

Rational Theology

There are only three possible ways of proving the existence of God by means of speculative reason. All the paths leading to this goal begin either from determinate experience . . . or they start from experience which is purely indeterminate . . . or finally they abstract from all experience, and argue completely *a priori*, from mere concepts, to the existence of a supreme cause.

Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A590/B618

Kant tells us that there are exactly three ways of proving the existence of God by speculative reason. In the first, we begin from “determinate experience and the specific constitution of the world” and ascend from there to a supreme cause. “The world presents to us so immeasurable a stage of variety, order, purposiveness, and beauty” (A622/B650) that we may infer a sublime and wise cause (A625/B654). This is the physico-theological proof or argument from design. In the second, we begin from indeterminate experience or “experience of existence in general” and proceed once again to a cause. Here it does not matter what the world is like, but only that it exists; if the cosmos consisted of nothing but a speck of dust, we would still need to posit a cause for it. This is the cosmological proof. Finally, we may bypass experience altogether and argue “completely *a priori*, from mere concepts.” This is the ontological proof, most audacious of all, as it premises nothing about what exists. In this chapter I examine what Kant has to say about the cosmological and ontological proofs. I consider them (as Kant does) as attempts to prove the existence not of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but of a primordial being, whose identity with the God of religion must be a matter of further argument or faith.

A. The Ontological Argument

The version of the ontological argument Kant considers is that of Descartes, not Anselm.¹ It may be set forth as follows:

1. The *ens realissimum* (i.e., God) is, by definition, the being who possesses all perfections.

2. Since (a) existence is a perfection, (b) any being that possesses all perfections must exist.
3. Therefore, the *ens realissimum* exists.

Kant is generally credited with originating what has become the standard criticism of the ontological argument—that existence is not a predicate. His critique contains in addition two other objections that he and his commentators do not always keep separate from the first: in a predicative proposition you may always “reject the subject,” and there is something logically defective in the concept of a necessary being. I argue that one of these criticisms is cogent while the other two—including the famous one—are not.

B. Real Predicates

Kant never enunciates the slogan so often attributed to him, that existence is not a predicate. What he says instead is that existence is not a *real* or *determining* predicate, that is, “a predicate which is added to the concept of the subject and enlarges it” (A598/B626). As always, by a ‘predicate’ he does not mean a linguistic item but a property or a constituent of a concept. His contention may be understood in accordance with the following definitions:

A predicate *P* enlarges a concept *C* =Df $\Diamond \exists x(Cx \ \& \ \neg Px)$. (Note that “enlarge” may be a misleading term, insofar as enlarging a predicate typically results in narrowing its extension.)

A predicate *P* is a *real* predicate =Df *P* enlarges at least one concept.²

It follows from these definitions that a predicate *P* is *nonreal* iff for any concept *C*, $\Box(x)(Cx \ \& \ Px \text{ iff } Cx)$. This makes clear the sense in which a nonreal predicate “makes no addition” to any concept: if *P* is nonreal, then saying that something is both *C* and *P* says nothing not already implied by simply saying that it is *C*.³

Is Kant correct in claiming that existence is not, in the sense just defined, a real predicate? Yes, indeed: there is no concept *C* such that $\Diamond \exists x(Cx \ \& \ \neg Ex)$. This, at any rate, is a consequence of letting the existential quantifier express existence.⁴ To suppose there is something ($\exists x \dots$) that does not exist ($\dots \neg Ex$) is to suppose there is something that there is not.

Relative to widely accepted assumptions, then, Kant’s dictum is true. The next question is, how does it show that Descartes’s argument is wrong? How does the fact that existence is not a real predicate invalidate the ontological argument or make it unsound?

One common suggestion is that only real predicates may be used in definitions, in which case it would be illegitimate for Descartes to define God as a being who, among other things, exists.⁵ But this suggestion is off the mark on two counts. First, Descartes is not guilty as charged. Look at his first premise; it says that God has all perfections but makes no mention of existence. Of course, in the next premise, Descartes says that existence is one of the perfections, so one may wish to say that he is implicitly if not explicitly defin-

ing God as a being who exists. But that brings us to the second point: what Descartes is charged with is no crime. There is nothing wrong with using non-real predicates in definitions. Any tautological predicate (e.g., being red or nonred) is as much a nonreal predicate as existence, but there is nothing logically vicious about the definition 'x is square = Df x is an equilateral rectangle & x is red or nonred'. The second conjunct in the definiens is idle but harmless.

Perhaps it will be suggested that the premise that runs afoul of Kant's dictum is not the first but the second, for if existence "makes no difference" to any concept, how can it be a perfection? A perfection might be thought of as a property that contributes to the greatness of a thing, or makes an already good thing better than it would be without it. But if existence "makes no difference" to any concept, how can it be a perfection in this sense? How can an existent thing be better or more perfect than a nonexistent thing?⁶

But this objection is readily sidestepped. As I have formulated the second premise above, it consists of a premise proper (whatever has all perfections exists) and a reason for it (existence is a perfection). Perhaps Kant's dictum undermines or refutes the reason offered for the premise, but it does not refute the premise itself. Quite the contrary: it entails the premise! If existence is implied by any concept whatsoever, then in particular it is implied by the concept *possesses all perfections*, and that makes the second premise true.

Our verdict so far must be that Kant's most famous criticism of the ontological argument leaves it entirely unscathed.

C. Existence and Quantifiers

When the slogan "existence is not a predicate" occurs in contemporary philosophy, it does not generally mean quite what Kant meant by "existence is not a *real* predicate," though it does mean something closely related. It is worth while to inquire into what the contemporary slogan means, how it is related to Kant's views, why we should believe it, and how it affects the ontological argument.

What the slogan usually means is that it is the job of the existential quantifier to make existence statements—that you say that something exists when and only when you say something of the form ' $\exists xFx$ ' (or an equivalent). In short, the existential quantifier deserves its name.⁷

The view that existence is expressed by quantifiers is often accompanied by the Fregean view that quantifiers are second-level predicates—predicates that express properties of concepts rather than properties of objects. For Frege, to say that something exists is always to say that some concept is instantiated.⁸ This, of course, is the so-called Kant-Frege view, discussed earlier in chapter 8, section H. It should be noted, however, that the bare linkage of existence with quantifiers need not take this Fregean form. It could instead take a Quinean form, in which ' $\exists x(x \text{ is dog})$ ' carries ontological commitment to dogs, but none to doghood or the concept Dog.⁹

Why should we speak of the *Kant-Frege* view? The following passage gives one good reason:

If, now, we take the subject (God) with all its predicates (among which is omnipotence), and say 'God is', or 'There is a God', we attach no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates, and indeed posit it as being an *object* that stands in relation to my *concept*. (A599/B627)

To say that God exists is to say something not directly about God, but only about the concept of God, namely, that there is an object corresponding to it. That does sound remarkably like Frege's view.¹⁰

Why should we accept the Kant-Frege view? One reason is that it gives us a neat solution to the ancient problem of nonbeing, or of negative existentials.¹¹ How can we truly say that unicorns do not exist? Must they not exist in some fashion if we are to say anything meaningful about them? Notoriously, some philosophers solve this problem by distinguishing two modes of being, shadowy subsistence and robust existence: it is because unicorns subsist that we are able truly to deny that they exist. Frege and the post-1903 Russell solve the problem without bringing in a second mode of being: according to them, we say that unicorns do not exist by saying of the *concept* unicorn (which *does* exist) that it has no instances. If we treat positive existentials in parallel fashion, we arrive at precisely the Kant-Frege view: to say that something exists (or that things of a certain sort exist) is to say that some concept is instantiated.¹²

How is the Kant-Frege view related to Kant's doctrine that existence is not a real or determining predicate? The former may be seen as underlying (because entailing) the latter. Recall that a predicate *P* is *nonreal* iff for any concept *C*, $\Box(x)(Cx \ \& \ Px \leftrightarrow Cx)$. The right-hand side of the entire biconditional is equivalent by elementary logic to 'for any *C*, $\Box(x)(Cx \rightarrow Px)$ '. So, existence will be a nonreal predicate iff it is already entailed by any other predicate or concept. Now, suppose we say, in alliance with Kant and Frege and in opposition to Meinong, that it is the function of the quantifier 'there is' to make existence statements. In that case, we cannot truly say that there are things that do not exist: for any concept *C*, to say that $(\exists x)(Cx \ \& \ \neg Ex)$ will be to say something contradictory and impossible. Well, if $(\exists x)(Cx \ \& \ \neg Ex)$ is impossible, then $(x)(Cx \rightarrow Ex)$ is necessary, but that is just what is involved in saying that existence is not a real or determining predicate.¹³

We should ask finally how "existence is not a predicate" in its contemporary meaning affects the ontological argument. I showed in the preceding section that Kant's dictum that existence is not a real predicate does nothing to harm the ontological argument. Does the contemporary dictum have any extra punch—any adverse impact on the ontological argument not already delivered by Kant's dictum? As far as I can see, the answer is no: that existence is expressed by quantifiers does nothing to disturb either premise. As for premise 1, there is nothing wrong with defining a being in terms of a clause *Px* that implies existence. This clause will now have to take the quantified form ' $\exists y(y = x)$ ', but what is wrong with that? As for premise 2, there is nothing wrong with affirming that whatever has all perfections exists; indeed, that is implied by the Kant-Frege view as strongly as it is implied by Kant's dictum.

D. Rejecting the Subject

The doctrine of Kant's (and also, by the way, of Gassendi's)¹⁴ that we have been exploring—that any property implies or presupposes existence—must surely heighten our suspicion that something is wrong with the ontological argument. For, if any property implies existence, do we not have the makings of an ontological argument for the existence of any being we please? Recall Gaunilo's objection to Anselm—by means of the ontological argument, one could prove the existence of a perfect island. In the present context, we could define *F*s as items that have the property *P*, affirm as our next premise that anything with *P* must exist, and conclude that *F*s exist. Surely something has gone wrong, but what?

In the second of his criticisms of the ontological argument, Kant tells us what:

If, in an identical proposition, I reject the predicate while retaining the subject, contradiction results; and I therefore say that the former belongs necessarily to the latter. But if we reject subject and predicate alike, there is no contradiction; for nothing is then left that can be contradicted. (A594/B623)

As I interpret this passage, Kant is telling us that all that follows from the premises of the ontological argument is a *conditional* proposition, namely, that *if* anything is God (an *ens realissimum*), then it exists. Since this proposition is analytic (following as it does from a definition in the first premise and a logical truth in the second), to deny its consequent while affirming its antecedent would be to contradict oneself. However, one can deny that anything satisfies the antecedent (thus “rejecting the subject”) with logical impunity. One can thus deny the existence of God while accepting both premises (and the conclusion, if properly stated) of the ontological argument.¹⁵

A similar objection was raised against Descartes's version of the ontological argument by Caterus:

Even if it is granted that a supremely perfect being carries the implication of existence in virtue of its very title, it still does not follow that the existence in question is anything actual in the real world; all that follows is that the concept of existence is inseparably linked to the concept of a supreme being. So you cannot infer that the existence of God is anything actual unless you suppose that the supreme being actually exists; for then it will actually contain all perfections, including the perfection of real existence.¹⁶

I think this criticism is exactly on target. To appreciate why, it will help to make one other point first. The starting point of the ontological argument is supposed to be a definition, and a definition is not supposed to presuppose the existence of the thing defined. The definition of a *K* should only say *what* *K*s are (or would be if there were any), not *whether* there are any. That is why definitions are typically stated as biconditionals: an item *x* is a *K* iff _____.

Now look at the first premise of the ontological argument as I formulated it above: the *ens realissimum* is the being possessing all perfections. That is not a biconditional, but an identity flanked by two definite descriptions. If we understand descriptions *à la* Russell, it unpacks into ‘there is exactly one being that possesses all perfections, and that being is the *ens realissimum*’.¹⁷ The resulting proposition asserts the existence of an *ens realissimum*, so it is not neutral on questions of existence as definitions are supposed to be. To get a definition that does not by its very form presuppose the existence of the being it defines, we must move to the conditional or biconditional mode. That is, our proper starting point must be this:

x is an *ens realissimum* iff x possesses all perfections.¹⁸

Otherwise, we simply beg the question. I think any proponent of the ontological argument would have to accept the stricture on his starting point that I am now urging.

If we accept the stricture, however, we must also accept Kant’s criticism. What we are given in the argument are premises of the form ‘x is God iff x is F’ and ‘whatever is F exists’. From these it follows that a being is God only if it exists—but it does not follow that there is anything that is God. We can reject the subject along with its predicates, including the predicate of existence. The point is really just the simple one that from conditional premises we cannot derive a categorical conclusion.¹⁹

E. The Modal Ontological Argument

There are variants of the ontological argument in which *necessary* existence rather than existence *simpliciter* is claimed to be the relevant perfection of God. Necessary existence (or existence in all possible worlds) is, of course, one of the traditional attributes of God, since a being whose existence was merely contingent would not have the self-sufficiency and explanatory ultimacy that the office of Supreme Being requires. Credit for calling attention to such “modalized” versions of the ontological argument belongs to Hartshorne, Malcolm, and Plantinga;²⁰ I take my departure here from a version due to Malcolm.

How would it help the ontological argument to enlist necessary existence as a perfection? One suggestion is this:²¹ even if simple existence is not a predicate, necessary existence may be one, and that would enable the standard criticism of the ontological argument to be circumvented. It is indeed arguable that necessary existence is a real (or determining) predicate in Kant’s sense. I showed above that for no concept C is it possible for there to be instances of C that do not exist, but that seems to leave room for the claim that for some concepts C, it is possible for there to be instances of C that do not *necessarily* exist. If so, necessary existence would be a determining predicate, enlarging or making a difference to the content of a concept.²²

But how would that save the day for the ontological argument, given the results in sections B, C, and D above? I showed there that the fundamental objection to the ontological argument is *not* that existence is not a determining

predicate, or even that it is not a predicate, period. The fundamental objection is rather the one raised by Kant in company with Caterus: all we can derive from the premises of the ontological argument is a conditional proposition, not one affirming the existence of God outright. I have chosen Malcolm's version of the modal ontological argument for consideration precisely because he sees it as offering a way around the objection of Kant and Caterus.

Malcolm's defense of the ontological argument as he actually presents it rests on a confusing misconstrual of Kant. He takes Kant to concede that the statement 'God necessarily exists' follows from the premises of the argument but at the same time takes him to maintain that this statement, when properly analyzed, is equivalent to the conditional statement 'if God exists, then He necessarily exists'. Malcolm further takes Kant to hold that this conditional is compatible with (and indeed, that it entails) 'it is possible that God does not exist'. He then claims that 'God necessarily exists' is in fact *incompatible* with 'it is possible that God does not exist'. So, Malcolm concludes that Kant's rejection of the ontological argument is inconsistent with one of his own admissions. Specifically, Malcolm holds that something Kant allows to follow from the ontological argument does, after all, rule out the possibility of God's nonexistence.

This criticism of Kant mistakes his point. The point is not that 'God necessarily exists' must be analyzed as a conditional; it is rather that *only* a conditional and *not* 'God necessarily exists' follows from the premises of the ontological argument to begin with. Malcolm's rejoinder to Kant's criticism assumes that the conclusion 'God necessarily exists' *can* be extracted from the argument, but that is precisely what Kant denies.

Nonetheless, Malcolm has given us everything we need to make a riposte to the Kant-Caterus "conditionalizing move" (as Bennett calls it). If Kant is willing to concede that the conditional 'if there is a God, then he exists' follows from the premises of the original ontological argument, then he should also be willing to concede that the conditional 'if there is a God, then he necessarily exists' follows from the premises of the modal ontological argument (in which necessary existence replaces existence as the relevant perfection). But the second conditional is not as harmless as the first; when augmented by plausible premises to be identified below, it does imply that God exists.

Here, then, is the Malcolm-inspired version of the modal ontological argument I recommend. To facilitate presentation, the modal operators in what follows are sometimes spelled out and sometimes abbreviated by '□' and '◇'.

1. □(if God exists, then God necessarily exists).

This is the conditional proposition that Kant would concede, asserted now as holding necessarily. Kant would have to concede its necessity, since it follows from premises that are themselves necessary.

2. ◇(God exists).

This is the premise by which Leibniz thought any valid ontological argument would have to be supplemented. Kant acknowledges this premise at A596/B624 and says he will allow it for the sake of argument (even if elsewhere he implicitly challenges it, as I show in sections F and H).

3. \Diamond (God necessarily exists).

This follows from premises 1 and 2 by the modal principle that possibility is transmitted by entailment.

4. \Box [if God necessarily exists, then \Box (God exists)].

In this premise, we move from necessity *de re* in the antecedent to necessity *de dicto* in the consequent. I comment on the significance of this shortly.

5. $\Diamond \Box$ (God exists).

This follows from 3 and 4, again by the principle that possibility is transmitted by entailment.

6. $\Diamond \Box p$ only if $\Box p$.

This is a theorem of the modal system S5, provable from that system's axiom that whatever is possible is necessarily possible.

7. \Box (God exists).

This follows from 5 and 6 and completes the proof. If the proof is sound, it shows that the conditional proposition Kant concedes implies the necessity of the existential proposition he says we are free to deny.

What is there in the argument that we might reasonably question? Bennett observes that the transition from 'God necessarily exists' to 'it is necessary that God exists' in step 4 is controversial.²³ The difference between these two may appear overly subtle—what does it amount to? Well, suppose that God necessarily exists, that is, that there is a being who is God in our world and who exists in all possible worlds; but suppose also that there are worlds in which this being is no longer God and in which no other being plays the role of God, either. In that case, the antecedent of 4 would be true and its consequent false; that suffices to illustrate the difference between them.

In showing us under what circumstances premise 4 would be false, the scenario just sketched also brings to light a premise we could add to ensure its truth: whatever being is God is *essentially* God. That is to say, the divine attributes cannot be possessed by any being accidentally. It follows that if any world contains a God, that being is God in all possible worlds in which it exists, and if any world contains a necessary being who is God, that being exists in all worlds and is God in all worlds.²⁴ Thus may premise 4 be vindicated.²⁵

Is there anything else in the argument that might be questioned? Perhaps the likeliest target is 2, the premise that the existence of God is possible. Some contemporary opponents of the ontological argument have taken the tough line that the existence of God is, indeed, impossible.²⁶ Why would anyone say that? The most common answer is that there is something defective or incoherent in the very idea of a necessary being. That, as noted above, is one of Kant's own points, to which I turn next.

F. Could There Be a Necessary Being?

The third of Kant's three criticisms of the ontological argument is that the notion of a necessary being is problematic, if not impossible. It is not immedi-

ately clear how this point affects the Cartesian ontological argument that is the target of Kant's criticism, since it is not explicitly part of that argument that God *is* a necessary being.²⁷ However, it does affect the modal ontological argument we have been considering in an obvious way. If there cannot be a necessary being, and if that is what God would have to be, then the Leibnizian premise affirming the possibility of God's existence is false.

In his debate with Copleston on the existence of God, Russell contended that the term 'necessary' is significantly applicable only to propositions, not to things, and that the notion of a necessary being therefore makes no sense.²⁸ Kant may be making a similar point in the following passage, which occurs soon after he has raised the question of whether the concept of an absolutely necessary being is legitimate:

All the alleged examples are, without exception, taken from *judgments*, not from *things* and their existence. But the unconditioned necessity of judgments is not the same as an absolute necessity of things. The absolute necessity of the judgment is only a conditioned necessity of the thing, or of the predicate in the judgment. (A593/B621)

One may think this objection easily overcome. After all, if the notion of a necessary proposition is granted, why not simply define the notion of a necessary being in terms of it as follows?

x is a necessary being =Df the proposition that x exists is necessary.

But this will not do. Since a definition with free variables is tacitly equivalent to its universal closure, we are here quantifying into the context 'the proposition that _____ exists is necessary'. There are familiar reasons for holding that this is illegitimate.²⁹

To accommodate the idea of a necessary being, we do better to forget about necessity *de dicto* or the necessity of propositions and appeal straightaway to the idea of necessity *de re*, as in the following definition:³⁰

x is a necessary being =Df x is necessarily such that it exists.

Here we attribute necessary existence to a thing, not necessary truth to a proposition.

Notice also that the necessity we attribute is unconditional or absolute necessity—we are not merely saying that x is necessarily such that it exists *if* it has some other feature. In the passage quoted above, Kant seems to deny that there is such a thing as unconditional necessity:

The absolute necessity of the judgment is only a conditioned necessity of the thing, or of the predicate in the judgment. The above proposition [a triangle has three angles] does not declare that three angles are absolutely necessary, but that, under the condition that there is a triangle ... three angles will necessarily be found in it. (A593–94/B621–22)³¹

Kant is right, of course, about the example, but a defender of the notion of necessary existence (and perhaps also many defenders of the distinction between essential and accidental properties) would dispute Kant's implicit attempt to generalize from it. Not all necessities connect predicates with other predicates; some connect predicates directly with things. On this issue, philosophy in the first half of the twentieth century tended to agree with Kant, but philosophy since then has shown the way to make room for the idea of predicates or properties attaching necessarily and directly to things.³²

There is another objection to the idea of a necessary being to be found in Kant and in a fair amount of literature inspired by him. This is the objection that no existential proposition can be necessary—that there cannot be necessary propositions of the form ' $\exists xFx$ '. This objection is distinct from the first, though not always distinguished from it. To say that something has necessary existence, $\exists x\Box Ex$, implies that it is necessary that something exists, $\Box\exists xEx$,³³ but not conversely. Thus, the objection to the necessity of existential propositions would automatically be an objection to necessary beings, but not conversely. Often the objection takes the form of the following syllogism:

1. No existential proposition is analytic.
2. Only analytic propositions are necessary.
3. Therefore, no existential proposition is necessary.

Kant himself affirms premise 1 at A598/B626: "But if, on the other hand, we admit, as every reasonable person must, that all existential propositions are synthetic. . . ." But since he explicitly challenges premise 2 (that, indeed, is the official occasion for writing the *Critique of Pure Reason*), he is in no position to advance the present objection.

In my view, then, both of the Kantian objections to the notion of necessary being are inconclusive—the first because the notion of absolute necessity *de re* has survived attempts to discredit it, the second because (as Kant himself teaches us) not all necessity is born of analyticity.³⁴

So much for defending the idea of a necessary being from objections; I now present a positive argument in its favor. Ironically, it proceeds from a premise that Kant himself accepts—the Kant-Frege view. So, if the argument is correct, one of Kant's criticisms of the ontological argument—that existence is not a predicate—turns out to undermine another—that there cannot be any necessary beings.³⁵

In discussing the Kant-Frege view, I have shown that it is a theorem of standard quantification theory that everything exists:

1. $(x)Ex$.

That is because its negation, $\exists x\neg Ex$, is contradictory, given that the existential quantifier expresses existence. Now, since what is provable is necessary, we also have

2. $\Box(x)Ex$.

By universal instantiation, ' $(x)Ex$ ' entails ' Ea ':

3. $\Box[(x)Ex \rightarrow Ea]$.

From 2 and 3 together with the principle that what is entailed by the necessary is itself necessary, we next obtain

4. $\Box Ea$.

So, not only is it possible for there to be necessary beings; we have just proved that an arbitrary nameable being is one!

There are, to be sure, systems of logic in which the above argument does not go through. In free logic, the rule of universal instantiation is restricted in a way that prevents us from arriving at step 3: we cannot infer from ' $(x)Fx$ ' to ' Fa ' unless we already have the premise that a exists, so all we could get at line 3 is the harmless $\Box[(x)Ex \ \& \ Ea \rightarrow Ea]$. It seems to me, however, that if we adopt free logic we depart at least from the spirit of the Kant-Frege view. Free logic places a companion restriction on the rule of existential generalization, requiring ' Ea ' as an auxiliary premise before one can get from ' Fa ' to ' $\exists xFx$ ', and that requirement has point only on the assumption that a can instantiate the property of being F even if a does not exist. How can that assumption be true if, as on the Kant-Frege view, asserting existence and asserting the instantiation of a property go hand in hand?

Some may think that step 3 is blocked for a different reason. In some of his systems of quantified modal logic, Kripke has imposed a stricture against applying the rule of necessitation (which says you may put a ' \Box ' in front of anything provable) to purported theorems containing free variables, such as ' $(x)Ex \rightarrow Ey$ '. This keeps the Barcan and Converse Barcan formulas from being provable in his systems.³⁶ It might be thought that the same stricture prevents us from arriving at my step 3, but in fact it does not. The proof I have given uses a name rather than a variable in step 3, so it does not violate Kripke's stricture.

That the Kant-Frege view leads to the necessity of all beings should not be a surprise given the argument of chapter 8. There I argue that the Kant-Frege view leads to the result that there cannot be any absolute existence-changes: if something exists at one time but not at another, what is really going on is that some substance existing at both times is qualified now one way, now another. In the modal case, we are now reaching an analogous conclusion: if something exists in one possible world but not in another, what is really going on is that some substance or substances existing in both worlds are differently qualified or arranged in the two worlds. "This hammer might not have existed," we may say, but that only means that a certain head might not have been attached to a certain handle—or, going deeper, that certain particles might not have been so arranged as to constitute a hammer. Substances themselves exist in all worlds, and the myriad beings of our world that do not exist in other worlds are therefore merely modes. (Modes must here, as in chapter 8, be accorded the status of mere constructions, not to be quantified over in an ontologically perspicuous language.) If Kant and Frege are right, it now appears, so too are Spinoza and the Tractarian Wittgenstein: genuine substances are necessary beings.

But hold! The view we are now flirting with clashes with a conclusion advanced earlier. In chapter 11 I offer the Mixed Paralogism, a blend of the first two Paralogisms of Rational Psychology, as showing that thinking things must be substances. I am arguing here that if the Kant-Frege view is correct, all sub-

stances are necessary beings. Yet surely not all thinking things are necessary beings—immortality is not so easily assured. I leave it to the reader to consider which among the following contains a false step that should be rejected: the Mixed Paralogism, the Kant-Frege view, or the contention that the Kant-Frege view requires all substances to be necessary beings.³⁷

G. A Meinongian Ontological Argument

In an interesting discussion of Descartes's ontological argument, Anthony Kenny has claimed (a) that Descartes was a proto-Meinongian, and (b) that "if we give Descartes his Meinongian assumptions, there is nothing fallacious in his argument."³⁸ Others, including Russell, have also thought that within a Meinongian framework the ontological argument would go through. That is the claim I examine in this section.

I begin by identifying the relevant Meinongian assumptions. There are two, the first of which is expressed in the following notorious passage:

(I) Those who like paradoxical modes of expression could very well say:
"There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects."³⁹

That is paradoxical indeed, but it is not the contradiction it may appear to be. Meinong's point is that there are objects of which it is true that they do not exist. For this not to be contradictory, 'there are' (*es gibt*) must not mean the same thing as 'there exist'; that is to say, Meinong's quantifier must range over even things that do not exist. As he puts it in another famous passage, "[T]he totality of what exists, including what has existed and will exist, is infinitely small in comparison with the totality of Objects. . . ."⁴⁰

Here is the second relevant assumption, sometimes called the Independence Principle:

(II) [T]he *Sosein* of an Object is not affected by its *Nichtsein*. This fact is sufficiently important to be explicitly formulated as the principle of the independence of *Sosein* from *Sein*.⁴¹

Thus, an object does not have to *be* (have existence or *Sein*) in order to be a certain way (have characteristics or *Sosein*). The golden mountain is golden, but it does not exist; it is one of that multitude of things that "there are" but that do not exist.⁴²

How do Meinong's views come to the aid of the ontological argument? A natural first thought would be this: with assumption (I), *Meinong breaks the connection between quantifiers and existence*. For him, it is not contradictory to say there are things that do not exist. Hence, we lose the basis offered in section C for saying that existence is not a real predicate. If some winged horses do not exist, existence becomes a real or determining predicate after all; it "enlarges" the concept of a winged horse.

If that were the only relevance of Meinong, he would offer no salvation to the ontological argument. I argued above that the ontological argument is flawed for reasons independent of the slogan "existence is not a predicate,"

whether taken in its Kantian or in its contemporary meaning. It is flawed for the Kant-Caterus reason that its conclusion can be nothing more than the conditional 'if any being is God, that being exists'.

There is a second way, however, in which Meinong's ideas might be exploited in defense of the ontological argument. For Kenny, the key is assumption (II), the Independence Principle. *Meinong breaks the connection between predication and existence*. According to the Kant-Caterus objection, the starting point of the ontological argument must be conditional if it is not to beg the question, and from a conditional premise no categorical conclusion can be derived. Given Meinong's theory, however, our starting point may be the categorical 'God has all perfections'; since this is noncommittal about existence, it does not beg the question.⁴³ When we add premise 2 (that whatever has all perfections exists), we may then go on to draw the categorical conclusion that God exists.

Such is Kenny's defense of the ontological argument. He goes on to object to Meinong's theory as bad ontology, but he sticks by the contention that if we grant Meinong's assumptions, the argument is valid.

I disagree. Those who like paradoxical modes of expression could perhaps put my objection to Kenny in this way: yes, we may now draw the conclusion that God exists, but that does not mean that God exists! We are still free, as Kant said, to reject the subject along with its predicate of existence. The Meinongian assumptions about predication that allow the premise 'God has all perfections' to be true regardless of whether God exists also allow the conclusion 'God exists' to be true regardless of whether God exists.⁴⁴

My point is simply that if the predicational form '*Fa*' does not require for its truth that *a* exist, the same remains true when 'exists' itself is the predicate. Some may wish to counter that '*Fa*' trivially implies that *a* is *F*, so how can 'God exists' fail to imply the existence of God?⁴⁵ We seem to have reached a stalemate; how are we to resolve it?

Perhaps the following example will help. Suppose we agree to define a concept of fictional truth according to which a proposition *p* is true (in novel *N*) iff it is stated or implied by the author of *N* within its pages. Let the author now proclaim within his novel: "My characters are real, not imaginary; they have an existence outside these pages." It is then true (in the sense defined) that the characters are real, not merely imaginary. Imagine now a debate in which one party says, "Yes, but it doesn't follow that the characters *are* real outside the novel," and the other replies, "How could it not so follow? What you have conceded is the truth of precisely this, that the characters are real outside the pages of the novel." I hope the reader will agree with the first party. Fictional truth may not be the best model for *Sosein* without *Sein*, but I trust the moral of my little story is clear: no predicates employed within a bracketed form of discourse will ever enable one to transcend the brackets.⁴⁶

Here is another analogy that may be instructive. C.D. Broad once suggested that a lesson to be learned from McTaggart's purported proof of the unreality of time is that we cannot say that an event is present by using a tenseless copula and a temporal predicate: 'e is present' will not do unless the copula is in the present tense, else we would be implying that *e* is eternally present. So, we need tense as an additional device, and once we have it, temporal predi-

cates are redundant.⁴⁷ Similarly, I suggest, we cannot say that something exists by using an existentially neutral form of predication along with a predicate of existence. We need some additional device—an existentially loaded form of predication or an existentially interpreted quantifier—and once we have it, the predicate of existence is redundant.

We are thus led in the end to a further relevant sense of the dictum that existence is not a predicate—a sense in which the dictum is inimical to the ontological argument after all. Existence *is* a predicate (or may be if you like), but it is not by means of any such predicate alone that we ever manage to say that anything exists. To do that, we need some further device—a form of predication that presupposes existence or a non-Meinongian quantifier. If we have the further device, existence as a predicate is redundant. Moreover, the assertion that God exists or that there is a God—in the existentially loaded sense—does not follow from the premises of the ontological argument.

H. Necessary Being and *Ens Realissimum*

I turn now to Kant's treatment of the second way of proving the existence of God: the cosmological argument. The cosmological argument as Kant presents it has two distinct stages. The first stage argues for the existence of a necessary being; the second stage argues that the necessary being can only be God or the *ens realissimum*. ("And this all men call God," as Aquinas says at a similar juncture.) The two-stage structure of the argument is made especially clear at A584–86/B612–14 and A604–6/B632–34.

Kant gives the following compact formulation of the first stage of the cosmological argument:

If anything exists, an absolutely necessary being must also exist. Now I, at least, exist. Therefore an absolutely necessary being exists. (A604/B632)

I postpone discussion of this argument to the next section. Here I concentrate on the second stage, to which Kant devotes most of his critical attention.

In the second stage of the argument, "reason looks around for a concept that squares with so supreme a mode of existence as that of unconditioned necessity . . ." (A585/B613) and discovers that "[t]he concept of an *ens realissimum* is . . . of all concepts of possible things, that which best squares with the concept of an unconditionally necessary being . . ." (A586/B614). Indeed, the concept of an *ens realissimum* is the *only* concept that is adequate to the concept of a necessary being:

The necessary being can be determined in one way only, that is, by one out of each possible pair of opposed predicates. It must therefore be completely determined through its own concept. Now there is only one possible concept which determines a thing completely *a priori*, namely, the concept of the *ens realissimum*. The concept of the *ens realissimum* is therefore the only concept through which a necessary being can be thought. In other words, a supreme being necessarily exists. (A605–6/B633–34)⁴⁸

Kant's overall criticism of the cosmological argument is well known: he maintains that it presupposes the ontological argument, which he has already refuted. But how exactly does the one argument presuppose the other?

An obvious first guess would be this: the cosmological argument depends on the ontological argument because it asserts that there is a necessary being, which could be true only if the ontological argument were sound. Thus Russell writes:

It is clear that Kant is right in saying that this argument depends upon the ontological argument. If the existence of the world can only be accounted for by the existence of a necessary Being, then there must be a Being whose essence involves existence, for that is what is meant by a necessary Being. But if it is possible that there should be a Being whose essence involves existence, then reason alone, without experience, can define such a Being, whose existence will follow from the ontological argument. . . .⁴⁹

Though a good guess, this is a wrong one. Russell's suggestion makes the cosmological proof depend on the ontological proof in its *first* stage. As we read on, however, it becomes clear that Kant thinks the cosmological proof depends on the ontological proof in its *second* stage. Here is a compact statement of his point:

If I say, the concept of the *ens realissimum* is a concept, and indeed the only concept, which is appropriate and adequate to necessary existence, I must also admit that necessary existence can be inferred from this concept. Thus the so-called cosmological proof really owes any cogency which it may have to the ontological proof from mere concepts. (A607/B635)

Here Kant is saying that if we can infer from having necessary existence to being an *ens realissimum* (as in stage 2 of the cosmological argument), we can also infer from being an *ens realissimum* to having necessary existence (as allegedly in the ontological argument). But we cannot normally reverse an inference like that; what enables us to do so in this case? Here is Kant's fuller explanation of the point:

If the proposition, that every absolutely necessary being is likewise the most real of all beings, is correct (and this is the *nervus probandi* of the cosmological proof), it must, like all affirmative judgments, be convertible, at least *per accidens*. It therefore follows that some *entia realissima* are likewise absolutely necessary beings. But one *ens realissimum* is in no respect different from another, and what is true of some under this concept is true also of all. In this case, therefore, I can convert the proposition *simpliciter*, not only *per accidens*, and say that every *ens realissimum* is a necessary being. But since this proposition is determined from its *a priori* concepts alone, the mere concept of the *ens realissimum* must carry with it the absolute necessity of that being; and this is precisely what the ontological proof has asserted. . . . (A608/B636)

The steps in this reasoning may be set out as follows:⁵⁰

1. Every necessary being is an *ens realissimum*. (This is the central claim of stage 2 of the cosmological argument.)
2. Some *ens realissimum* is a necessary being. (From 1 by conversion *per accidens*.)
3. One *ens realissimum* is no different from any other.
4. Every *ens realissimum* is a necessary being. (From 2 and 3.)
5. That is to say, from the mere concept of an *ens realissimum*, the necessary existence of its object may be inferred. (Purportedly from 4.)
6. Line 5 is "precisely what the ontological proof has asserted."
7. Therefore, the cogency of the cosmological proof depends on that of the ontological proof.

One might object straight off to the inference from 1 to 2. The classical inference of conversion *per accidens* (i.e., from 'all F is G' to 'some G is F') is valid only if A-propositions are accorded existential import, but it was implicit in Kant's best criticism of the ontological argument that A-propositions need *not* be given existential import. (You can affirm an A-proposition while "rejecting the subject.") In the present context, however, the inference from 1 to 2 poses no problem. Kant is discussing the position of a cosmological arguer who has *already* proved 'there is a necessary being', and from this result together with 1, 2 *does* follow.⁵¹ So, Kant's inference is all right; we just need to augment the justification he offers for it.

Moving on, step 3 is a consequence of the fact that the concept of an *ens realissimum* is formed by conjoining all the positive predicates from each pair of a predicate with its opposite. So, naturally, all *entia realissima* are just alike.⁵² As for step 4, it plainly follows from 2 and 3.

It is steps 5 and 6 that bear close scrutiny. Note that since the premises yielding 4 are necessary truths, we are enabled to reach not just 4 but its necessitation: *necessarily*, every *ens realissimum* is a necessary being. That makes it true in one sense that we may "infer" from being an *ens realissimum* to having necessary existence, as 5 says: we can say that necessarily, if anything is an *ens realissimum*, it is also a necessary being. But this proposition is purely hypothetical; from it alone we could not conclude that there *is* a necessary being. That, indeed, is Kant's own best criticism of the ontological argument. To go on and say as he does in 6 that 5 amounts to the ontological argument is to forget or ignore this criticism.⁵³

I am not saying that nothing authorizes us to get past 4 to the existence of a necessary being. If part 1 of the cosmological argument is correct, we already know at this stage that there is a necessary being. The point is rather that the cosmological arguer need not excoGITATE the existence of the necessary being from step 4 alone, as the ontological arguer tries to do. There is nothing in 4 that allows us to examine the concept of an *ens realissimum* and conclude (on that basis alone) that there must be an object instantiating it. Therefore, the cosmological arguer need not (just in virtue of being committed to proposition 4) be an ontological arguer.

The point of the previous two paragraphs may be encapsulated as follows. In the sense of 5 in which 5 follows from 4, it is not true (as 6 maintains) that 5 amounts to the ontological argument. By the same token, in the sense that 5

must have if it is to amount to the ontological argument, it does not follow from 4.⁵⁴ So, Kant's central criticism of the cosmological argument fails.

We should ask at this point whether there is any other criticism Kant would or could make of the cosmological argument. Indeed, it appears that he is committed to finding some flaw in the cosmological argument in addition to the one he highlights. He objects to 5 on the ground that it recapitulates the ontological argument, and he maintains (even if mistakenly) that 5 follows from 4. He is therefore committed to rejecting 4. But 4 follows from 1, 3, and the existence of a necessary being, as I have shown. Kant does not question 3. He must therefore question either 1 (the inference from necessary being to *ens realissimum*) or the existence of a necessary being in the first place. He does, in fact, raise doubts on each score.

On the first point, Kant's attitude appears to be the following. If we had to identify the best candidate for having necessary existence, it would be the *ens realissimum* (A586–87/B614–15). Nonetheless, for all we know, some lesser being might be a necessary being. “[W]e are entirely free to hold that any limited beings whatsoever, notwithstanding their being limited, may also be unconditionally necessary . . .” (A588/B616). This coincides with one of Hume's criticisms of the cosmological argument—that for all we know, the material universe might be the sought-for necessary being.⁵⁵

One who raises this possibility must not, of course, rule the very idea of a necessary being out of court. But in other places Kant does object to the idea of a necessary being (which brings me to the second point).⁵⁶ I have already considered two such objections in the context of the ontological argument (section F). Kant raises further objections in a section entitled “Discovery and Explanation of the Dialectical Illusion in All Transcendental Proofs of the Existence of a Necessary Being,” which is appended to his discussion of the cosmological argument.

In this section, Kant presents a little paradox together with two ways of resolving it. Here is the paradox:

If I am constrained to think something necessary as a condition of existing things, but am unable to think any particular thing as in itself necessary, it inevitably follows that necessity and contingency do not concern the things themselves; otherwise there would be a contradiction. (A616/B644)

The paragraph preceding the quoted sentence makes it clear that Kant affirms both conjuncts in the antecedent of his conditional. Thus, we have

(A) I must think $(\exists x)(Nx)$ ⁵⁷

and

(B) $(x)(I \text{ must think } \neg Nx)$.

If to these we add

(C) if I must think p, then p,

we then obtain the contradiction

(D) $(\exists x)(Nx) \ \& \ (x)(\neg Nx)$.

What is the way out? Kant says we must view principles (A) and (B) as subjective and regulative, rather than as objective and constitutive. In effect, he denies (C), telling us that what we “must think” about these matters need not be constitutive of reality. Even so, a mild paradox remains, insofar as we are enjoined to think a number of things that cannot all be true.⁵⁸

Kant passes immediately to another way of avoiding the contradiction without remarking that it is different from the first:

[I]nasmuch as the second rule [i.e., B] commands us always to regard all empirical causes of unity as themselves derived [and contingent] . . . it follows that we must regard the absolutely necessary as being *outside* the world. (A617/B645)

Here we are invited to replace ‘ $(x)(\neg Nx)$ ’ by ‘ $(x)(Wx \rightarrow \neg Nx)$ ’, which is compatible with ‘ $(\exists x)(Nx)$ ’ insofar as the being making the latter proposition true may be “outside the world.” This is a recapitulation of Kant’s strategy for reconciling the Thesis with the Antithesis of the Fourth Antinomy: let everything in nature (the totality of sensible appearances) be contingent, as the Antithesis maintains, but at the same time let there be a necessary being, as the Thesis proclaims, by placing the necessary being outside nature.⁵⁹ In the present context, however, this strategy is too conciliatory, for positing a necessary being *anywhere* will still (in the company of 1) bring us to step 4, which Kant is committed to rejecting.

Kant on the whole appears to be agnostic about the existence and even the possibility of a necessary being. If so, he owes us an account of what goes wrong with the *first* part of the cosmological argument, which purports to establish the existence of precisely such a being. He never gives us such a critique. In the next section I undertake an evaluation of part I, which I refer to from now on simply as the cosmological argument.

I. The Cosmological Argument

The central claim of the cosmological argument is that if anything exists, an absolutely necessary being must exist. Kant explains the rationale for this claim as follows:

This inference is too well known to require detailed statement. It depends on the supposedly transcendental law of natural causality: that everything contingent has a cause, which, if itself contingent, must likewise have a cause, till the series of subordinate causes ends with an absolutely necessary cause, without which it would have no completeness. (A605/B633n.)

That explanation makes the cosmological argument sound too much like its unsophisticated cousin, the first cause argument. In the subtler form in which it was advanced by Leibniz and Clarke, the cosmological argument concedes the possibility of a causal series extending infinitely into the past, but then

goes on to insist that the existence of *the whole series* must be explained by the existence of something outside it. As Hume's Demea puts it:

[T]he whole eternal chain or succession, taken together, is not determined or caused by anything, and yet it is evident that it requires a cause or reason, as much as any particular object which begins to exist in time. The question is still reasonable why this particular succession of causes existed from eternity, and not any other succession or no succession at all.⁶⁰

Since we may assume that all contingent beings are members of the series, the being outside it must be a noncontingent being, which is to say a necessary being.⁶¹ The nerve of the argument is thus better represented when Kant writes: "The whole universe must thus sink into the abyss of nothingness, unless, over and above this infinite chain of contingencies, we assume something to support it . . ." A622/B550).⁶²

The cosmological proof in the above form is the target of a famous criticism by Hume, expressed thus by Cleanthes:

Did I show you the particular causes of each individual in a collection of twenty particles of matter, I should think it very unreasonable, should you afterwards ask me, what was the cause of the whole twenty. This is sufficiently explained in explaining the causes of the parts.⁶³

The proponent of the cosmological argument allows that each member of the set of contingent beings is caused by some member of the set that existed earlier. In that case, claims Hume, it is unreasonable to seek any further explanation for the series as a whole.

Although many philosophers profess to be fully satisfied with Hume's reply,⁶⁴ I think there is something wrong with it.⁶⁵ From the passage quoted above, we may extract the following principle: the existence of a totality is always adequately explained when the existence of each member is explained. A corollary is that if there is an infinite totality of objects or events each of which is explained by the causal efficacy of some other members(s) of the totality, then the existence of the whole totality is thereby adequately explained—no recourse to anything outside the totality is needed. It is this corollary that I wish to challenge.

Consider the following pattern of explanation:

Explanandum: all members of the set {a,b,c,d,e, . . . } of Fs exist.

Explanans: a exists because b and c caused a to exist; b exists because d and e caused b to exist; and so on.

You would be giving an explanation of this type if you tried to explain the existence of zebras by noting, for each zebra, that it is the offspring of two other zebras—Zeb was begotten by Zeke and Zelda, and so on.

I maintain that explanations of this sort are circular. The explanans invokes the existence of Fs, but Fs are the very beings for whose existence an explanation is being sought. To be sure, the circularity is not quite of the 'P because P' variety, since the existence of each zebra is explained by reference to *other*

zebras. But if what is to be explained is the existence of zebras *in general* (or why there are zebras *at all*), the explanans provokes the very question it is supposed to answer. This is the sense in which the explanation is circular.

If what is demanded is an explanation of the existence of zebras in general, no amount of appeal to zebras begetting zebras will satisfy it. The demand will be satisfied only when recourse is had to something that is *not* a zebra—as happens equally in the explanations offered by creationists and evolutionists.

In light of the foregoing I wish to propose the following counterprinciple to Hume's, which I call *the anticircularity stricture*:

The existence of Fs in general (or the fact that Fness is instantiated) can be explained only by appeal to the existence of something that is *not* an F.

The stricture requires qualification, as I show in a moment. But I believe that some principle along these lines must be correct, and that its correctness is acknowledged in other contexts. It is presumably some such principle that leads us to reject explanations of perception in terms of homunculi. "How does vision take place? Well, objects outside us cause patterns on the retina, which are then scanned by a little man seated behind it. . . ." If what is sought is an explanation of vision in general (not just human vision as opposed to homuncular vision), that explanation is worthlessly circular.

Hume's dictum appears plausible only because he illustrates it with a finite case that does *not* violate the anticircularity stricture. We accept his explanation of the twenty particles of matter only because it has recourse at some point to an entity outside the twenty. (Even if the particles are capable of reproducing, we would not accept causal loops.) The entity outside the twenty must be either a particle of matter or not. If it is, we have not explained why there are particles of matter in general; if it is not, we have explained Fs by reference to non-Fs. Either way, we do not run afoul of the anticircularity stricture. But as soon as we try to explain the existence of an *infinite* totality in Hume's fashion, we *do* run afoul of it.

The application of this point to the cosmological argument will by now be obvious. The cosmological arguer demands to know why there are contingent beings at all. The Humean would say that the existence of each contingent being may be explained by the causal efficacy of some other contingent being, and that is explanation enough. If we accept the anticircularity stricture, however, we will insist that the existence of contingent beings in general can be explained, if at all, only by reference to a *noncontingent* being. The noncontingent being may or may not be God—that is a matter for further argument. But I suggest that cosmological arguers have always been right to maintain that we can explain everything that needs explaining only if there is a necessary being.

I turn now to the needed qualification in the anticircularity stricture. As presently stated, it is open to the following embarrassing counterexample: the existence of necessary beings can only be explained by the existence of contingent beings! There are also further counterintuitive consequences, such as that the existence of nongreen things can be explained only by reference to the existence of green things. These counterexamples are avoided if we qualify the principle as follows:

If it is contingent that there are Fs, then the existence of Fs can be explained (if at all) only by reference to the existence of things that are not Fs.

This sidesteps the two counterexamples just given, since it is not contingent that there are necessary beings, nor (if one is any sort of Platonist) is it contingent that there are nongreen things, since the number two necessarily exists and is necessarily nongreen. But it is presumably contingent that there are contingent things,⁶⁶ so the restricted principle retains its intended application to the cosmological argument.

J. The Principle of Sufficient Reason

It is plain that a needed premise in the cosmological argument is the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which Leibniz formulated thus: “[N]o fact can be real or existing and no proposition can be true unless there is a sufficient reason why it should be thus and not otherwise.”⁶⁷ Were it not for this principle, the existence of one or more of the contingent beings might simply be a brute fact, getting no explanation by reference to a necessary being or anything else.

Why should we accept the Principle of Sufficient Reason? I am enough of a rationalist to find it attractive, but I now argue that it is a principle that can be accepted only at the high cost of banishing contingency from the universe altogether.

Suppose for the moment that there is a necessary being, and suppose further that this necessary being is God. What fact about God is it that explains the existence of all the contingent beings? Is it his sheer existence, or is it some further fact about him—his choosing, say, to bring into being one rather than another of all the possible worlds? In the former case, we are citing as the self-sufficient explanation of the existence of all contingent beings (and presumably also of the holding of all contingent truths) a fact that is itself necessary, namely, that God exists. But on the assumption that one fact adequately explains another only if it entails the other, this implies that the necessity of the explanans will be transferred to the explanandum. Hence, it will be necessary that the totality of mundane beings exists; they will not be contingent after all. So, on the first alternative, the existence of contingent beings is not explained but negated.

It will be instructive to compare the current situation with one I noted in chapter 3, section D. There I showed that the attempt to explain the necessary in terms of the contingent (by citing certain contingent facts as necessary conditions for the necessary) results in doing away with necessity. Here I point out that the attempt to explain the contingent in terms of the necessary (by citing certain necessary facts as sufficient conditions for the contingent) results in doing away with contingency. If the universe is to house both kinds of truths, we must evidently forswear any attempt to explain either of the twain in terms of the other.

I turn, then, to the other alternative: what explains the existence of contingent beings is some fact over and above God’s existence, say, his choosing to create one world rather than another. The further fact must be contingent, else we land smack back in the difficulty of the last paragraph. But then what is the

explanation of the further fact? It either has none, or we explain it by reference to a prior contingency, thus embarking on the explanatory regress already dismissed above in connection with Hume. It appears, then, that our choices are two: either banish all contingency or admit at least one exception to the Principle of Sufficient Reason.

The point for which I have been arguing is made with admirable compactness in the following passage from Bennett:

Let P be the great proposition stating the whole contingent truth about the actual world, down to its finest detail, in respect of all times. Then the question 'Why is it the case that P?' cannot be answered in a satisfying way. Any purported answer must have the form 'P is the case because Q is the case' but if Q is only contingently the case then it is a conjunct in P, and the offered explanation doesn't explain; and if Q is necessarily the case then the explanation, if it is cogent, implies that P is necessary also. But if P is necessary then the universe had to be exactly as it is, down to the tiniest detail—i.e., this is the only possible world.

In short, an explanatory rationalist [one who accepts the Principle of Sufficient Reason] is under intense pressure to suppose that there are no contingent truths.⁶⁸

In the next section, I consider a suggestion of Nozick's that is meant to get us out of the dilemma of having to reject all contingency or accept brute facts.

K. The Realization of All Possibilities

The Principle of Fecundity says that *all possibilities are realized*. In a chapter devoted to the above-described dilemma,⁶⁹ Robert Nozick commends this principle as one that would drastically reduce the number of unanswerable why-questions. He also explores the idea that the principle itself may be explained by explanatory self-subsumption: it is deducible from itself together with the fact (arguably necessary if it holds at all) that what it states is a possibility. He thus holds out the hope that without eliminating contingency, we might reduce the quotient of brute fact in the universe to nothing.

There are two ways of interpreting the slogan "all possibilities are realized": as shrinking the realm of the possible down to what is actually the case, or as expanding the realm of the realized up to the limits of the possible. The philosophy of Spinoza may provide an example of the former; Nozick plainly intends the latter. Presented with the question, "Why X rather than Y?" Spinoza would say, "Because Y could not have happened"; Nozick would say, "There is no 'rather' about it; X and Y *both* obtain."

Is it not a possibility that *not* all possibilities are realized?⁷⁰ If so, the Principle of Fecundity would be undermined by the following syllogism:

1. All possibilities are realized.
2. It is a possibility that not all possibilities are realized.
3. Therefore, not all possibilities are realized.

Nozick identifies several strategies for avoiding this contradiction and others that threaten. I examine three such strategies here.

The first strategy is to restrict the Principle of Fecundity so that it only says that all *first-order* possibilities are realized, where a first-order possibility is one that neither entails nor excludes the existence of other possibilities. We then avoid the syllogism above, since 'not all possibilities are realized' does not state a first-order possibility. Nozick mentions this strategy in a footnote⁷¹ but declines to adopt it, since it would prevent us from explaining the Principle of Fecundity by subsuming it under itself.

Even if we did adopt the first strategy, however, it would not keep the Principle of Fecundity from spawning contradictions. Consider the two possibilities 'there are talking donkeys' and 'there are no talking donkeys'. These are both first-order, so our restricted principle says they both obtain. But if they both obtain, do we not have a contradiction on our hands?

This brings us to the second strategy, which is to relativize the notion of a possibility's obtaining so that mutually incompatible possibilities can all obtain without contradiction. Nozick suggests that we think of the various possibilities as belonging to "noninteracting realms." I take it he means to ban *logical* interaction—no possible world can imply anything about what goes on outside its own boundaries in logical space. If we follow this strategy, we are supposed to be able to say that the possibilities *something exists* and *nothing exists* both obtain! ("Why is there something rather than nothing? There isn't. There's both."⁷²) For this to work, it must amount to the following idea: 'nothing exists' really means 'nothing exists *here*, in this region of logical space'. It is thereby rendered consistent with the existence of something in some *other* region of logical space. More generally, the idea seems to be that 'so-and-so happens' is always short for 'so-and-so happens in world *w*'.

The problem I see for this strategy is the following. Are worlds defined by what happens in them or not? If they are, all contingency is lost. All we can assert are propositions of the form 'so-and-so happens in world *w*', and these will be necessarily true, by definition of whatever world is in question. On the other hand, if worlds are *not* defined by what happens in them—if they are bare chunks of logical space or arenas in which things happen—then we invite a new host of why-questions: why does so-and-so happen in *this* world rather than *that*? For the entire wheel of possibilities could have been rotated through logical space. Recall Leibniz's objection to Newtonian absolute space: he complained that if space were an arena in which objects were placed, not simply an abstraction defined in terms of the relations among objects, then there would be no sufficient reason why the entire material cosmos is situated here rather than there. Similarly, if worlds are not defined in terms of what goes on in them, there can be no sufficient reason why certain things happen in this world rather than that one. So, the relativization strategy seems to leave us with Bennett's dilemma: either all truths are necessary, or there is at least one brute fact.

I come now to the third strategy, which is the one Nozick favors. He undertakes to restrict the Principle of Fecundity to possibilities of a certain delimited sort in such fashion that the principle will no longer refute itself, yet will still explain itself by way of self-subsumption. Since the restricted principle is to be self-subsuming, he suggests that 'self-subsuming' should help to demarcate the sort itself. In that case, the desired Principle of Limited Fecundity would take the following form:

(LF) All self-subsuming possibilities of sort S are realized.⁷³

LF, unlike the original Principle of Fecundity, does not subsume its own negation and therefore does not refute itself.⁷⁴ But does it subsume itself? Nozick is content to point out that either answer we give to this question is consistent. I believe the situation is rather more troublesome than this. LF is self-subsuming iff it has the property specified in its antecedent—that is, only if it has the property of being self-subsuming. There seems to be nothing to determine either that it subsumes itself or that it does not. In such a case, I think we should conclude that the matter is simply indeterminate.

Let us set that misgiving aside, however, and assume that LF does subsume itself. I maintain that under that supposition LF would not be true but instead either false or without any truth value at all. It would be false if there were self-subsuming principles of sort S other than LF that were false. Suppose, however, that there were no other self-subsuming principles of sort S that were false. Could we then declare LF to be true? I say no, since our declaration would be groundless: there would be nothing to make LF false, but nothing to make it true, either. An example will illustrate the situation.

Suppose you walk into a classroom and see written on a blackboard the sentence S: 'every sentence now appearing on this board is true'. Elsewhere on the board there appear only true sentences—' $2 + 3 = 5$ ' and the like. So far, so good, but is S true? It depends—on whether it is true! The truth of S depends on its own prior truth in much the same way as does that of the so-called "truth-teller" sentence, 'this sentence is true'. Some philosophers are willing to declare the latter sentence true, but my intuition tells me that such sentences are lacking in truth value altogether. The reason is that truth-attributing facts must supervene on (or be determined by) facts that do not involve truth. From this it follows that whenever the truth-free facts do not determine a truth value for a given sentence, we are left with a truth-value gap. To illustrate, the fact that the sentence 'snow is white' is true is determined by its having the meaning it does together with snow's being white—facts that do not themselves involve truth. But whether our sentence S is true is not determined by any truth-free facts, so by the supervenience principle it has no truth value at all.⁷⁵

To return to Nozick, it should be clear that his Principle of Limited Fecundity, if self-subsuming as desired, has the same status as the sentence 'all sentences now appearing on this board are true'. Circumstances could conspire to make it false, but nothing could happen to make it true: in the best-case scenario, it would be without truth value. So, Nozick's favored ultimate explanatory principle, if genuinely self-subsuming, is not true, and if it is not true, it cannot serve as an explanation of itself or anything else.

The prospects for *explaining everything* now look dark indeed. We are left with Bennett's alternatives: either all truths are necessary, or there is at least one brute fact. The "terrible sublimity" of this situation is well brought out in the following passage from Kant:

We cannot put aside, and yet also cannot endure, the thought that a being that we represent to ourselves as supreme amongst all possible be-

ings should, as it were, say to itself: 'I am from eternity to eternity, and outside me there is nothing save what is through my will; *but whence then am I?*' (A613/B641)

Be it the existence of the primordial being or the disposition of its will, it appears that there is bound to be at least one brute fact.