
The Language Revolution
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Class 2
The Ontological Argument
Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Responses

Anselm

Characterizing 'God'



- All perfections, including omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence
- Whatever necessarily exists
- Creator and preserver
- Anselm: something than which nothing greater can be thought

A Note on Characterizing Terms

- The characterizations of 'God' invoked at the beginning of the argument are definitions of a term.
- It remains to be seen whether they actually refer to an object.
- 'Korub' refers to red swans.
- Are there any korubs?

Anselm's Argument

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' refers to that than which nothing greater can be conceived.
4. So 'God' can not refer just to an idea; it must refer to an actual object.

So, God exists.

► Some corollaries

1. We can not think of God not to exist.
2. God must be eternal.
3. God must be necessary.
4. God must be everywhere.

Gaunilo

- My idea of the most perfect island does not entail that it exists.
- In fact, it may entail that it does not exist, since a non-existing island would be free of imperfections.



Against Gaunilo

You often picture me as offering this argument: Because what is greater than all other things exists in the understanding, it must also exist in reality or else the being which is greater than all others would not be such. Never in my entire treatise do I say this. For there is a big difference between saying “greater than all other things” and “a being greater than which cannot be thought of.” (Anselm, 4)

- The perfection of an island may entail that it does not exist.
- A non-existing island would be free of imperfections.
- Gaunilo alleges that we do not have a sufficient idea of God.
- But, the question of whether we have a sufficient idea of God is not central to the original argument.
- Gaunilo’s response is neither linguistic nor sufficient to refute the argument.

Descartes's Ontological Argument

Existence is part of the essence 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).
- "[T]he necessity...lies in the thing itself."

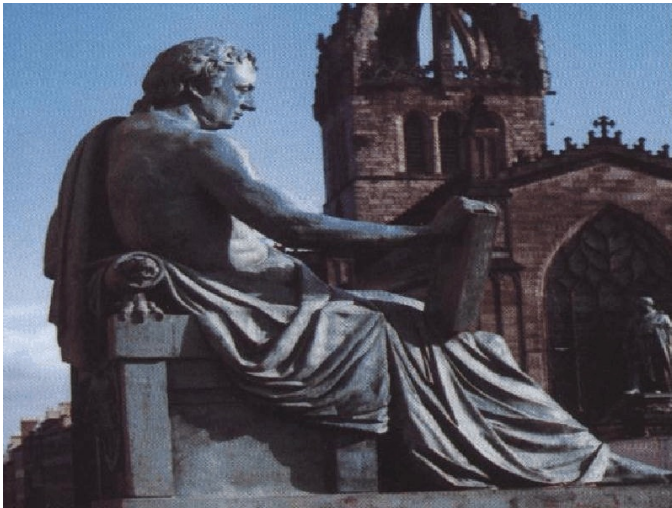


Caterus

- The concept of a necessarily existing lion has existence as part of its essence.
 - ▶ 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.
- Descartes seems to be begging the question.
- Caterus's response is conceptual, but not linguistic.
 - ▶ He is raising questions about the nature of concepts and their relations to objects.
 - ▶ We might call his response metaphysical.

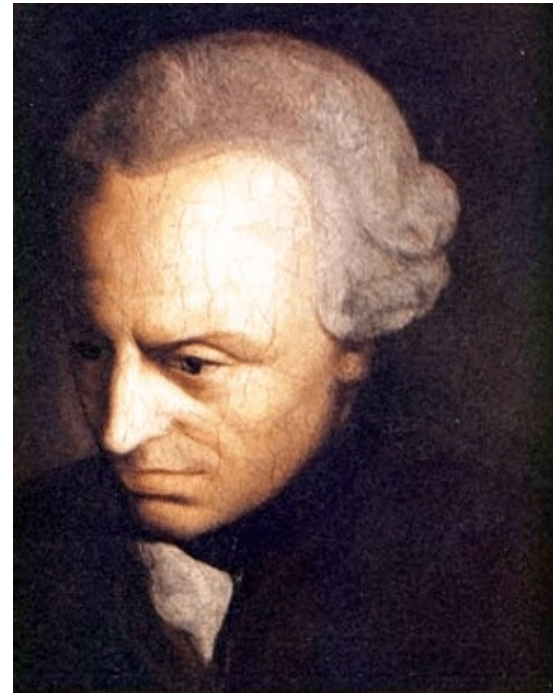
Hume

“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.”



Kant

- 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.
- “100 real thalers do not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers.”



Real 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.
- One can not do metaphysics through grammar alone.
 - ▶ Existence is a grammatical predicate, but not a real predicate.
 - ▶ Grammatical form is not the same as logical form.

Existence is a grammatical predicate,
but not a real predicate.
Grammatical form is not a sure guide to
logical form.

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

- 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 (Linguistic) 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.
- $'(\exists x)Gx'$ or $'(\exists x) x=g'$
- 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?

Summary

- Gaunilo doesn't get the argument.
- Caturus's distinction between concept and object is good, but it is not a linguistic solution.
- Hume's language is still on the level of ideas, and not on the level of language.
- Kant is talking about ideas, too.
- He mentions logic, but for Kant, logic is psychological, governing thought.
- Frege turns Kant's solution into a linguistic solution.
- Frege makes the logic objective, rather than psychological.