

# Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W-03

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Hamilton College, Fall 2007

August 30 (Class 2/28)

Continuing Part I of the course: Philosophy of Religion

Anselm's Ontological Argument for the Existence of God

# I. Inscriptions, terms, ideas, concepts, and objects

An inscription is a token of a term, or word.

Words may be taken to stand for ideas in our minds.

Different people have their own ideas, but may share concepts.

Some concepts refer to or stand for objects.

# More on inscriptions, terms, ideas, concepts, and objects



- The inscription 'Guernica' is an instance of the title (a term) of Picasso's painting.
- The inscription may evoke an idea of the painting in our minds.
- Your idea and mine may match, in which case we are thinking of the same concept.
- That concept corresponds, in some way, to the actual painting.

## II. Anselm's ontological argument for God's existence

1. I can think of 'God'.
  2. If 'God' were just an idea, or term, then I could conceive of something greater than 'God' (i.e. an existing God).
  3. But 'God' is that than which nothing greater can be conceived.
  4. So 'God' can not be just an idea.
- So, God exists.

# III. Descartes's ontological argument

Existence is part of the essence of the concept of God

- The essence of an object is all the properties that necessarily belong to that object.
- A chair's essence (approximately): furniture for sitting, has a back, durable material
- Bachelor: unmarried man
- A human person: body and mind
- God: three omnis, and existence

Descartes's version does not depend on our ability to conceive (of that than which no greater can be conceived).

# **IV. Some problems with the concept of God**

1. Evil, which seems to conflict with omni-benevolence.
2. Error, which seems to conflict with omnipotence.
3. Free will, which seems to conflict with omniscience.

# Another problem with omni-benevolence, attributed to Leibniz

1. God is omnipotent so he can create the best possible world.
2. God is omni-benevolent, so he wants to create the best possible world.
3. The world exists.

So, this is the best of all possible worlds.

A corollary: Since this is the best of all possible worlds, all of the evil in it is necessary.

# The Lisbon Earthquake





# V. Problems with the Ontological Argument: Gaunilo and Caterus

- The above problems concerned the conclusion of the ontological argument.
- But, we are concerned here with the argument itself.
- Gaunilo, responding to Anselm, asks us to consider the most perfect island.
- On Anselm's principles, it seems that the island must exist.
- But, we know that the most perfect island does not exist.
- So, there must be a problem with Anselm's argument.

# Against Gaunilo

- The perfection of an island may entail that it does not exist.
- A non- existing island would be free of imperfections.
- No guano, e.g.
- Still, the airfare would be pretty steep.

# Caterus

## Responding to Descartes

- The concept of a necessarily existing lion has existence as part of its essence.
- But that concept entails no actual lions.
- We must distinguish more carefully between concepts and objects.
- Even if a concept contains existence, it is still just a concept.

# VI. Objections to the ontological argument: Kant

“100 real thalers do not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers” (Kant, 28).

- Kant, following Hume, claims that existence is not a property in the way that the perfections are properties.
- Existence can not be part of an essence, since it is not a property.

# Real (determining) predicates and logical predicates.

- A logical predicate serves as a predicate in grammar.
- Any property can be predicated of any object, grammatically.
- The Statue of Liberty exists.
- Seventeen loves its mother.
- A real predicate tells us something substantive about an object.
- The Statue of Liberty is over 150 feet tall.

Existence is a grammatical predicate,  
but not a real predicate.

# **Kant's objection accounts for the objections from Caterus and Gaunilo.**

- All three urge us to distinguish concepts from objects.
- In predicating existence of a concept, we are just restating the concept.
- We are not saying anything about the object.

# VII. Is existence a predicate?

- Kant: existence is too thin to be a real predicate.
- We do not add anything to a concept by claiming that it exists.
- The real and possible thalers must have the same number of thalers in order that the concept match its object.
- So, we do not add thalers when we mention that the thalers exist.
- But, do we add something?

# Debates about existence

- The tooth fairy
- Black holes
- We seem to consider an object and wonder whether it has the property of existing.
- We thus may have to consider objects which may or may not exist.
- E.g. James Brown, Tony Soprano.



# Meinongian subsistence

- The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Austrian philosopher Meinong, attribute subsistence to fictional objects and dead folks.
- James Brown has the property of subsisting, without having the property of existing.
- Kant's claim that existence is not a real predicate, while influential, may not solve the problem.

# VIII. The formal logic argument for Kant's solution

- First-order logic makes a distinction between predication and quantification.
- In our most austere language, existence is not a predicate.

# Propositional logic

Simple terms (capital letters) for statements, punctuation, and some connectives:

- Negation ( $\sim$ ): “It is not the case that...”
- Conjunction ( $\cdot$ ): “and”
- Disjunction ( $\vee$ ): “or”
- Material Implication ( $\supset$ ): “If... then...”

# Building complex statements

- Let 'P' stand for: Gonzales resigned on Monday.
- Let 'Q' stand for: Vick pleaded guilty.
- 'P•Q' means that Gonzales resigned on Monday and Vick pleaded guilty.
- ' $(P \vee Q) \supset P$ ' means that if either Gonzales resigned on Monday or Vick pleaded guilty, then Gonzales resigned.

# First-order logic

- We can decompose the simple terms for statements.
- Complex terms for statements are made of objects (or variables) and predicates.
- Quantifiers indicate existence.
- We represent objects and variables using lower case letters.
- We represent predicates using capital letters.
- Predicates stand for properties of the objects, and are placed in front of the object letters.

# Translating into Predicate Logic

- $Pa$ : means object  $a$  has property  $P$ , and is said “ $P$  of  $a$ ”
- Alice is clever:  $Ca$
- Bobby works hard:  $Wb$
- Chuck plays tennis regularly:  $Pc$

# Consider: All philosophers are happy.

- The subject of this sentence is not a specific philosopher, no specific object.
- Similarly for “Something is made in the USA”.
- There is no a specific thing to which the sentence refers.
- For sentences like these, we use universal and existential quantifiers.
- We also use variables (usually ‘x’, ‘y’, and ‘z’).

# The existential quantifier, $\exists x$

Used with any of the following expressions:

- There exists an x, such that
- For some x
- There is an x
- For at least one x
- Something



# The universal quantifier, $\forall x$ ,

Used with:

- For all x
- Everything

# Sample Translations

- Something is made in the USA:  $(\exists x)Ux$
- Everything is made in the USA:  $(\forall x)Ux$
- Nothing is made in the USA:  $(\forall x)\sim Ux$  or  $\sim(\exists x)Ux$
- All persons are mortal:  $(x)(Px \supset Mx)$
- Some actors are vain:  $(\exists x)(Ax \cdot Vx)$
- Some gods aren't mortal:  $(\exists x)(Gx \cdot \sim Mx)$
- No frogs are people:  $(x)(Fx \supset \sim Px)$  or  $\sim(\exists x)(Fx \cdot Px)$

# Kant and first-order logic

- First-order logic was developed a full century after Kant's work
- But, it uses the distinction he made between existence and predication.
- The quantifiers deal with existence and quantity
- The predicates deal with real properties, like being a god, or a person, or being mortal or vain.
- Since first-order logic is supposed to be our most austere, canonical language, there does seem to be a real difference between existence and predication.

# Against Kant's solution

- Formal systems can be constructed with all sorts of properties.
- We can turn any predicate into a quantifier, or a functor, even turn all of them into functors.
- The question, which is beyond the scope of this course, is whether first-order logic really is the best framework for metaphysics.

# IX. Moore

The same conclusion as Kant, but with a different argument

- First, clear up a terminological confusion.
- Kant calls real predicates determining, and calls grammatical predicates logical.
- Moore, following Kneale, contrasts logical predicates (Kant's real predicates) with grammatical predicates.
- The Moore/Kneale terminology derives from the fact that we do not use a predicate to represent existence in first-order logic.
- Thus, existence is not a first-order-logical predicate.

# Moore and ordinary language

- Moore's argument is based on how we use words.
- 'Tame tigers growl' can mean that all do, or only some do.
- 'Tame tigers exist' lacks that ambiguity.
- 'All tame tigers exist' is just odd, perhaps unusable.

# Another Route, for Moore

- 'All tame tigers growl' means that some tame tigers growl and no tame tigers do not growl.
- By analogy, 'all tame tigers exist' should mean that some tame tigers exist, and no tame tigers do not exist.
- That last clause seems meaningless.
- So 'all tame tigers exist' should be meaningless as well.
- Similarly, 'some tigers do not exist' is odd.

# Moore's conclusion

- Existence is seems logically tied to 'some' and 'all'.
- These are represented by quantifiers in first-order logic, in a way which ordinary predicates, like 'growl' and 'are striped' are not.
- Thus, a difference in the way we use sentences supports the formal distinction.
- Again, existence is not a predicate.



# X. Rowe's argument

- Kant's denial of the ontological argument is tied up with general points about existence and predication.
- Rowe's criticism is, like Gaunilo's, directed at the argument itself.
- Rowe: the ontological argument is question begging since it presumes what it sets out to prove, if we accept that God possibly exists.

# Rowe's version of Anselm's argument

1. If God possibly exists, then either God exists or God does not exist.
2. But God can not not exist, since 'God' refers to that than which no greater can be thought.
3. So, God exists.

- Rowe thus concedes to Anselm that no non-existent thing can be God.
- But, he denies premise 1.
- Rowe thus leaves open the question whether any existent thing is God.

# Existence and possibility

- The concept of God could be impossible to instantiate.
- That is, 'God' would refer to nothing coherent, or consistent.
- Then, either God exists or God is impossible.

# Magicians

Defined as existing magicians

- There can be no non-existent magicians.
- If something does not exist, then it can not be a magician.
- So, if there are no existing magicians, then there are no magicians.
- But, if a magician exists, then there is a magician.

# Rowe's solution

- Anselm's argument leaves open the possibility that the concept of God is impossible.
- If the concept is possible to instantiate, then God must exist.
- But, it remains to be shown that it is possible for God to exist.

# Rowe v Kant

- Note that Rowe's approach to criticizing the argument differs from that of Kant.
- Kant denied that existence was a property.
- Rowe uses existence as a property, but shows that it is an awkward property.

# Evaluating the Kant/Moore argument

- Kant's criticism is usually taken to be decisive against the ontological argument.
- Existence is certainly a thin property.
- But, there do seem to be some things which exist and some things, like James Brown, that do not exist.
- Rowe takes this approach: magicians and God are things which may or may not exist.
- Many contemporary philosophers think that such a claim, though, is self-contradictory.
- We'll need more logic than we can do here to fully evaluate the contemporary situation.

# XI. A priori and a posteriori arguments

- The ontological argument is an example of an a priori argument for God's existence.
- A priori statements are explained by the use of thought, rather than experience.
- A statement is believed a priori if our justification of that belief is independent of experience.
- It is hard to specify exactly what 'independent of experience' means.
- A statement is believed a posteriori, or empirically, if our justification refers to sense experience.



# Hume's principle

Matters of fact can not hold a priori

- Kant, following Hume, urged that a priori arguments which purport to conclude that something exists are inappropriate.
- Logic, which precedes a priori, should make no existence assertions according to Hume and Kant
- We generally construct logic to tell us about the relations among statements, not to tell us about the nature of the world.
- It is the job of science to tell us about the nature of the world.
- The distinction between logic and science is the distinction between validity and truth.

# A response to Hume

- Anselm and Descartes might respond that the ontological argument is an exception to Hume's principle.
- Who is to say that a general principle can not admit of exceptions?

# A posteriori arguments for the existence of God

- Other arguments start with premises about the existence of the world, and its properties.
- In particular, the argument from design and the cosmological arguments are a posteriori.
- Aquinas's arguments are cosmological.
- Hume discusses mostly the argument from design.
- Read these for Tuesday.

## **XII. A priori or a posteriori?**

1. It is Thursday.
2. Thursday is a day of the week.
3. If it is raining, then it is raining.
4. What goes up, must come down.
5. The sky is blue.
6.  $2+2=4$ .
7. We are studying at Hamilton College.
8. Hamilton College is a College.
9. Bachelors are unmarried.
10. It is time to leave.