

6 Kant and Frege and Ontological Argument

I want to examine what Kant and Frege have said against the Ontological Argument. Both have given reasons why they think the ontological argument does not work. Ontological argument attempts to obtain existence from thought; that pure thought can prove what exists. Basically Kant argues that existence is not a predicate, therefore you cannot obtain the existence of an object from the thought or concept of that object. Frege argues that existence is the property of a concept and therefore not the property of an object itself. That means that we cannot go from the idea of an object to the existence of an object.

6.1 Kant and Existence

Let us consider Kant first. Kant argues that for experience and knowledge to be possible, something must be given to the senses (an intuition) and what is given must be recognised as having certain properties (a concept).

'Thoughts without concepts are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind' (A51/B75). Sensibility is the faculty of intuitions and understanding is the faculty of concepts. Where rationalists emphasized thought dominating the senses and the empiricists emphasized the senses creating thought, Kant required a dynamic balance between thought and the senses, concept and intuition, understanding and sensibility. Thought can be described as a priori (what comes before (experience)), analytic (containing its own explanation) and tautological (self-evident, not requiring explanation). Data from the senses may be described as a posteriori (what comes after (experience)), synthetic

(contingent upon events) and experiential (not self-evident, requiring further explanation). Kant maintains this polarization. Although Kant locates the manufacture of knowledge in the mind because the mind organizes and the raw data of perception, he insists on the reality of objects external to himself. It seems to me that Kant, therefore, will resist ontological argument because he is resisting the charge of Idealism whereby the mind creates its own reality (or reality is dependent on the perceiving mind). Because Kant must have objects existing outside himself, he will argue that the existence of such objects cannot depend on thought or the mind.

In this thesis I am arguing that thought indicates existence, thought tells us where to look or opens up the possibility of existence. This is done as follows. I present a theory of creation. Creation is the act by God that unites thought (concept) with existence (object). Creation is an intentional act by God. That which exists can be thought about or conceived. The creation is understandable and is able to be represented in a language. A created object exists and that which exists is conceivable. To be conceivable means that the existing (created) object can be thought about which implies that the thought can be expressed in some language. Only that which is conceivable can exist. An inconceivable thing cannot exist because we cannot determine what it is that we are saying exists. But not all that is conceivable exists. Creation asserts that there is a basic and inherent connection between thought and existence.

That which exists is conceivable. An objection is, why should what exists be conceivable? The meaning of the term 'exists' is that it is being asserted that there is something rather than nothing. Nothing is indescribable. That which exists is not nothing, therefore it must be something. If it is something it must be describable, and I add, expressible in some language. An object may be hidden or described in a language that I do not understand, but it will be describable, in principle, in some language. To say that something exists is to locate it physically or conceptually. Something is explained in terms of that to which it relates. If something exists, it has relations with other things, otherwise we do not know that it exists and the object is totally indeterminate. Non-existence does not describe anything; it is simply the logical negation of existence. If non-existence is that about which nothing can be said, then existence is something about which at least one thing can be said. An existing object may not be known or recognized but it is, in principle, knowable and recognizable. In that sense the creation is a closed conceptual system. Everything conceivable in the creation (conceptual system) is conceivable in terms of the system.

If Kant claims that existence is not a predicate and that you cannot obtain existence by thought, how then does Kant handle existence? I will examine an argument by Kant where he is arguing for the existence of things outside himself.

Kant wants to prove the existence of objects outside of himself. I want to show inconsistencies in his argument and in his use of existence. Kant devised this argument to refute the charge of Idealism (B276). In Kant's account,

the human being constructs all their experience, so it is an easy step to argue the construction by the person of the world that they experience. Kant, however, rejects this step, and offers the following proof to show empirically that the consciousness of his own existence proves the existence of external objects in space. (Note the link to the Cartesian cogito - 'I think therefore I am'- which links existence to consciousness.) Kant calls this proof a theorem entitled: 'The mere, but empirically determined, consciousness of my own existence proves the existence of objects in space outside me'.

The proof goes as follows (B276):

I am conscious of my existence as determined in time. All time-determination presupposes something persistent in perception. This persistent thing, however, cannot be something in me, since my own existence in time can first be determined only through this persistent thing. Thus the perception of this persistent thing is possible only through a thing outside me and not through the mere representation of a thing outside me. Consequently, the determination of my existence in time is possible only by means of the existence of actual things that I perceive outside myself.

Using awareness for consciousness and time determination to mean the passage of time, the argument so far seems to be

1. I am aware of my existence in time.
2. Time requires a fixed point.
3. This fixed point gives me my awareness in time.
4. This fixed point is not in me.
5. This fixed point is not a representation but actual.
6. Therefore my existence in time is possible only by means of actual things outside me.

Consciousness (awareness) does the work here. Consciousness notifies me of my existence and requires the passage of time. But because consciousness exists, time exists. Time determination (passage) requires a fixed point. But consciousness cannot be its own fixed point. Therefore, something must exist outside consciousness to make consciousness possible. I exist in time because something outside me exists in time. Kant's argument continues

Now consciousness of time is necessarily combined with the consciousness of the possibility of this time determination: Therefore, it is also necessarily combined with the existence of things outside me, as the condition of time-determination; i.e., the consciousness of my own existence is at the same time an immediate consciousness of the existence of things outside me. (Finish of proof).

This part of the argument seems to be saying:

Awareness of my existence goes with passage of time. The passage of time goes with the existence of outside things. Therefore the awareness of my existence is simultaneous with the existence of things outside me. (End of paraphrase.) A more brief summary of the argument could be:

1. I exist.
2. I am aware of my existence in time.
3. Time requires a fixed point, which is outside me.
4. I am aware of time and therefore, of a fixed point.
5. Therefore something exists outside me.

My point here is about how Kant obtains existence for external objects. He commences by assuming his own existence. He is aware of his existence because of the passage of time. The awareness of the passage of time (or

time interval) requires a fixed point. He then claims that the fixed point has to be external to himself. But why is this the case? We can be aware of the passage of time by internal markers (feelings or internal events). This may not be objective clock or mechanism time, but it is a time duration. But granting Kant this point, what is the role of consciousness (awareness) here? Is Kant aware because he exists or does he exist because he is aware? If he is aware because he exists, it is his existence that gives him awareness. If he exists because he is aware then awareness is giving him existence. So with respect to external objects, is Kant aware of them because they exist or do they exist because Kant is aware of them? Kant wants to avoid saying that things exist because he is aware of them (that is Idealism). Is Kant saying: I exist therefore I am aware (existence produces awareness)? and then following this up with: I am aware of external things therefore they exist (awareness producing existence)? Kant wants a proof of existence here and the key to his argument is the use of his awareness. Time duration is the way he obtains awareness of his awareness. To say that he is aware of something because it exists is assuming the existence that he wants to prove. Can awareness (which is a thought) give existence (which is independent of thought)? As a realist myself, I do not want to argue against the independent reality of external objects. But I think Kant is arguing ontologically (from thought (awareness) to existence). This argument of Kant's is meant to be a Theorem proving the existence of objects and he is using his awareness (in time) to assert the existence of objects external to himself. I think that Kant is being inconsistent in that he

goes from his existence to his awareness and then from his awareness to the existence of external objects. To go from awareness to existence, as a proof, is an example of ontological thinking, which Kant derides.

6.2 Kant's Attack on the Ontological Argument

I want to now consider Kant's famous argument against the Ontological Argument of Descartes. I am claiming that Kant wants to avoid ontological thinking to avoid the charge of Idealism. In his chapter entitled 'On the impossibility of an ontological proof of God's existence', Kant has four arguments which may be briefly headed as 1) Existence as Introduced, 2) Necessity and Contradiction, 3) Uniqueness of Absolute Being and 4) Existence is not a Predicate.

In his first argument (Existence as Introduced) Kant argues that a triangle may necessarily have three sides but we do not necessarily have a triangle. Kant adds 'the unconditioned necessity of judgements is not an absolute necessity of things' (B622). Existence is introduced under the concept of the thing and then produced as a proof of the existence of the thing. Kant says 'to have presupposed an existence as belonging to possibility, and then inferred that existence on the pretext from its inner possibility, is nothing but a miserable tautology' (B625). With this one may agree. But how does Kant introduce existence in his own argument given above in his theorem proving the existence of external things? Existence is introduced into this argument by Kant with the assumption of his own existence known by his self-awareness. His awareness of time depends on the existence of a fixed object. Time is the factor of

his experience of which Kant is aware. Kant is saying he is having an experience of awareness (of time) and therefore something (a fixed point) exists external to himself. Because of the existence of his awareness, Kant is claiming that there must be something he is experiencing. Existence is being introduced under the concept of awareness and then awareness is used to produce the existence of the objects Kant requires. Therefore this first argument about how existence is introduced can be used against Kant himself.

The second argument is that the existence of God is not necessary. Using the subject and predicate analysis of a sentence, Kant says that to reject a predicate in an identity and maintain the subject creates a contradiction because the predicate necessarily goes with the subject. But to reject both predicate and subject does not create a contradiction (A594/B622). To claim that God is not omnipotent is a contradiction in the idea of God. But to claim that 'God is not' then no predicate is mentioned so no contradiction is created. This argument works if existence is not a predicate for 'the unconditioned necessity of judgements is not an absolute necessity of things' (A593/B621). However, it depends on the idea of God being used. It is true that some ideas of God can be rejected without contradiction. However, if the God being defined exists before anything else can be said about God then contradiction cannot arise. Can we say that there is an object that exists and that is all that needs to be said about it? Such an object would have pure, unconditional (indescribable) existence.

This leads to the third argument about the ens realissimum (the most real being). Kant's objection is that existence is already introduced in the concept of the greatest possible being (A596/B624). My comment on this argument is as follows. Can one define an object whose property is that it exists? This is not saying that I have the idea of an object and I am defining it to exist. This is saying that it is the nature of the object to exist. If I describe an object then I am defining it, so I am introducing the concept of the object for the object to be understood. Is there a possible case where there is an object whose existence is prior to the ability to know it? This object exists in the first instance and the concept of this object only occurs after the object exists. I am not referring to the sequence of knowing that an object exists after I understand what it is. This is the sequence of being able to assert that the object exists before it can be known what it is. This seems to be impossible. I claim that the inconceivable does not exist. If we do not have the concept of a thing how can we talk about its existence when, in fact, we do not know what we are talking about? Also, I am not talking about an object, which I claim to exist, but, at this stage, I do not know what it is. The object I am attempting to talk about is a unique object that would exist necessarily, not because of the necessity of the concept of the object but because the object has existence prior to any concept of it. The only object that could fit this requirement is God, who exists before any concept of God's existence. Concepts only arrive with the creation, when there are relations between objects and concepts are manipulated in language.

Could there be such an object without it being God? Could there be any other object, which exists before any concept of it is possible? Such an object would have to subsist in itself alone. Every other object is an object of the creation and therefore, in relation with other objects from which it is distinguished. Objects in the creation can, presumably, exist before we have any knowledge of them. We have no idea of their existence or of what they might be in order to exist. An inconceivable object is one that is never expressible (conceivable) in any language. However, God, as the ens realissimum, is conceivable as subsisting in God alone, and assertions of God's existence can be made without the requirement of any other description (in the first instance). When we have a creation we have a language by which the existing God is conceivable. Creation becomes the way by which concepts and language are available to be able to describe God. God, as an existing object, is conceivable (correctly) according to the relations conceivable in the creation. When I say 'correctly', I mean that the knowledge gained in the creation by our use of language, leads us in the right way to think about God. The creation does speak of God correctly, but our understanding and extent of knowledge about the creation, may not always reflect that correctness. Nevertheless, the invisibles of God are made visible, being understood by the things that are made.

Kant's fourth argument may be summed up using the well-known phrase that 'existence is not a predicate'. This actual phrase does not occur in the chapter. Kant's basic argument here is that to say that a thing exists adds

nothing to the concept of a thing. Kant says 'Being is obviously not a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing' (A596/B624). Again he says, 'not the least bit gets added to a thing when I posit in addition that this thing is' (A600/B628). The argument seems to be that because existence is not a predicate (property) then I cannot claim that an object has the property of existence. That is, I cannot add existence as a property to a concept and obtain an existing thing. Also I cannot introduce the assertion of existence under the guise of a property such as perfection.

There has been much discussion of the issue 'Is existence a predicate?' (see, for instance, Kneale in Feigl (1942), Moore in Plantinga (1968)). An existence statement is a claim about the content of a proposition. 'This tree exists' is an existence claim about a tree. It does not tell us anything about the tree as such, other than it exists. An existence claim does not add to the content of a proposition. We say nothing more about the content of a subject of a proposition if we say that it exists. But we do say something about the subject, namely, that it exists. In a theory of creation, existence is not driven by concepts but is recognized by concepts. What actually exists is a determination of God initially, and then of other creative agents within the creation. Indeed, existence cannot be added by us to a concept to obtain an existing object. According to Kant, I cannot add existence to the thought of thalers in my pocket and obtain real money in my pocket. But who would argue for this? Existence is not detachable. There is no free-floating existence

where existence is in search of an object to make it exist. Existence is a property of what is created that tells us something about the creation. A property is something that tells us what is the case about an object (it is green etc.). Existence tells us something about the object, therefore it is a property. Objects are determined by their creation by God and not by their propositions. Objects are described by their propositions (their conceivability) but not created by them. Therefore we cannot be in the scene of concepts obtaining existence by the acquisition of another concept, namely existence.

But is this what Anselm is doing? I claim that an interpretation of what Anselm is doing in Anselm's Definition is giving us a way to 'see' an existent that is already there. This is most certainly the approach of an argument from creation. I want to avoid the idea that existence is, or can be, determined by propositions. This is theory driven existence, which means that we can reason our way to what exists. I think we can reason our way about what exists but not reason our way to determine what exists. What exists is consistent with what is conceivable but not determined by what is conceivable.

6.3 Frege and Existence

Frege, in his *Grundlagen der Arithmetik*, argues that existence is the property of a concept not of an object. This means that we cannot obtain existence for an object because the existence is a property of the concept not the object. Frege argues

In this respect existence is analogous to number. Affirmation of existence is in fact nothing but the denial of the number 0. Because existence is a property of a concept the ontological argument for the existence of God breaks down (Frege, p65).

How is this an attack on the ontological argument? Examiner B has given the following answer. 'The ontological argument, at least in Descartes's and Leibniz's form says that the concept of God contains all perfections and existence is a perfection. But Frege counters that existence is not an attribute of the existent thing and hence is not one of its perfections. The concept of God cannot include existence, because it includes all and only the properties of God, and even if God exists, existence is not one of these. Existence is reduced to a property of the concept of God.'

There are two ways I wish to examine the idea that existence is a property of a concept and not of an object. The first objection is this. Frege holds that concepts are objective. He says, 'If, then, a concept is something objective, an assertion about a concept can for its part contain something factual' (Frege, p61). If a concept can be factual and objective then the concept itself must exist. That is, the concept itself is an object. However, to assert the existence of the initial object, I need to assert the existence of the concept of that object, so that the concept can have an existence property and I can declare the object as existing. But to declare the existence of the concept as object, I need another concept whereby I can assert the existence of the concept by which

I can assert the existence of the initial object. In fact, if concepts are existing objects, I can never attain the assertion of the existence of the concept I need, to assert the existence of the initial object. I obtain an infinite regress in my search for the existence claim of a concept of an object. (This is similar the Zeno's paradox of the arrow. This says that an arrow never reaches its mark (alternatively, never leaves the bow) because before the arrow gets half way it must go $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way, and before it gets $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way it must get $\frac{1}{8}$ of the way...). If one then argues that concepts themselves do not require existence claims, then how is their objectivity to be obtained? Also if the concept cannot be shown to exist how can that which does not exist have the property of existence?

A second objection is as follows. If the existence claim for an object is via its concept, it would seem that we have to have the right and only right concept. For instance, consider the statement, 'There are 3 horses'. If there are three horses this seems plain enough. But if the existence claim is via the concept which concept are we referring to? Does 'There are 3 horses' mean 1) the concept 'horse' three times. Or 2) does the concept '3 horses' imply there is a concept for '4 horses', '5 horses', and an infinite number of concepts for an infinite number of horses. Or 3) does the concept mean '(variable) horse' where variable takes the concept 3, 4, 5, ...? Here three horses are the extension of the predicate 'horse' instantiated three times to give the truth value 'true'. In fact, I imagine there is an indefinite number of ways of theoretically manipulating the concept of '3 horses'. This

may seem trivial, but if the concept does the work of the existence claim, I need to be sure which concept I am using. This theory stops me from saying that existence is in the object '3 horses', that I can verify by looking for three horses. With the extension of concepts as instantiations of predicates, Frege has given us a way to talk about existence. It is most certainly an improvement on Kant's division of propositions into subject and predicate. However, it seems to me that existence is inherently in the object, which is what is maintained in the theory of creation.

6.4 Frege's Logicism and Incompleteness

In chapter 11 I will be dealing with Incompleteness in a consistent system. At this point I would like to add an argument by Benacerraf concerning problems raised by the reductionist programme of Logicism. This proof outline Benacerraf describes as amusing. I describe it as devastating.

The argument is as follows (Demopoulos (1997), p65)

- Frege claims that arithmetic truths are analytic.
- Analytic truths are all a priori and can be reduced to logic because analytic statements are so defined as being obtained from logic only.
- Frege believes that all arithmetic can be effectively derived from logical first principles.
- That is, if all arithmetic truths are analytic there is a set of logical truths from which the arithmetic can be

effectively derivable. If logic is recursively axiomatizable (effectively generated from axioms) then so is arithmetic, which is supposedly based on logic.

- But Gödel's First Incompleteness Theorem shows that arithmetic is not recursively axiomatizable. (This can be expressed as there is always an undecidable truth not provable in the consistent formal system.)
- If arithmetic is not recursively axiomatizable neither is the logic from which it is derived.
- If logic is not recursively axiomatizable it must contain other truths and possibly 'infinitely numerous unprovable primitive truths' (ibid, p65)

So Benacerraf concludes

Not all arithmetic truths are analytic
and /or

not all logical truths are a priori
and/or

There is a place for intuitive primitive truths.

This seems to me to be a strong argument against the deflationary reductionism induced by Logicism. I argue in chapter 11 that the unprovable truth of consistent formal systems is consistent (usable) with the idea of God. If the creation is a consistent, true system, then God can be seen as the undecidable truth, the uncreated object outside the Created Order in origin but inside the creation in being conceivable. This says that the proposition 'God exists' is undecidable. That is, I cannot prove or disprove the proposition 'God exists' by means of a consistent, formal

system. The reasons I offer for 'God exists' as being at least one undecidable truth are as follows. 1) Semantically, God is the highest order of conceivable being. 2) God, as pure existent, can exist without a creation and, in that sense, is at the boundary of conceivability. 3) Traditionally in the arguments for God's existence (cosmological, teleological, moral etc.), God is viewed at the appropriate answer to the problems of First Cause, Designer and Source of Moral Judgment. 4) If God can be proven in the system, then the nature of Incompleteness will require another or greater truth beyond that of 'God' at that conceptual level. This is a contradiction of God as the greatest conceivable being.

By the above argument from Benacerraf, if the created order is consistent it cannot be reduced to logic and there is a place for intuited as well as logical knowledge of the way things are.