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Rationalism

We've been talking about empiricism so far. We're going to talk a little bit about rationalism in this chapter. And one of the best examples of rationalism is Anselm. You might remember that he lived about 1100. That was toward the end of his life. You'll notice in the book he died in 1109. So just remember he lived mostly in the 11th century. I'm not anxious that you memorize the dates exactly, but it is good to know at least what century he lived in. And toward the end of his life he became archbishop of Canterbury. And he tried to improve on Augustine. And incidentally, St. Augustine is in Florida. St. Augustine is in heaven. And I have a grandson named *Augustine*. *Augustine* not *Augustine*.

Well Anselm tried to improve upon Augustine. This is not dishonorable nor disrespectful. Anselm deliberately adopted Augustine's motto, *credo ut intelligam*. But the one person who seemed to know a little Latin has disappeared. Do any of you know what happened to her. Yes.

Audience: The only thing I know is that she comes in ??? students ??? sometimes she may have problems.

But she has been absent two or three times in a row.

Audience: She could be on her way.

I hope so. But she's missed two or three times. On whom am I going to depend for Latin if she doesn't come?

Audience: ???

On you? Anselm deliberately adopted Augustine's motto, *credo ut intelligam*. Now *credo* is what do you call it? Oh it's a verb, yeah. *Intelligam* is the subjunctive mood. And *credo* is the indicative mood. *Ut* takes the subjunctive. And you ought to be able to read it even if you don't know any Latin because you know what a creed is. And you can see intelligence in the last verb. So it means "I believe in order to understand." Oh well it's translated right here in the next phrase isn't it. Look how...

Audience: ???

I'm just too considerate of the students. The doctrines of Christianity are revealed in Scripture and accepted as true by faith. Faith saves. If salvation depended on an understanding of philosophy few would ever get to heaven. Nevertheless, understanding is a laudable aim. And one increases in Christian virtue by increasing his understanding. You realize do you that the

Scripture says everything that has to do with godliness comes through knowledge. You realize that. You can't be godly or spiritual unless you have knowledge and the more knowledge you have the more spiritual you'll be. Every blessing of God comes through knowledge. Now what verse am I quoting? Am I not quoting an apostle? A book in the New Testament. One of the Epistles. Oh I guess maybe you haven't read the New Testament. No.

Audience: ???

Hmm?

Audience: What do you think Gordon-Conwell is?

I don't know what Gordon-Conwell is. Well you look up some of the epistles and see where it says all piety, every degree of sanctification depends on one's knowledge. Yes, that's right. Which Peter? There are two of them you know. Well, you've made a good guess anyway. It is Peter. The rest of you can look up which Peter. Second Peter. That's the way to do it. Then only you have to remember what verse.

One increases in his Christian virtue by increasing in his understanding. But unless God first gives the revelation and man first believes it, there would be nothing to understand. Therefore I believe in order to understand.

One thing among others that Anselm wanted to understand better than Augustine did was the existence of God. I've told you what I think about the word existence, but when I'm giving the history of philosophy I have to say what these people said, and so I use their words. One of his concerns was the existence of God. To this end he wrote out in his monologium a traditional argument based on the platonic method of hypostatizing goodness, justice, and other eternal ideas. But he was not satisfied. He wanted something clearer and more simple. By a stroke of genius, not any the less so because of its Augustinian inspiration, by a stroke of genius he hit upon the ontological argument.

Here it is in full. Now I don't want to read the whole thing to you, but maybe I think I can skip the first paragraph just to save a minute or two. Ah, maybe I better read that too. You ought to read it once or twice in your life. And you also ought to read the cosmological argument once or twice in your life. You will find the cosmological argument in the 8th book of Aristotle's physics. You may have noticed in your reading of Christian material that many theologians will refer to the cosmological argument but they never tell you what it is. That is, they never give the argument. So once in your life you ought to read Aristotle's Physics book 8. I tell you for the rest of your life you'll remember you read it even if you don't remember anything there you read. When you read it you'll understand why I say you'll never forget the experience. Very painful.

Here is the cosmological argument. Ontological. Yeah, yeah. I hope you will correct me when I make slips of the tongue because it is confusing. This is Anselm's ontological argument. Its in the form of a prayer.

And so, Lord, do thou, who dost give understanding to faith, give me, so far as thou knowest it to be profitable, to understand that thou art as we believe; and that thou art that which we believe. And, indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. I've read discussions of the ontological argument that misquote Anselm and hence make great blunders in criticizing him. Here is his definition of God Thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Or is there no such nature, since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God? But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak—a being than which nothing greater can be conceived—understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist.

For, it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists. When a painter first conceives of what he will afterwards perform and hang up in the library entranceway, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand it to be, because he has not yet performed it. But after he has made the painting, he both has it in his understanding, and he understands that it exists, because he has made it.

Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in his understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And assuredly, now we get to some implications, assuredly whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.

Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.

And assuredly, well it assuredly exists so truly that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist. And this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence if that than which nothing greater can be conceived can be conceived not to exist it is not that than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is then so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist. And this being thou art oh Lord our God. So truly therefore dost thou exist oh Lord my God that thou canst not be conceived not to exist and rightly. For if a mind could conceive for a being better than thee the creature would rise above the creator and this is most absurd. And indeed whatever else there is except thee alone can be conceived not to exist. To thee alone therefore it belongs to exist more truly than all other beings. And hence in a higher degree than all others. For whatever else exists does not exist so truly and in a less degree it belongs to it to exist.

Why then has the fool said in his heart there is no God since it is so evident to a rational mind that thou dost exist in the higher degree possible. Why, except he is dumb and a fool.

Descartes reduced this page and a half to three lines. God by definition is the being who possesses all perfections. Existence is a perfection. Therefore God exists.

Spinoza enlarged the argument, enlarged Descartes argument somewhat and made it theorem 13 was it? Theorem 13 of book 1 of his *Ethica Ordine Geometrico Demonstrata*. You can translate that if you wish. But you can call the book Spinoza's ethics and you'll get by with it.

A monk Gaunilo, Anselm's contemporary, attacked his ontological argument. More recently Kant supposedly demolished it. Maybe Hegel reinstated something like it, but not Hegel is dead. He sorta died around well early this century. He didn't continue living. Certainly not after the first world war. See G. E. Moore annihilated Hegel about was it 1893 or somewhere along in there. Shot him dead and buried his corpse in England or something like that. So Hegel is now dead.

The first thing then is to consider Kant's critique. It is very intricate and needs close attention. That's why I'm reading it even though I hope you have already read it.

On an earlier page, Kant had defined an idea as a necessary conception of reason to which no corresponding object can be discovered in the world of sense. That's page b383. When he comes to the impossibility of an ontological proof on page b629 he begins, "the conception of an absolutely necessary being is a mere idea the objective reality of which is far from being established by the mere fact that it is a need of reason." That an idea has no corresponding object in the world of sense is not inimical to the existence of God for God is not a sensory object. But this, as Kant intended, highlights the problem of how to prove the objective reality of a non-sensuous object. For Kant sensation was enough to prove the existence of a chair or a rock, but what does the same for God? Had Anselm used Kantian terminology he might have affirmed that a necessary concept of reason, since necessary, must have an object.

But maybe he would not so affirm. The laws of logic are necessities of reason, but they are rules for the conducting of argumentation. They are not external objects. The idea of God then as well might then be a necessary concept without having a corresponding object. In fact this is just what Kant believes. The idea of God is a heuristic principle. Anybody know what heuristic means? Nobody?

Audience: ???? guiding principle ???

Well ... it is a guiding principle. It means a principle of discovery. I'm glad you have studied Greek. Apparently nobody else in the class has ever studied Greek. Don't you remember dear old what's-his-name who jumped out of the bathtub and said Eureka! Well that's heuristic. Maybe none of you know what bathtubs are. They belong to a prior generation do they. Well anyhow. Eureka. Now what is the first form of that verb? Eurisko, certainly. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. That's painful. Only one and a half students in the class knows any Greek. Terrible.

The idea of God is a heuristic principle. A principle by which we conduct investigations particularly investigations into morality. But this is far from establishing the objective reality of a

corresponding entity. As Kant says, this idea serves merely to indicate a certain unattainable perfection and limits the operations of the understanding rather than extend its sphere by the presentation of new objects. This thought is preserved in a sorta a pun, not a pun but a little jingle or something. Its not a quotation from Kant. But I forget who said it first. It might have been, it was one of the minor philosophers who came after Kant, and of course I can't remember his name offhand. At any rate, he said, it is the philosopher who wrote the book of the title Alsop, as if. That's the title of his book in which he says this. What was his name? I'll remember it next week sometime. But he said this, "we cannot know there is a God, but we must act as if there be one." That's heuristic, the idea of God as a heuristic principle. A heuristic or methodological principle, Kant's belief in this does not follow validly from the thesis that necessary concepts may correspond to no objective reality. The question still remains open. And Kant proceeds to his demolition of the ontological argument.

Kant accuses the rationalists in their talk about a necessary being of never stopping to inquire how it is possible even to think of such a being, not to mention proving its existence. And you will see that this criticism applies very strictly to Descartes in his 5th meditation. But to quote Kant, "a verbal definition of a concept is certainly easy enough. It is something, the non-existence of which is impossible. But, continues Kant, this definition does not throw any light on the conditions which make it impossible to cogitate the non-existence of anything." Of course it is easy to state a condition which makes it impossible to cogitate the existence of something. If a definition is self-contradictory, there can be no corresponding object. Anselm in fact said this. But Kant's question concerns the condition that might make it impossible to cogitate the non-existence of something. What condition would prevent one from thinking God does not exist? Toward the end of his argument, Anselm contended that God so truly exists that he cannot be conceived not to exist. The reason given was: if a mind could conceive of a being better than thee, as is easily done if thee is a non-existent object, the creator would rise above the creator and this is most absurd. As expressed, this is not a very clear reason. Doubtless, it means that the statement of the fool. There is no god is self-contradictory and therefore false.

Presumably Kant knew what Anselm had said, though one modern writer thinks that Kant had never read Anselm. And in that knowledge obviously believed that his own stricture was applicable. To wit, no one can state a condition which makes it impossible to cogitate the non-existence of anything. He thought it was applicable, no doubt, because the rationalists, when pressed to explain necessity, cited geometrical examples. A triangle, he said, necessarily has three angles. To say that a three-angled figure has only two angles is self-contradictory. The trouble with this Kant points out lies in the fact that the example is an example of a necessary judgment. What is needed is an explanation of a necessary thing. The geometrical example does not prove that three angles necessarily exist. It proves only that if a triangle exists, three angles necessarily exist in it. But the ontological argument claims to prove not the necessity of a proposition but the existence of an object. Kant presses the point, "if in identical judgment I annihilate the predicate in thought and retain the subject the result is a contradiction, and hence I say the former belongs necessarily to the latter." But if I suppress both subject and predicate in thought no contradiction arises, for there remains nothing at all. And therefore no means of forming a contradiction.

Audience: ???

Well, remove yes. You can put it crudely if you want, you can write on a sheet of paper, a triangle has three angles. Well, if you rub out the subject, the word three angles, or if you rub out the either one, you have no proposition left. There is no contradiction there. If you assert there is a triangle and deny the contradiction, beg your pardon, if you assert there is a triangle and deny the predicate three angles, you have contradicted yourself. But if you erase all the sentence, erase both triangle and three angles, there is no contradiction left on the paper because you've rubbed everything off. A necessary proposition is easily understood, but the ontological argument isn't aimed at a necessary proposition. It is aimed at a necessary object, a necessary thing. And geometrical examples are therefore irrelevant as a support for the ontological argument because geometrical examples only deal with the necessity of a proposition. That is, with the necessity that a predicate belongs to a subject. But if you erase a subject the predicate goes along with it and no contradiction is possible. Well, read it over six times and then put the book under your pillow at night and sleep on it. There is a slight lack of finesse here. Maybe it is only verbal carelessness. However, the example of the triangle does not perfectly fit.

The example is "a triangle has three angles." The main matter is "God has existence." Annihilate the three angles in thought and the triangle vanishes automatically. But then Kant does not say "annihilate God and then existence vanishes automatically." What he actually said was "annihilate God's existence and God vanishes." Is this only a verbal slip? He could have said, "annihilate God in thought and his existence disappears at the same time." If this is what Kant really meant then there is another question that goes beyond verbal slips. Is it possible to annihilate God in thought? What does it mean to annihilate something in thought? Does it mean merely not to think about it? Refusing to think surely is a prescription for avoiding self-contradiction. But what bearing such a refusal has to do on God or even on angles is hard to say. Maybe then annihilation means denial of existence. If I positively deny that there are any triangles, it is not absurd to deny triangularity. If now I positively deny that God exists it is not absurd to deny his existence. But this does not fit the triangle example. With respect to triangles, Kant has insisted that the denial of the subject eliminates the predicate. But when Kant turns to the main matter and demands "deny God exists," he asks us to deny, not the subject as in the triangle example, but the predicate. Thus his argument does not hang together. If now Kant retreats to the notion of "not thinking God" there's a further consideration. Though it seems true that one can think, can think botany for example, without thinking angles, it is not so clear that one cannot think God.

A rationalist might well say, and some of them have said, that if a thinker thinks anything he must think God. Augustine, recall, showed not only that truth was possible, he showed that truth is inevitable and inescapable. If we think at all we think the laws of logic. Truth is inherent or innate in the mind, but God is truth. Therefore it is impossible to annihilate God in thought. He exists so truly that he cannot even be conceived not to exist. Kant was aware of this. He specifically referred to it. Here is what he wrote, you find yourselves compelled to declare there are certain subjects that cannot be annihilated in thought. But this is nothing more than saying there exists subjects which are absolutely necessary. The very hypothesis which you are called on to establish.

Now, where does this leave us now? The argument back and forward has lived up to its reputation of being extremely complicated and subtle. It seems to be a subject particularly inappropriate for a student who has had little or no philosophy. Yet how can a philosophy of religion avoid discussing the existence of God? Atheism may in a sense be called a religion, but colloquially and in common opinion if there be no God there can be no religion. The student is into it now. Turning back would be cowardice or laziness. He must therefore suffer on. Perhaps, just perhaps it will get easier.

Where then does the argument pro and con lead us? There are three things Kant cannot claim to have done. First, it may be true to say that the assertion “there are certain things that cannot be annihilated in thought” is equivalent to the proposition “there exists subjects which are absolutely necessary.” But if the rationalist is called upon to substantiate this assertion, then Kant should also make clear what he means by annihilating something in thought and show that God can be so annihilated. This situation is pretty much of a draw. In fact Kant has a little the worse of it. For Augustine and Anselm at least tried to substantiate their view, but Kant has done nothing to show how God can be annihilated in thought. In the second place he cannot claim to have disproved the existence of God. In fact he himself insists that no one can disprove God’s existence. For, if as he believes, all the arguments for God’s existence are invalid, it still might be true that God exists. But in the third place at this point he can’t legitimately claim that he has disproved the ontological argument. At most he has shown that the argument is incomplete. He might say that the argument has not even begun. He might say Anselm and Spinoza use as a premise the proposition they wish to establish as a conclusion. But in reply Augustine would surely say the argument is complete for we have shown that it is necessary to think God.

Kant still has two points to make. Two related points. Maybe just one point. Or at least the previous point over again. In the early pages of *A Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant distinguished between analytic and synthetic judgments. Analytic judgements are those whose predicates are logically contained in their subjects. For example, when I say, “all bodies are extended,” this is an analytical judgment. For I need not go beyond the conception of body in order to find extension connected with it. I need merely analyze the conception. And then Kant says some other things too. The statement “a body has weight,” is not an analytic judgment because there can be bodies that have no weight. But you can’t have a body that has no extension. That’s part of the definition and therefore it is an analytic judgment, whereas the statement “bodies have weight” is a synthetic judgement which is sometimes false.

Synthetic judgments are augmentative. They are not conceptually contained in the subject. But adds additional information, the predicate adds additional information about the subject. If I say the desk is brown, the judgment is synthetic because no analysis of the meaning of the term desk will require this desk to be brown. Kant now asks, and here we get I guess to the most important part of the argument, so take a deep breath and try to hang on. Is the judgment “God exists” analytic or synthetic? If it is analytic the predicate adds nothing to the concept of the subject. But then the concept in your mind is identical with the thing itself. And you have proved only the existence of your concept. But if you confess, and I’m this is a quotation of course, if you

confess as every reasonable person must that every existential proposition is synthetical, how can it be maintained that the predicate of existence cannot be denied without contradiction? A property which is characteristic of analytical propositions only.

You better read that paragraph over 6 or 8 times, but I'll go on. This will count for once. The second point, that is, the same one over again, being is not a real predicate. That is a conception of something that is added to the conception of some other thing. Logically it is merely the copula of the judgment which I tried to maintain in the previous class hour, did I, was it the discussion I had yesterday or something. Being is not a real predicate. That is it is not a conception of something which is added to the conception of some other thing. Logically it is merely the copula of a judgment.

The proposition "God is omnipotent" contains two conceptions. The word "is" is no additional predicate. If I take the subject God and say "God is" or "there is a God" I add no new predicate to the conception of God. I merely affirm the existence of the subject with all its predicates. I posit the object in relation to my conception.

Then Kant continues with his famous illustration of \$100 and their relation to his bank account. And this next paragraph is all quote. "Thus the real contains, I beg your pardon, thus the real contains no more than the possible. A hundred real dollars contain no more than a hundred possible dollars. For as the latter indicates the conception and the former the object on the supposition that the content of the former was greater than that of the latter, my conception would not be an expression of the whole object. And consequently would be an inadequate conception of it."

You get the sense of that sentence? If my conception of a hundred dollars in any way differed from the characteristics of a hundred dollars, I would not have the conception of a hundred dollars. If I have the conception of the hundred dollars then my conception involves all the characteristics of the hundred dollars in the bank. Let me read this paragraph which is the crucial paragraph in Kant's refutation of the ontological argument. Now we've been talking most this morning in this discussion about the cosmological argument, that's empiricism. But there have been people, not only Anselm, but even into modern times who hold to the ontological argument. For instance, W. G. T. Shedd rejected all the empirical arguments and if you will read his dogmatic theology you will see that he bases belief in God on the ontological argument.

Well, let's see what Kant said against the ontological argument. If you don't like what Kant said, alright, but you must give your reasons. But let's see what Kant said. "The real contains no more than the possible. A hundred real dollars contain no more than a hundred possible dollars." And this is the reason for saying that. "For as the latter indicate the conception, and the former the object," now let me interrupt, I'm trying to give you here Kant's position. I'm not stating my own position. In fact I don't make any distinction between conception and, I don't even admit that there is such a thing as a conception. But Kant did, and so I use, I try to give you Kant's argument. The latter indicate the conception and the former the object. On the supposition that the content of the former was greater than that of the former, my conception would not be an expression of the whole object. That is, if your conception is a proper conception of the object,

your conception must contain all the attribute the object has, because if there, if your concept misses one or two of those characteristics, you don't have the concept of the object. Well that is perfectly obvious it seems to me.

It would be an inadequate conception. But, this is where people get confused, in reckoning my wealth there may be said to be more in a hundred real dollars than in a hundred possible dollars. That is, in the mere conception of them. For, the real objects, the dollars, is not analytically contained in my conception, which is merely a determination of my mental state. Although this object of reality, this existence apart from my conception does not in the least degree increase the aforesaid hundred dollars.

That's a quotation. And you read it two or three times and if you want to see the context out of which it is taken you'll find it in edition B page 627.

Two of Kant's rather enthusiastic commentators wrote, "The popularity of Kant's criticism of this argument, Hegel has remarked, results probably from his homely illustration of the one hundred dollars."

No doubt this homely, this very homely illustration stands out like an oasis in an 884 page desert of the most crabbed literary style on record. Nevertheless, to base the reputation of a great philosopher on an illustration is rather hard on Kant. The two commentators in spite of their admiration for Kant continue, "Everyone can see that in this, in the case of the dollars, you cannot deduce the being from the mere notion." But it is important to remember that the illustration is not quite apt. The very nature of a finite object is expressed by saying that its being in time and space is discrepant from its notion. God on the contrary, ought to be only what can be thought to be existing. His notion involves being. It is this unity of the notion and being that constitutes the notion of God. What Kant has shown is that on the supposition that sensibility is different in source from understanding, you cannot infer existence in space and time from a mere concept. But Hegel saw that this supposed difference in source was a fiction. Sensibility as well as understanding is but a phase of thought and so Kant's laborious argumentation here is not worth much.

Now you may not quite follow that the first time you read it but you should remember that Hegel rejected Kant's philosophy. You see Kant insisted that you did get something from sensation. He called it *das gegebene*. Now of course you're unconscious of it, but something given is poured into your mind and your mind has a form and hence what is given takes the form of the mind. And so you never know what is given. But you have to have the given in order to know anything. Now Hegel, with I think very conclusive arguments, shows that nothing can be given. And hence he doesn't exactly go back to Descartes' form of rationalism but he invents a conceptual form of rationalism as distinct from Descartes' propositional rationalism.

Now if you don't understand what I'm saying, that's not surprising. But I'm telling you, you want to hear it the first time, you want to study it later on maybe. But there always has to, unless you don't care for the subject at all, there has to be a first time that you hear something. And the first time you may not understand too well. Yes.

Question: Would Kant say that the concept of God is, I'm really bad at words...

It is not a concept. The proposition, God exists, he says must be synthetic. You see, for Kant, God is not a concept, it is an idea. And an idea is quite distinct from a concept in Kant's philosophy. Never confuse an idea with a concept if you're talking about Kant. Now if you're talking about Aristotle I suppose you could use either word indiscriminately

Question: Anselm and probably yourself would say that "God exists" is an analytic.

No, I wouldn't. Anselm would say it is analytic, yes. I would say its nonsense. Because "existence" has no meaning. A predicate that attaches to everything doesn't mean anything. If I say something 6 or 7 or 17 times over maybe you will sorta ??? concept that is not a concept at all.

Well we have come to the beginning of Gaunilo. Now Gaunilo is the forerunner of Anselm and Gaunilo rejects the ontological argument and Anselm will reply to him. And we will consider that tomorrow. Not tomorrow, next time whenever it is. I think today is Wednesday, is it. I certainly don't know that it is Wednesday, but I'm going to, since you tell me, I'm going to assume you said the truth and act on it, though I might be quite mistaken.