Philosophy 203 History of Modern Western Philosophy

Russell Marcus Hamilton College Spring 2011



Class 28 - May 5 First Antinomy On the Ontological Argument



Business

- I'm sorry that I don't have the papers, yet.
- Final Exam
 - Tuesday 7pm
- Review Session
 - Monday 10am
- Please complete your on-line course evaluations.
- I welcome personal comments about particulars of the course.

First Antinomy

Three Antinomies

- Kant presents three antinomies, or paradoxes, to supplant his claim that reason has limits.
- While some proper metaphysics can be established using synthetic a priori reasoning, other topics (e.g. God, free will) are beyond our ken.
- Our reason, wanting answers to such questions, speculates.
- The problem with such speculation is that we can argue on either side of the debate.
 - We can establish that the universe is infinite.
 - We can also establish that it is finite.
- Since such antinomies can not hold, Kant sees such proofs as demonstrating that reason has exceeded its limits.
 - We can commit such arguments to the flames.
 - 1. The temporal and spatial finitude of the universe
 - 2. The existence of simples (atoms, monads)
 - 3. Free will and determinism

For Finitude

- An infinite series can not be completed.
- If the universe existed from infinitely long ago, the present time would be the end of an infinite series.
- So, there must have been some beginning.
- For spatial finitude, Kant claims that the concept of simultaneity presupposes a spatially finite universe.
- If the universe were infinitely large, we could not think of all of the universe as existing simultaneously.

For Infinitude

- In Time
 - Creation is logically impossible.
 - If there were a beginning point, there would have to be something before it.
 - But, that time would have nothing in it, since the universe has not been created yet.
 - So the universe would have no way to begin.
- In Space
 - Imagine you were to go to the end of the universe.
 - Stick out your arm past the edge.
 - You could always perform this task.
 - Thus, the container has to be infinite.
- Remember, space is an *a priori* form of intuition, presupposed by all possible experience.

Resolving the Antinomy

- Kant has argued, *a priori*, to both sides of a contradiction.
- He concludes that pure reason has exceeded its reach.
- There is no knowledge to be had of whether the universe is finite or infinite.
- Like a Humean empiricist, Kant concludes that we can not know any facts of the matter.

Are There Facts About Finitude?

- Kant assumes that claims about whether the universe is finite or infinite are matters for a priori metaphysical reasoning.
- But there are some mathematical and physical facts that undermine his claims.
- Kant: the universe must be spatially bound because otherwise we could have no definite concept of simultaneity.
- According to the theory of relativity, simultaneity and time itself are not definite concepts.
- They depend on the arbitrary choice of a frame of reference.

Einstein on Simultaneity

"Events which are simultaneous with reference to the embankment are not simultaneous with respect to the train, and vice versa (relativity of simultaneity). Every reference-body (co-ordinate system) has its own particular time; unless we are told the reference-body to which the statement of time refers, there is no meaning in a statement of the time of an event" (Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*, Chapter IX).



Kant on Infinity

- Kant assumes an obsolete concept of infinity.
 - "The true (transcendental) concept of infinity is this: that the successive synthesis of unit[s] in measuring by means of a quantum can never be completed" (A432/B460, AW 793a).
- George Cantor's work on transfinite numbers established that there are different sizes of infinity.
 - To count from one size of infinity to the next, we consider the smaller infinity as complete.
- We define a set to be infinite if it can be put into one-one correspondence with a proper subset of itself.
 - the integers and the even integers

Kant on Mathematics and Non-Euclidean Space

- Kant argues that we have a priori knowledge of Euclidean geometry arising from its role as a form of pure intuition assumed in all appearances.
- Kant: All space is necessarily Euclidean.
 - "Our exposition...establishes the *reality*, that is, the objective validity, of space in respect of whatever can be presented to us outwardly as object" (*Critique* B44/A28).
 - We construct our intuitions in Euclidean space.
 - Our knowledge of geometry is a priori knowledge of the necessary structure of space.
 - Our knowledge of arithmetic is a priori knowledge of the necessary structure of "combinatorial" aspects of space and time.
- But there are different kinds of space: Euclidean and non-Euclidean.
 - Consider an interstellar triangle.
 - The sum of its angles will not be 180°, due to the curvatures of space-time corresponding to the gravitational pull of the stars, and other large objects.
 - Space-time is not Euclidean, but hyperbolic.
- Given the different structures of space, Kant would have to argue that we can know, *a priori*, which space we are using in our intuition.

Kant on the Ontological Argument

Descartes's Ontological Argument

- Existence is part of the essence of the concept of God.
 - having angles whose measures add up to 180 degrees is part of the essence of a 'triangle'.
 - ▶ the concept of a mountain necessarily entails a valley.
- The essence of the concept of God is perfection.
 - the three omnis
 - ► existence

On Existence

Gassendi said that existence is not a perfection, but no one believed him!

- The idea of existence, then, is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent. To reflect on any thing simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other. That idea, when conjoined with the idea of any object, makes no addition to it. Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent. Any idea we please to form is the idea of a being; and the idea of a being is any idea we please to form" (Hume, *Treatise* §I.II.VI).
- 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.
- "A hundred real thalers do not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers" (AW 822a).

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. Grammatical form is not a sure guide to logical form.

Kant and Caterus

- Kant's objection accounts for the objection from Caterus
 - the necessarily existing lion
- Both 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.

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



Meinongian Subsistence

- Meinong attributes 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.



The Fregean 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.
- '(∃x)Gx' or '(∃x) x=g'
- Note the distinction between the concept (represented by the predicate or object) and existence (represented by the quantifier).

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.
- First-order logic is supposed to be our most austere, canonical language, the *Begriffsschrift*'s microscope.
- But, is first-order logic really the best framework for metaphysics?

The End