

I. THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

DOES GOD EXIST?

Theist: Yes, God exists.

Rational theism: There is a rational basis (sound reasons) for belief in God;

Arational theism (fideism): There is no rational basis for belief in God, but believe anyway;

Irrational theism: There is a rational basis for believing that God doesn't exist, but believe anyway.

Atheist: No, God doesn't exist.

Again, may be rational, arational, irrational.

Agnostic: You're asking me? God might or might not exist.

THE TRADITIONAL ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (*PROSLOGIAN* CH 2)

Attempts to prove the existence of God simply from the concept of God. Simply knowing what God is supposed to be should be enough to convince you that God exists. So what is the concept of God we're using?

God =_{df} an absolutely perfect being: a being than which nothing greater is possible, a being than which nothing greater can even be conceived.

What do we mean by exists? Distinction: existing in reality *vs.* existing "in the understanding" or "in the mind."

Existing in reality

Frog Pond Fountain

Ligers

Pondicherry

Crazy Glue

Existing only "in the mind"

Fountain of Youth

Unicorns

Atlantis

Phlogiston

The issue is not whether God exists in the mind, whether some people have an idea of God. It's whether that idea is instantiated in the external world.

Distinguish too the things that possibly exist (exist in some possible world) from those that do not (those that do not exist in any possible world).

There are things the concept of which implies they don't exist, since the concept entails that they do not exist in any possible world. Let PRIMUS =_{df} the largest prime number.

- 1) The concept of PRIMUS is a concept of a prime number larger than any other.
- 2) Nothing like that can possibly exist.
- 3) The concept of PRIMUS is a concept of something that cannot possibly exist. (1,2)
- 4) Therefore, (necessarily) PRIMUS does not exist.

Are there also concepts that necessarily have instances? Anselm (and Descartes, and maybe Gödel) think so. For them, the concept of God is such a concept.

The reason is that existence is a perfection. Consider Ulysses. He has got lots of good qualities, but he is not perfect: he's impulsive, he is impatient, he spends too much time on the road. A further imperfection, it seems, is that he doesn't exist. An existent Ulysses-like individual would to that extent be better than the actual Ulysses. Anselm sees a general principle here: any merely possible object would be that much better if it existed (or at least, any good one would). The ontological argument simply applies this to God:

- 1) The concept of God is the concept of a perfect being; nothing greater is possible.
- 2) Existence is a perfection, a "great-making" property: it is greater to exist than not to.
- 3) A God that existed only in the mind would not be as great as a real God. (2)
- 4) So the concept of God is the concept of a being that really exists. (1,3)
- 5) Therefore, God exists. (4)

OBJECTIONS

1. The Perfect Island (Gaunilo)

For Anselm there is only one thing whose essence includes existence, and that is God. Why can't there be other things whose essences have this marvelous feature? And why can't we then prove these other things to exist just as Anselm has proved God to exist? superisle =df an absolutely perfect island. An argument in the same spirit as Anselm's ought to show that superisle exists. And it doesn't.

2. The concept of God is such that nothing could instantiate it

The round square. The largest prime. We can show a priori that these cannot be instantiated. Is this true of all descriptions that cannot be instantiated?

3. Existence and nonexistence are not properties (Kant, Frege)

Pegasus doesn't exist doesn't attribute a property to Pegasus; it can't, for there is no such thing. Tame tigers exist doesn't say of each tame tiger that it exists. What's going on? To say something exists is to say that a concept of that thing has instances. But then premise (2) makes no sense. It's not as if the concept of God would be more perfect if God existed. Anyway, it's supposed to be God that's perfect.

4. We can't define things into existence

How are we to understand premise (4)?

- (4a) Nothing can satisfy the God-concept unless it exists.
- (4b) Some existing thing satisfies the God-concept.

These aren't equivalent. Let a runicorn =df an existing unicorn.

- (4a') Nothing can satisfy the runicorn-concept unless it exists. (True!)
- (4b') Some existing thing satisfies the runicorn-concept. (False!)

To satisfy the runicorn-concept you must exist, but that's just one more reason nothing satisfies the runicorn-concept. Back to God, it's (4b) that we need to reach the conclusion (5) that God exists. But what follows from (1)-(3)? (1) says our God-concept can only be satisfied by a perfect being. (2) and (3) add that any such being will have to exist. That only gets us to (4a).

In fact, do runicorns even possibly exist? (Rowe) Assume that unicorns possibly exist (some people deny this) but don't actually exist. What does the further condition in the definition of 'runicorn' add? 'Exists' in the definition seems to mean 'actually exists'. (Contrast the role of 'blue' in blunicorn =*df* a blue unicorn.) But there is no unicorn in any possible world that actually exists. So there are no possible runicorns.

Compare:

The inventor of bifocals was Benjamin Franklin (contingent)

The actual inventor of bifocals was Benjamin Franklin (necessary, but not a priori)

The actual inventor of bifocals was not Benjamin Franklin (impossible, but not a priori)

Of course the sentence "There are runicorns" would be true in the mouth of an inhabitant of some world where unicorns existed. But that shows that what they would mean by it, and what we mean by it, are in some sense not the same.

NEW ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT (PROSLOGIAN CH 3; GÖDEL?)

- 1) Nothing can satisfy the concept of God but a necessary being.
- 2) So if God is so much as possible, God is necessary. (1)
- 3) It is surely possible for God to exist—theism is not incoherent after all.
- 4) So God exists necessarily (2,3)
- 5) So God exists actually.

Why do we believe (3)? Once we define necessary existence into God, isn't it an open question whether she is even possible? Again this might not be something that we can decide a priori.

What is our concept of God? Might it depend on whether she exists?

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