

5 God and Existence

Any ontological argument is an argument about existence or what one can claim to exist. An ontological argument wants to move from the formal and the a priori to the existence of an object: a version of which is 'essence entails existence'. To this move there are strenuous objections. I want to examine two of the objects to ontological argument expressed by Kant and Frege. Firstly, I want to look at how Anselm uses existence in his argument and, after examining the objections of Kant and Frege, I will offer an account of existence appropriate to a theory of creation. In Quine's phrase, I am looking to justify the 'ontological commitment' to God.

5.1 Anselm's use of Existence

It is Anselm's intention to get to the existence of God. He claims to do this by thought. In his first argument, that I have called Comprehension, Anselm says that whatever is understood exists in the understanding. Anselm is not saying that God exists in the understanding, but that the thought of God exists in the understanding. This means that, if God exists in the understanding, then God must exist as a thought. If it is actually God, as a being, existing in the understanding, then Anselm already has the existence of God that he seeks. He would, in fact, be saying that God exists, and in this instance, exists under the species of thought. However, God is not a thought, although God can be known by thought. The existence that Anselm claims that he has is the existence of a thought about God which, as he argues, even 'the fool' has to admit

to being the case. The question then becomes, How do you get from the thought of God to the existence of God? We have the existence of the thought about an object. Now this object, God, is such a unique object that the existence of the thought about God leads, necessarily, to the existence of the object being thought about. But, goes the objection, you cannot go from the thought of an object to the existence of that object. According to Kant, the thought of money in your pocket does not put money in your pocket. But Anselm counters that God is that unique object that exists. Existence, for God, is closer than a property; God just is. A property is something that an object may be conceived as not having. They may have it, even necessarily, but the property is a concept separable from the object itself. Goodness is a property of God (and other things also). We may think of God without thinking of God's goodness although we will want to include goodness in any description of God. But Anselm wants to say that you cannot really think about God and God not exist. Atheists may think about god as not existing, but that is not the God that Anselm is thinking about. The god that may be conceived as not existing is a lesser god than the God that does exist.

This idea of the inherent existence of God fits in well with the idea of God as Creator. If God is the Creator of all that is (other than God as God), then we see God as existing without cause or explanation. If God exists, we do not have to ask, Well who made God? Or, What is the cause of God? God is *sui generis* (of its own kind). God is the source of God, if we want to use 'source' or origin

language. However, there are strong objections to obtaining the existence of God from the idea of God. Even though Anselm has described God as the God whose nature it is to exist, this is not accepted as a means of obtaining existence. But how does one obtain existence for an object? This is usually done by the senses, so that if the existence of an object can be verified by the senses then that object is granted existence, or it is said to exist. I have no desire to challenge the importance of the senses in verifying existence. However, the place of thought in determining existence can be overlooked. If I claim that God can be understood but is hidden, then I still do not have the sensory verification that is required for an existence claim. But do I have conceptual evidence (as distinct from sensory evidence) for the existence of God?

5.2 A Theory of Existence

I want to put forward an account of existence as expressed through the argument of God and the creation. A key argument in this account is the assertion that any object that exists is discernible from any other object. This idea is expressed by Leibniz in the Law of the Identity of Indiscernibles, which I will take to mean that if there is no means of distinguishing between two objects then they are the same object. This may be argued for, adapting an argument of Russell (Russell (1992), p58). Suppose A and B are two indiscernible objects. I wish to show that they are the same object. A differs from B in that they are said to be different objects. If they differ then whatever differs in A differs in B so that they remain indiscernible from each other. But since B does not differ from itself, it

cannot differ in such a way that it obtains a property of A (in remaining indiscernible from A). Hence A and B will differ as to properties which is contrary to the hypothesis of indiscernibility. Therefore, there cannot be two objects that are also indiscernible from each other.

I commence my account of what exists as follows.

1) The Void is impossible. By this I mean that there cannot be a state where there is total, wordless non-existence as an existing thing. The Void is not something that can be described in the sense that it can exist. It is a logical concept, in that it is the negation of what is. The Void cannot be described because there is nothing describable or discernible about it. If there is only the Void there is nothing and nothing can be said, least of all that it exists. Is the Void one of Plantinga's non-existent objects? Any object whether actual or not must be in some possible world. What possible world contains the Void seeing that nothing is possible about the Void. The Void cannot be a possible state of affairs. Is it the null set? No, because the null set is a set. Is 'the void exists' a proposition? It has the form of a proposition but, by definition, it denotes nothing. This is not like denoting 'the present king of France' which, although false has content. The void, by the intended meaning and force of the word, denotes nothing, not something false. It is vacuous. Is the Void a negative existential like 'Socrates does not exist'? I would say no, because the Void has no subject about which it can make a statement, true or false. Is the Void the negative existential 'Existence does not exist'? This seems to be contradictory. If we say that the Void is

the statement 'Everything does not exist' we have an impredicative proposition that denies its own existence. At least, the term is problematic and I take it to be a negation of existence which gives non-existence and cannot be anything including not being a non-existent object.

However, we know that something does exist and that something can be said.

2) Therefore there is at least one existing thing. If there is at least one existing thing then the logical possibility of non-existence can be asserted. That is, you can only really talk about non-existence if you have existence first. The argument is: Non-existence (total void) is indescribable. But something (anything) does exist (on the evidence of the senses at least). Therefore at least one object exists. The logical possibility of non-existence can now be asserted but only on the prior assertion of something already existing. Non-existence cannot be asserted about nothing because there is nothing to negate. Therefore, because at least one object exists we avoid the Void. But to avoid the Void (which we are required to do) something has to exist. Is there any requirement for this minimal (primary) existent? It needs to be an object about which, if any thing can be said about it, it can be said to exist. To avoid the void, we need an object whose existence is viewed as assertable. I take this minimal requirement for existence to be supplied by the existence of God. With God there is, at least, the possibility of the pure assertion of existence. In this minimal condition all that can be stated is existence. God is not discernible from any other object because, before the creation, there is no

other object from which God may be distinguished. So the only thing of any description that can be said is that God exists.

3) This means that the existence of God is associated with God even though God is not discernible from any other object. The existence of God does not depend upon knowing the concept of God. That is, the existence of God is not a property of the concept of God. Concepts are available when there are discernible objects, a situation that comes only with the creation. God is the only pure existent in the sense that God exists before there is the proposition declaring God's existence. God's existence is not theory driven. God alone can exist in a pre-conceptual way.

4) This leads to the creation, which supplies discernible objects. God, as Creator, creates the creation and expresses ways by which objects may be known and, in fact, God may be known as a discernible object. Discernibility is not a requirement for the existence of God. God, as the primary existent can exist without any other discernible feature. These features are there but without any other object they are not discernible, at least by mind. The existence of God does not depend on other objects but is discernible by means of other objects. I argue that God has no nature, therefore God chooses to be intelligible. Sometimes, it may be said, that God withdraws God's intelligibility and God is seen to be incomprehensible. If this is an event brought about by God and not just our ignorance or intransigence, then we can say that God chooses to be so.

5) With the creation there are objects and relations between them. Particular objects are discernible and knowable. I would claim that the creation is *ex nihilo*, there being no object prior to the creation but God, and that the creation is a countable collection of discernible particulars. Relations exist between discernible particulars. Such relations are greater than, less than, in front of, behind, brighter, duller and so on. The fact that relations between discernible objects exist is a property of the creation (a result of the creative act and intention of God).

It may be said that a creation is 'a mind' and 'a matter'. A 'mind' is a conceptually closed system of relations and concepts. This conceptual system can only produce other concepts. This is the conceivability associated with every creation. This is the base out of which the language works. Any creation is spoken by God and therefore, conceptual and able to be manipulated by language. A 'matter' is the finite collection of physical objects. This is closed in the sense that any physical object only produces another physical object. The conceivability function from objects (matter) to concepts (mind) is 1-1 but not onto. For every object there is a concept, but for every concept there is not an object. The set of concepts is countably infinite. The set of physical objects is finite. This is because the creation is completed (God has finished all God's works) and even God cannot finish an infinite sequence that, by definition, cannot be completed from within the sequence. Conceivably, there can be more than one creation. God is not necessarily in each creation but God is pointed to by

each creation. This is because each creation is a collection of conceivable objects and relations with mathematical properties, which, in their own way, can be used to express the concept of the maximal being.

6) Because there are relations between discernible objects there are sets or collections of objects. Relations between objects and collections of objects based on common (or uncommon) properties are part of the creation. Creation is the act whereby objects relate. There are no objects without relations between them (discernibility) and no relations without objects to relate to each other. I do not posit a separate conceptualist world of propositions, relations and properties. In this sense, the creation is *ex nihilo*, instantaneous and complete. Objects and relations between them appear at the same time. One is not prior to or separable from the other. All possible objects are conceivably present. The extent of the creation is the extent of the conceivable relations between existing objects. Not all possible objects exist. But relations that do exist between existing objects make non-existing objects relationally possible. There is a mathematical analogy here. The set of natural numbers (positive integers) represents objects and this set is not dense. The set of rational numbers (ratios of integers) represents conceivable objects (among which are actual objects) and this set is dense. That is, between any two rational numbers (conceivable objects) one can always devise another rational number (conceive another object). Cantor has defined a set (or aggregate) as 'any collection into a whole M of definite and separate objects m of our intuition

and our thought' (Cantor (1955), p 85). Although this is naïve set theory that was upset by latter considerations of impredicative sets, it nevertheless expresses a core conceptual activity ranging over discernible things.

7) Set Theory is relevant to my account of conceivability whereby concepts are used in the arrangements and re-arrangements of discernible objects as collections or sets. Concepts do not create objects in the creation. A property of the creation is that it is finished. There are no new objects with respect to the creation but there may be new concepts or words that are used to express the re-arrangements or discovery of relations already existing between objects. This implies that the creation consists of objects and all conceivable relations between them.

8) Relations are expressed in the evidence of concepts and conceptual activity. New words are developed to handle new experiences of concepts. But basically, with respect to the creation, nothing has changed. The creation always has the capacity for any concept because the creation is conceptually closed and any concept must be conceivable in the creation. Nothing inconceivable (not of a concept) has suddenly become conceivable (of a concept). Whatever is thought is thought always in terms of how we have already been thinking. When the 'unimaginable' happens we have a conceivable way to express it. The conceivability of the creation (collectable as sets) is inherent in the creation itself and is expressed by language but not created by language. So I adopt a realist position in the philosophy of mathematics. The symbolic or conceptual nature of creation, or reality, makes language possible and indeed

necessary. It is our task to manipulate reality with language.

9) This means that we can examine the behaviour of the creation and the conceptual processes that exhibit the dynamic nature of what is. Mathematics is a prime language tool for examining the conceptual behaviour of the creation as we understand it as reality, or what is the case. Mathematics 'works' with reality and is a major source of our knowledge of what exists and how it exists. Mathematics is conceptual. Mathematics allows us to search out what exists and predict what may be the behaviour of the creation. This is because the conceptual nature of the creation is a true and reliable expression of the creation and a reliable measure of the way in which discernible objects relate.

10) Conceptual knowledge (using mathematics) becomes the basis for evidence of the way the creation works and for understanding the nature of God. In the quote from Romans 1:20 that I quoted at the beginning of this thesis, Paul claims that the invisible things of God are clearly visible, being understood by means of the things that are created, namely God's eternal power and godhead. These are two relevant examples. 'Eternal power' refers to an infinite sequence (eternal) which is related to the concept of power. The other example, 'godhead', refers to a non-sequential concept of the totality of the God idea, the in-the-limit concept of deity. This suggests conceptual evidence for the existence of God.

The problem of existence that arises with ontological argument is how can thought relate to existence? How can the a priori inform the a posteriori? Can pure thought tell us anything about what is the case?

5.3 On proving existence as against indicating existence

I am arguing that we cannot prove existence. My account of existence is based upon the idea of the creation whereby God creates what exists, *ex nihilo*. What actually exists is the arbitrary choice of God in the creative act. I have argued that what exists is not driven by any preconceived idea or theory. If existence were theory driven, then God would have to conform to a theory or principle beyond God's control, which is not a God-behaviour. Even if God invented God's own theory, the theory would be a creation and God would be submitting to 'a creature'. God is not bound by anything, not even by God's own nature. If God had a nature it would be something separate from God, virtually a tyranny of divine expectation on how God should act. God acts the way God acts by choice and God is sovereign over God's behaviour. There may well be the expectation that God will act in certain ways, but God acts out of pure choice not out of the constraints of a nature. Covenant behaviour is entered into by God by choice. This does not make God capricious but it does make God arbitrary in the exercise of God's sovereign choice. God remains God by God's choice not by the constraint of a divine nature or our theory of divinity.

Ontological thinking is proving existence. Proof is theoretical (*a priori*), whereas existence is physical (a

posteriori). Proof deals with concepts or propositions. There is not an object associated with every concept. Plausibility of concept does not imply actuality of existence. I have no proof as to why there are horses but no unicorns. In the question of existence, I can point to horses but not to unicorns. Conceptually, horses and unicorns are equally probable. And I claim that any attempt to explain why there are horses and no unicorns is only arguing from what is the case. I can theorize about trees (conceptually) but, if existence is involved, I must refer to a particular tree, whose existence I indicate but do not prove. When we say that we prove that something physical exists, we, in fact, indicate (point to) that it exists (or take someone else's experience as confirmation). Creation is a given and we look to see what is given. Many things are conceivable but only a few things actually exist. The conceptual world is created with the physical world and is not before it or after it. We may experience concepts after objects in our learning experience of the world, but we should not confuse our experience of things with the way things are. Language is the mechanism for manipulating a conceptual world. This conceptual world (at least in the arena of mathematics) is an excellent means of examining the physical world. But the creation is evidence of, and a way of looking for, the Creator.