it? I will argue below that concepts are not the result of experience but rather concepts create or organise experience. How does abstraction, which is loss of information, lead to theory which is the accumulation or recombination of information?

There are two poles in this account. One pole is theory based on language, the other pole is neural intake. That is, we move from induction on independent perceptual events to organizing conceptual theory. This is a movement from perception to conception or from existence to thought. In traditional ontological thinking, the move was from the conceptual to the existent, from logic (essence) to existence.

## **2.2 An account of the relation between thought and existence**

In the context of the ontological argument, I wish to put forward an account of the relation between thought and existence.

As I have been describing above, the empiricist tradition rejects a factual a priori. That is, pure thought can tell us nothing about the contingency of what exists. Therefore concepts such as 'necessary existence', as logical constructs, can tell us nothing about any existing thing. Therefore, the ontological argument fails, in principle, as an argument. However, to make something of the ontological argument, I wish to retain thought and existence and explore a possible link between them. I will do this by introducing the idea of God. If I simply stay with the poles of thought and existence I get entrenched in the traditional warfare between Rationalism and Empiricism in such questions as does thought determine experience or does experience determine thought? Can I have information about reality by purely logical means? Just staying with thought and existence suggests that I have to make one prior to the other, as the history of the discussion about sources of knowledge has gone.

In order to put forward my account I need three concepts namely, God, conceivability and creation as previously explained.

The importance of having God as the Creator means that what exists is an act (or fiat) of God. What exists is not determined by eternal abstract objects. Conceivability is

an attribute of what is created. The human mind, which is part of the creation, is able to function in the conceivability of the creation and to develop concepts, words and use language. The question arises do the concepts necessarily exist independently of the objects they organise? I am arguing that the creation is such that it is conceivable. The human mind has the capacity to organise concepts. God is the source of the conceivability. If God is removed and the creation is simply what is the case, or even just physical objects, then the human mind is the obvious candidate for the creator of concepts and the agent for conceivability, possibly as an evolutionary development.

The whole point of my account of the conceivability of the creation is to maintain the possibility of language and thought in the understanding of the creation and of God as the Creator. That which is conceivable can be understood and manipulated by language. Therefore, the creation is understandable and able to be rationally described by mathematics. Wigner has written about 'the Unreasonable Effectiveness of Mathematics in the Natural Sciences' (Wigner (1959)). In attempting an explanation Wigner has no real explanation. He uses the word 'miracle' eleven times and characteristically concludes 'The miracle of the appropriateness of the language of mathematics for the formulation of the laws of physics is a wonderful gift which we neither understand nor deserve' (ibid, p139). He hopes that it remains the same as it has been. I claim that the conceivability of the creation, which is the basis of the language of mathematics, is part of the creation and

has been placed there by the Creator. Human beings devise the languages but the capacity for language is based on the created conceivability of the creation. In short, God creates the conceivable creation by which we may understand a conceivable God.

What are the weaknesses of this account? The key assumption is the existence of a God who is a Creator. There are two ways to approach this assumption. One way is to assert it and work on that assumption. Another way is to look for conceptual evidence for the assertion of God's existence. If God has created a conceivable creation (reality) able to lead to an understanding of God, is there any conceptual evidence that can plausibly be used to support the idea of a conceivable Creator? Mathematics and Logic are systems of concepts that are associated with the conceivable creation. The creation is usually perceived as being able to be correctly manipulated by mathematical and logical concepts. The idea of this thesis is to present concepts from mathematics and logic that are consistent with the idea of a conceivable God, that is, a God locatable by concepts.

Have I adequately accounted for the origin of concepts? Have I shown that concepts cannot have an existence independent of the creation? Concepts must arise as spoken by God and are implied in that speaking. It is God who conceives of the creation and the creation is a whole with its concepts and objects. I am not attempting to argue that God creates the concepts that exist independently, similar to a design for a house, which is independent of the house, which has an existence independent from the house and may exist without any house. Concepts of non-existing things,

such as stories in novels or plain fantasy, reside in books or minds. It appears that a mind is a part of the creation, created to recognise what is conceptual about the creation. This is quite different from the Platonic argument of eternal Forms to which reality conforms. In my account, God speaks and the creation (conceptual and perceptual) is created.

Plantinga argues for non-existent objects (Plantinga (1974)). One version of his Ontological Principle is that 'there cannot be propositions about what in no sense has being' (ibid., p136). He is using possible world semantics and is making a distinction between possible worlds and an actual world. He argues, after quoting Moore, Meinong and Russell that the subject of a true (negative) proposition exists in some sense. This is because in any world in which a singular proposition is true (and negative existential propositions are singular propositions) the subject is said to be in some sense. If there is a world in which say, a proposition about Socrates is true (even a negative proposition) then predicating a true (negative) property of him must mean that Socrates must be in that world in some sense. Plantinga has an extended discussion on this issue. I raise this issue in the context of the possible existence of conceivable objects. From the point of view of a theory of creation, I would claim that what is conceivable, although part of the creation, is not necessarily actual. It is not actual because the conceivable object is not created as an actual or existing thing. In the creation theory I espouse, something does not exist necessarily by its propositional nature but because it is part of a

conceivable creation. The act of existence is a divine choice. The object will necessarily be conceivable within the constraints of the conceptually complete creation within which it occurs. Existence is an (arbitrary) act of God. Something does not exist because it has the property of existence, such as being the subject of a true proposition. Analogous to other possible worlds, there may be other creations. But each creation has its own actual objects as so created by God and not because of the properties of propositions. If God determines that a proposition has the property to exist then the proposition is true for that creation. But existence has been God's decision.

Is the concept 'mind of God' simply anthropomorphic? Anything I say about God can be said to be anthropomorphic, because I claim that God is conceivable and knowable in terms of what I can know. I can only know in terms of a conceivable creation with which I am familiar.

Can I conceive of the inconceivable? I have used it as a word so I must be able to. But I can say no more. I cannot describe the indescribable and I cannot conceive of the inconceivable beyond simply using negated concept terms. To pursue this point, I claim that the inconceivable cannot exist. Part of the idea of creation is that a creation is conceivable and finite. The Christian idea of God involves me in a completed, finished creation. The creation entails what exists, and so what exists is conceivable, although not all that is conceivable exists. That which is conceivable may or may not exist but what is inconceivable does not exist. This clashes with traditional descriptions

of God which often place God in the inconceivable as ineffable, incomprehensible and indescribable. The point of talk about God is to make God conceivable and understandable by conceivable and linguistic means.

What about the existence of God before the creation? Before the creation, which was created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), God existed without the creation. Was God conceivable then? All I can do is speak from within the creation. From within the creation I claim that God is conceivable now and, seeing that God does not change, I must claim that God was conceivable then also. This means that God is conceivable without a creation, although there is no creation by which God can be conceived. It is the choice of God to be intelligible. The creation is the way that the creation knows God. The creation is created by God and God does not depend for God's existence or intelligibility upon having a creation. However, if God is intelligible by God's choice, then it is reasonable that God create a conceivable and intelligible creation. The creation is the conceivable way a creation (or an agent within it) obtains information about God. So God can be conceivable (by choice) without having a creation to be conceived by. Maybe God creates a creation by which God may be conceived and recognized by others.