NECESSITY AND GOD

I

While orthodox believers *intend* to be asserting a fact when they say 'There is a God', 'God exists', 'God does in reality exist', or 'Something and one thing only is omniscient, omnipotent and infinitely good', they seem not to be able to say what would or could, even in principle, count toward establishing either the truth or the falsity of such statements. Though 'God' and 'There is a God' are part of the corpus of English in a way 'The central meaning process is difficult to measure' or 'The ground of all-and-all cannot transmute itself into Being-for-itself' are not, yet for all that, such God-talk is in a certain important respect problematic.

It should, however, surely be asked: who is the philosopher to set up such entrance requirements—entrance requirements far more stringent than those a linguist would use—for determining when a given mark is a genuine word or a string of words is an intelligible sentence? Yet, believers claim that it is a fact that God exists, though it seems to be logically impossible to find out *what* this fact is. In this way 'God' is like 'Being itself', 'The Absolute' and 'The Ground-of-all-in-ali'.

Given these conflicting considerations and given the failure of Wittgensteinian Fideism, it may be worthwhile to leave the sturdy ground of the plain man and see if some theological concepts of ancient vintage will help beef up the claim that God-talk is intelligible. Here I want to study some claims that God is a Necessary Being. I want to examine the persistent and tantalizing claim that somehow God is a *logically* necessary being (a being whose non-existence is logically inconceivable) and that 'God exists' and 'There is a God' is a logically necessary truth or at least a proposition whose truth can be known *a priori*.

On the one hand, Hartshorne and Malcolm, following Anselm, claim that the fool contradicts himself when he says that there is no God and, on the other, J. J. C. Smart and J. N. Findlay, following Hume, contend that the concept of a logically necessary being, or of a 'logical-

ly necessary fact', or of a factual statement which is logically true, is a contradiction in terms.[1] Here questions concerning the intelligibility of God-talk and questions concerning whether God exists come together, for if Anselm is right, to show that 'God exists' is *intelligible*, is to show that God does exist, and if Smart and Findlay are right 'There is a God' is, for a religiously adequate concept of God, a contradiction.

Who is right here? Perhaps (as I believe) both sides are wrong. The best way to look into this matter is to consider the following two questions:

1. Should God be conceived of as a *logically* necessary being? Is the concept of a logically necessary being intelligible or free from absurdity?
2. Are there existential statements that are logically necessary or *a priori* or necessarily true?

Malcolm, Hughes and Hartshorne think that the Hume-Kant answer to 2) is a mere dogma. Is it? I do not think so. But Malcolm is surely right in saying we should argue out this Humean thesis against cases. Furthermore are we, as Findlay, Malcolm and Hartshorne think we are, pushed, when we honestly and carefully think of God, to take his existence to be either logically necessary or impossible?

II

Findlay's argument here is crucial. It starts, as Hughes and others aver, with a sensitive elucidation of what constitutes the proper object of a religious reverence. Findlay goes on to claim that *given* this attitude of reverence and *given* a propensity to reason, a reflective religious man is inescapably driven to conceive of God as a logically necessary being.

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[1] Charles Hartshorne, *The Logic of Perfection* (LaSalle, Illinois: Open Court Pub. Co., 1962); Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments." *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. LXIX (1960); J. N. Findlay, "Can God's Existence be Disproved?" and J. J. C. Smart, "The Existence of God," both in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, ed. by Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: Macmillan, 1955). See also the comments on Findlay's essay by Hughes and Rainer in the same volume.

Let us follow out Findlay's subtle analysis. Findlay remarks:

> Religious people have, in fact, come to acquiesce in the total
> absence of any cogent proofs of the Being they believe in: they
> even find it positively satisfying that something so far surpassing
> clear conception should also surpass the possibility of demonstra-
> tion. And non-religious people willingly mitigate their rejection
> with a tinge of agnosticism: they don't so much deny the existence
> of a God, as the existence of good reasons for believing in him.
> We shall, however, maintain in this essay that there isn't room,
> in the case we are examining, for all these attitudes of tentative
> surmise and doubt. For we shall try to show that the Divine
> Existence can only be conceived, in a religiously satisfactory
> manner, if we also conceive it as something inescapable and
> necessary, whether for thought or reality. From which it follows
> that our modern denial of necessity or rational evidence for such
> an existence amounts to a demonstration that there cannot be a
> God.[2]

Findlay thus attempts to show that if we conceive of God in a reli-
giously adequate way, we will come to see that such a concept of
God is self-contradictory. This is not, Findlay hastens to add, to say
that the various gods of idolatry and mythology are self-contradictory
conceptions or that other anthropomorphic conceptions of God are
self-contradictory conceptions, but that they are not *adequate* objects
of religious attitudes. Moreover, there are many uses of the word 'God'
which are so aseptic that they are clearly compatible with atheism.
We must pin down a fully developed theistic conception of God by
trying to discover what would count as an 'adequate object of a reli-
gious attitude'.

There are, Findlay argues, a number of descriptive phrases which
taken together draw a rough boundary around the attitudes in ques-
tion. It is important to note that these attitudes are not indifferently
evoked in any setting. There is a range of situations in which they
normally and most readily occur. This is true of any attitude-expres-
sing word. The words 'angry', 'anxious', 'fearful', and the like have
incorporated into their very *use* or *meaning* "a reference to the sorts
of thing or situation to which these attitudes are the normal or ap-

[2] J. N. Findlay, *op. cit.,* pp. 47-48.

propriate response." [3] Fear (for example) is an attitude which is readily evoked only in certain situations. That is, it is appropriately evoked in situations in which there is menace or potential injury. If I said 'I'm afraid but I know there is nothing dangerous about the situation', I would not be saying something that was absurd; but if I uttered that sentence and said 'and my attitude is perfectly appropriate, perfectly justified', I would be saying something absurd. Similar things can and should be said for anger. We cannot without a confusing linguistic deviation say that *any* object of any attitude is an *appropriate* object of that attitude. A simple examination of English usage or some other natural language will make it apparent that our attitudes have certain standard objects. It is by reference to them that we determine whether our attitudes are or are not appropriate or normal.

In trying in a given case to determine which attitude is appropriate, we can ask whether ordinary, reasonably knowledgeable and sane native speakers would in such and such circumstances say that such and such attitudes are justified or appropriate. All that "philosophy achieves in this regard is merely to push further, and develop into more considered and consistent forms the implications of such ordinary ways of speaking." [4] What can and should be inquired into is "whether an attitude would still seem justified, and its object appropriate, after we had reflected long and carefully on a certain matter, and looked at it from every wonted and unwonted angle." [5]

This is just what Findlay does for 'a religious attitude'. What would count as a fully adequate object of a religious attitude? What would it be like? By approaching it in this way we can see what a God adequate for religious purposes would come to.

Findlay, rather like Rudolf Otto, says that a religious attitude is one in which we will in appropriate circumstances tend to abase ourselves before some object, "to defer to it wholly, to devote ourselves to it with unquestioning enthusiasm, to bend the knee before it, whether literally or metaphorically." [6] The God of a believer is something toward which the believer has an attitude of total commitment, abasement, deference and utter devotion. God, by definition, is *worthy* of worship. That is to say, the appellation 'God' would not be used un-

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[3] *Ibid.*, p. 49.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] *Ibid.*

less it referred to what was taken to be *worthy* of worship and utter devotion. It is analytic to say 'A religious attitude is a worshipful and devout attitude' when one is talking about a Jewish-Christian-Moslem religious attitude. (There is no worship in Theravada Buddhism.)

What are the objects of such attitudes? Religious attitudes, Findlay points out, presume *superiority* in their objects. We feel as if we are nothing before the object of such an attitude. But "such an attitude can only be fitting where the object worshipped and reverenced exceeds us very, very vastly: in power, wisdom or other valued qualities." [7] (Recall Job and Job's reactions when God speaks to him out of the whirlwind.)

Consider some actual objects of religious attitudes. People have worshipped many things. They have worshipped stones, phalli and bulls, but—and this is central—not *as* stones, phalli or bulls. When it is realized that these things do not have an indwelling, mysterious power, religious attitudes toward stones, phalli or bulls no longer seem appropriate. We worship what we believe to have "surpassing greatness in some object." But if we continue to reflect we will say—as many religious people have—that an adequate object to such an attitude could not be limited in any manner. It would be "wholly anomolous to worship anything limited in any thinkable manner." All limited superiorities have the taint of relativity. Being dwarfed by mightier superiorities "they lose their claim upon our worshipful attitudes." [8] That to which we turn in awe, reverence, devotion and utter debasement must be thought to have "an unsurpassable supremacy along all avenues." It must somehow be all-comprehensive and totally unlimited. Everything else that exists must be dependent on such an object of reverence.

Reflecting on what would be an adequate object of an attitude of worship and reverence, we are irresistably led to the paradoxical claim that it cannot be anything which merely happens to exist. As Findlay puts it himself:

> The true object of religious reverence must not be one, merely, to which no *actual* independent realities stand opposed: it must be one to which such opposition is totally *inconceivable*. God

[7] *Ibid.*
[8] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

mustn't merely cover the territory of the actual, but also, with equal comprehensiveness, the territory of the possible. And not only must the existence of *other* things be unthinkable without him, but his own non-existence must be wholly unthinkable in any circumstances. There must, in short, be no conceivable alternative to an existence properly termed 'divine': God must be wholly inescapable, as we remarked previously, whether for thought or reality. And so we are led on insensibly to the barely intelligible notion of a Being in whom Essence and Existence lose their separateness. And all that the great medieval thinkers really did was to carry such a development to its logical limit.[9]

In turning to God, we turn to that to which we, if we are religious, will utterly abandon ourselves. The conditions we associate with the word 'God', if our religious attitude is appropriate, are conditions such as: being *all* wise, *all* good, *all* powerful, etc., etc. God by definition must possess all these perfections to a *superlative* degree. Of anything of which we could appropriately say 'My Lord and my God', we would withdraw that appellation upon the discovery of any imperfection at all.

We should also note that God must *not* simply possess these features, as a mere matter of fact, for then they wouldn't be *inalienably* His own. We would find it idolatrous to worship a being who just happened to have these qualities while something else might have had them. We are led, Findlay argues, "irresistably, by the demands inherent in religious reverence, to hold that an adequate object of our worship must possess its various qualities *in some necessary manner.*"[10]

A god that can satisfy religious needs and claims must be in every way inescapable. Such a god is a God "whose existence and whose possession of certain excellences we cannot possibly conceive away."[11]

To conceive of God thus, Findlay argues, is to conceive of an adequate *object* of a religious attitude. With this much ground cleared, Findlay springs his trap and comes up with his *ontological disproof* of the existence of God. He says that it is plain that these very requirements for an adequate object of a religious attitude entail "for all

[9] *Ibid.,* p. 52.
[10] *Ibid.,* p. 55.
[11] *Ibid.*

who share a contemporary outlook...not only that there isn't a God, but that Divine Existence is either senseless or impossible." [12]

Findlay makes it perfectly clear in his reply to criticisms by Hughes and Rainer that in speaking of a "contemporary outlook" he is not limiting this to those who would deny that there are synthetic *a priori* statements and claim that all necessary propositions are analytic. Even if we take a Kantian position and admit *synthetic a priori* statements, Findlay's claim still has force. His claim is that Divine existence is an existence whose "non-existence is inconceivable." No other God could be religiously adequate. Divine existence is either impossible or logically necessary. If God exists his existence is *logically* necessary. But such a conception is self-contradictory for those people who agree with Kant that "it couldn't be *necessary* that there should ever be anything of any description whatever." On such grounds it is obviously self-contradictory to claim that there is an X whose non-existence is inconceivable. The very logical requirement for the proper use of 'God', namely that of a Being whose very "*existence* and whose possession of certain excellences we cannot possibly conceive away," is self-contradictory. Anselm's argument in reality entails not that God must exist but that 'There is a God' is self-contradictory. Even if we allow existence to be a property, we still—on Kantian premises—could only say "hypothetically that if something of a certain sort existed, then it would exist necessarily, but not, categorically, that it actually existed." [10]

Findlay says that if one is 1) willing to accept his account of an *adequate* object of a religious attitude, an account which involves the contention that God must either exist necessarily or not at all, and 2) if one accepts Kant's view that (in the same sense of 'necessary') there are not any logically necessary facts of existence, then one is logically committed to the assertion that there can be no God. Relative to such premises we have proven—demonstrated—the non-existence of God.

Findlay makes a familiar point—a point Ryle, Waismann and Lazerowitz have stressed—that this argument, as any argument, can at a certain cost be evaded. He points out:

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 54.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 56.

...there can be nothing really 'clinching' in philosophy: 'proofs'
and 'disproofs' hold only for those who adopt certain premises,
who are willing to follow certain rules of argument, and who use
their terms in certain definite ways. And every proof or disproof
can be readily evaded, if one questions the truth of its premises,
or the validity of its type of inference, or if one finds new senses
in which its terms may be used. And it is quite proper, and one's
logical duty, to evade an argument in this manner, if it leads to
preposterous consequences. And Hughes and Rainer are within
their rights in thinking my conclusions preposterous: only I don't
agree with them.[14]

Findlay goes on to apply this general contention to his present
argument:

I admit to the full that my argument *doesn't* hold for those who
have no desire to say that God exists in some necessary and
inescapable manner.... Nor will it hold for those who are willing
to say, with Rainer, that one might *come* to perceive the necessity
of God's existence in some higher mystical state, nor for those
who say, with Hughes and St. Thomas, that God himself can
perceive the 'necessity' of his own 'existence', though both this
'existence' and this 'necessity' are something totally different
from anything that we understand by these terms.... But my
argument holds for all those thinkers... who accept Kant's view
that there aren't any necessary facts of existence and who also
can be persuaded to hold that a God who is 'worth his salt' must
either exist necessarily (in the same sense of 'necessary') or not
at all. The force of my argument doesn't depend, moreover, on
my recent analysis of necessity in terms of tautology: it holds on
any account of the necessary that can be squared with the above
conditions.[15]

Findlay's remarks here seem to me not at all to entail or give logical
support to any relativistic, historicist or Fideist doctrines. He has
merely dramatized the fact that logic is not everything and that a
rationalism which thinks that it is, is both irrational and illogical. But
there are surely certain premises which are more reasonable to hold,
or premises which have greater utility, or premises for which there is

14 *Ibid.,* pp. 71-72.
15 *Ibid.,* p. 75.

more empirical evidence, or premises which square better with the ways we do, and conceivably can talk and think, than do their rivals. Findlay's point, I take it, is that it is more reasonable or plausible to hold both of the premises he holds than their opposites and that jointly they entail the non-existence of God. But given this type of in-conclusiveness in philosophical arguments—any philosophical ar-gument no matter how well conceived—it is certainly rational, as J. J. C. Smart powerfully argues, to turn to considerations of *plausi-bility* in assessing rival philosophical claims. The most we can hope to achieve in any important philosophical argument is to show that a given account is more plausible than any of its rivals. But often to achieve this much is to achieve something of a very considerable im-portance, e.g., suppose that we could establish that the mind/body identity theory was more plausible than any of its rivals. This would clearly be of very considerable importance. Findlay, I think, would claim that his argument for the non-existence of God fares very well looked at in this light.

However, we must not forget that reasonable men have denied both premises in trying to refute the claim that it is self-contradictory non-sense to assert the existence of a religiously adequate God. Malcolm and Hughes have denied that logically necessary existence is self-con-tradictory or in some way impossible; Penelhum and Hick have agreed that it is indeed nonsense to speak of *logically* necessary existence but have argued that it is not true that a concept of a religiously adequate object of worship commits one to a belief in a logically necessary being, though it does commit one to a belief in a necessary being. I think the Penelhum-Hick 'out' is a much more plausible alternative than the Malcolm-Hughes 'out', but I want here to examine the Malcolm-Hughes argument, for I think it raises central issues both for philosophical theology and for metaphysics generally. There is a per-sistent tendency to try to make logical considerations do more work than they can possibly do and a deep and understandable urge to try to establish certain crucial existential claims *a priori*. I want to show, once again, in the light of plausible contemporary counter-moves, that such a conception of existence is incoherent.

Perhaps there are non-tautological *logically* necessary existential statements. Perhaps certain existential statements are after all true *a priori*. It may indeed be true, as Malcolm claims, that it is a dogma, an unproved assumption of modern analytic philosophy, that no sentences of the form 'There is a so and so' or 'Such and such exists' function to assert logically necessary truths. It is Malcolm's contention that there is no reason *not* to claim that *sometimes* 'X exists' or 'There is an X' are necessary propositions whose truth can be determined independently of any empirical investigation or any simpler type of looking and seeing.

Hughes makes similar claims. It is true enough that no tautology can be existential, but, Hughes argues, we should question the claim that *all* necessary or *a priori* propositions or statements are tautologies. Hughes agrees with Findlay that 'God exists' is a necessary proposition but he stresses that it is non-tautological. In saying 'God exists' the theist must admit that, *in this special case,* his proposition is *necessary without being tautological.* The Findlay-type atheist must show, Hughes argues, that it is logically impossible for there to be a non-tautological, non-analytic necessary *existential* proposition. We have seen that while Findlay will countenance *synthetic a priori* propositions, he will not countenance *existential a priori* propositions. Thus we have here a head-on conflict.

Against Hughes' claim isn't it plain, as Hume classically argued, that for any proposition of the form 'X exists' or 'There is an X' that we can always meaningfully or intelligibly deny that X exists or that there is such an X? We can always say 'It is not the case that X exists' or 'It is false that there is an X' without contradicting ourselves. In no case is 'X exists' an *a priori* truth.

In reply to this classical Humean claim it has been argued that such a Humean position is committed to at least one of the following two unjustified and unjustifiable assumptions: 1) to say that a statement is *a priori* is to say that it is analytic, or 2) only analytic statements are *a priori*. I agree that one should not accept the first statement, for it is obviously false. But the second statement seems to me to be true. However, as we have seen, Findlay does not accept it and does not need to accept it to make his argument. He needs to maintain only the Kantian claim that there are no *a priori* existential statements.

I agree with Findlay that such a claim is enough to rule out the possibility of there being a *logically* necessary being. But to make this claim doubly clinching, I want to go on to argue that only analytic statements are *a priori*. But even if my following arguments on that topic seem in one way or another unconvincing, bear in mind that the kind of statements which might be synthetic and *a priori* are all *hypothetical* statements; they do not *categorically* assert the existence of anything. So even if my argument fails, we still have no good grounds for believing that there can be a *logically* necessary being. Only if we can come up with a convincing example of an existential *a priori* statement will Findlay be undermined in this direction.

I now return to the problem of whether only analytic statements are *a priori*. Kenny has argued against my position in the following way; on the one hand, an analytic statement is a statement the denial of which is self-contradictory, or it is a definition or a statement logically following from a definition; *a priori* statements, on the other hand, are statements expressing *a priori* truths and, as Kenny puts it, "*a priori* truths are truths which are known on logical grounds alone." [16] It is his contention that not all *a priori* statements—statements expressing *a priori* truths—are analytic. He claims that the following statements are *a priori* without being analytic: [17]

1. Nothing can be both red and green all over at the same time.
2. Temporal precedence is transitive but irreflexive.

Kenny gives no argument at all to establish that they are not analytic. Yet it seems to me that it is only because of its ambiguity that 1) might be thought *not* to be analytic. Such a sentence-type, like the sentence-type 'Tadpoles are young frogs', is sometimes used analytically and sometimes empirically. Someone might carefully look to see if down under the red, one might detect a layer of green—the red having a certain transparency; or if down under the green, one might detect a red as one sometimes sees a brown bottom through greenish water. If someone used the sentence-type 1) in that way one could tell that he was making an empirical statement. If instead he employed the

[16] Anthony Kenny, "God and Necessity," in *British Analytical Philosophy,* ed. by A. Montifiore and B. Williams (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 143. Adel Daher has effectively criticized this essay, as well as some related arguments by Plantinga in his "God and Factual Necessity," *Religious Studies,* Vol. 8, No. 1 (March, 1970).
[17] *Ibid.,* p. 143 & p. 146.

sentence-type to make a claim to which evidence is *in principle* irre-
levant and if it were also a remark which no one who understood the
conventions of the language would regard as a remark which could
be intelligibly denied, then he would be employing that sentence-type
analytically. Sentence-tokens of that sentence-type, depending on the
context, can be used in either way; sometimes they are used to make
empirical statements and sometimes analytic statements and, as Wais-
mann in effect points out, sometimes it may not be clear just which
way the user proposes to use them. The same thing can be said for
2). (The user, even when he understands the distinction just made,
may not be clear how on a given occasion he is using such a sentence.)
It is this ambiguity or, if you will, indeterminateness of 1) , that tricks
us into thinking that it (evading the differences between sentences and
statements) is an *a priori* yet non-analytic statement. But we have no
good grounds for thinking we have any *a priori* but non-analytic truths
and the Humean argument, given above, for claiming that statements
of the form 'X exists' are never *a priori* truths seems, at least, to be a
sound one.

   If a theist replies that in the special case where 'God' becomes the
value of the variable X the proposition becomes a necessary one, the
onus probandi is surely on him to show that there is something very
special about the concept of God that makes 'God exists' or 'There is
a God' necessary propositions.

   The dialectic could go on, for a theist can reply 'Well, what is
special about God is that God *by definition* is a self-existent being or
a being whose non-existence is inconceivable'. But nothing is accom-
plished by such a move on his part. We do not know what can count
as 'a self-existent being' or a 'being whose non-existence is incon-
ceivable', for these terms have no established use in our language.
Moreover, the reason we do not understand them, and the reason why
they do not have an established use is that we do not understand how
'self-existent' or 'logically impossible not to exist' could qualify or
characterize being. Where an existential statement has an established
employment in a natural language, we understand what it would be
like to negate or deny it; we understand what it would be like for it
not to be true. Since it is always logically possible to conceive of the
non-existence of any being whatsoever, we find the notion of a self-
existent being—a being whose non-existence is inconceivable—to be
an inconsistent claim. This is what gives us an ontological disproof of

the existence of God if we try to conceive of God as a *logically* necessary being. It is that which gives Findlay's argument force.

This sounds question-begging and *in a way* I suspect it is. But note this: 'self-existent being' or 'being whose non-existence is inconceivable' have no established use in the corpus of English. Particularly when we try to conceive of the latter as a being or as being, we do not understand what could possibly count as an exemplification of such an alleged being. 'Self-existent being' is like 'talkative stone'. It is a senseless, self-inconsistent use of language. As far as I can see, all I can finally do toward establishing this is to get you to carefully reflect on our usage (or, if you will, simply reflect on your own live usage) and see that this is so, as you see that it makes no sense to call a puppy an old dog. It is this final appeal to usage and to the fluent speaker's *linguistic* intuitions that gives one the *impression* that the question is being begged. But it seems to me we have hit rock bottom here.

It should be noted also that there is something very fishy about making 'God' a *special case.* This seems most particularly evident when we keep in mind that the very coherence of the concept of God and first-order God-talk is itself in question. We cannot just assume we have an intelligible religious language-game or form of life.

However, it could be argued, and has been argued, that there are other quite intelligible cases of logically necessary or *a priori* existential propositions. Not all existential propositions can be denied without self-contradiction. This is Malcolm's belief and we must now look into his evidence for it. Consider the following six cases:

1) There is an infinite number of natural numbers.
2) There is a prime number greater than seven.
3) There are minds.
4) There are material objects.
5) There were material objects.
6) There is a universe.

First we should note that 1) through 6) are all odd; perhaps they are all even logically odd. But to say this certainly shouldn't by itself constitute a condemnation or even a criticism of them. To point to the logical oddity of an utterance is for me merely a device to put one on guard. It warns us that all *may* not be well with these utteran-

ces—language may have gone on a holiday. But, odd or not, we still have here *prima facie* cases of necessary existential statements, i.e., statements whose truth is determined on logical grounds alone, that is, existential statements that are somehow true *a priori.*

Let us consider the mathematical cases first. Malcolm takes, as his major non-religious case, the so-called existence theorems of mathematics, e.g., 2) 'There is a prime number greater than seven'. Here Malcolm's claim has, I believe, been successfully attacked by Allen and Abelson.[18] We should first note that 'necessary existence' has no established usage in mathematics, though Malcolm implies that it has. Yet there is a distinctive sense of 'exists' in mathematics. Mathematical existence is established in a different way than empirical existence. Instead of some complicated looking and seeing, the mathematician proves or demonstrates the existence of a 'mathematical entity' by a formal deductive procedure. But proof, deductive demonstration, in mathematics, as anywhere else, is always relative to a set of postulates. The existence theorems of mathematics, as Allen points out, are not guaranteed by intuition; they are conclusions derived by rule from Peano's postulates. It is indeed true that the existence theorems do not hold in virtue of their meaning alone; that is to say, Malcolm is correct in claiming they are not analytic; but they follow from postulates, at least one of which must be an existential (factual), logically contingent postulate, if the system is not to be various. Their truth cannot be determined on logical grounds alone. Existence in mathematics is never a matter of definition and it is never a purely *a priori* matter.

Furthermore, if we make a close analogy between 'There is a God' and 'There is an infinite number of natural numbers' or 'There is a prime number greater than a million', we will get something which Malcolm and no defender of the ontological argument would want: namely that, as our existence theorem only follows if we make certain *postulations,* so we must postulate the existence of God to prove His existence. But this is not what we wanted to do, for by postulating His existence the very question of His existence has now been begged at the outset.

Let us take some of the other purported examples of necessary (*a priori*) existential statements. We should note initially that 3) through

[18] See H. L. Allen and Raziel Abelson, *The Philosophical Review,* Vol. LXX (1961).

6) have a decidedly metaphysical flavour. They are hardly a part of ordinary discourse. Malcolm or any Wittgensteinian might very well reject them as sham statements—statements which have no home in any form of life—statements which play no role in any living form of language, have no role in any language-game. I would indeed assert this myself; and that we must go this far afield for necessary existential statements is itself significant. But less cautious defenders of necessary existence (such as Hartshorne) trot them out, so let us see, at least for the sake of the argument, what can be made of them.[19]

Consider first 3) 'There are minds'. Some might think that indubitable, and in a plain Moorean sense of 'indubitable' it most surely is indubitable, but the question at hand is whether it is a logically necessary proposition or an *a priori* truth. It would, I think, be reasonable to argue that there are minds follows logically from the statement that normal human beings have minds and one might argue that 'Normal human beings have minds' is a necessary (*a priori*) truth. But this last statement seems to me a necessary truth because it is analytic. However, we cannot derive a non-analytic proposition from an analytic one and thus we can only conclude that there are minds if we can add the existential proposition 'There are normal human beings'. But 'There are normal human beings' and even 'There are human beings' are contingent propositions. The conditions under which they would be false can be stated. They are most certainly not *a priori* truths. Thus we have no grounds for asserting 'There are minds' is an *a priori* truth.

Consider now 4) 'There are material objects'. Someone might say this is entirely indubitable and again in a plain Moorean sense it is. But the question is whether it is an *a priori* proposition or a necessary proposition that no conceivable experience can refute. It seems to me—as it does not seem to Baier—that it is not an *a priori* proposition.[20] 'Material object', as Austin has taught us, is a philosopher's term of art. We do not learn it by ostensive definition. But, as Baier points out, we learn it by reference to words so learnt. At first we learn words like 'bottle', 'rock', 'cat', 'sock', 'toothbrush', by being shown and being allowed to or made to handle the things bearing these names.

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[19] Hartshorne used no. 6) against me in argument.
[20] Kurt Baier, "Existence," *Aristotelian Society Proceedings,* Vol. LXI (1960-61), p. 26.

> Later, we learn the word 'thing' which can be used as a generic
> expression for any of these and others like them whose names
> we have not yet learnt. Later still, we learn to distinguish between
> those which are called 'things'... and those which are called
> 'animals', 'plants', and 'visual (or optical) phenomena' such as
> rainbows, clouds, and shadows.[21]

Now someone might ask, as Baier did, "how could a man who had
come to understand 'material object' in this way, be unaware that
there were some?" He could have learned some of his words like
'bottle' or 'rock' from a dictionary, but he could not "learn *all* of his
words that way, for how would a person acquire the ability to under-
stand the words in the dictionary?"[22] He would have to learn some
of these words through ostensive teaching.
   It is tempting to object:

> But can one be sure that the tables and chairs, the houses and
> stones, the shoes and ties, by reference to which he has learnt the
> expression 'material object' really are material objects, and not
> just bundles of ideas or sensations or phenomenal? This question,
> however, is not legitimate, for tables and chairs and the like are
> the sorts of things we mean by 'material objects'. The question
> makes no more sense than the question whether apples and
> oranges, grapes and plums really are fruit. There is of course
> another question which is perfectly legitimate, namely, whether
> material objects really are bundles of ideas or collections of
> electrons and so on, but whatever the true answer to this question
> it cannot reverse the truth that tables and chairs are material
> objects.[23]

Thus we are *tempted* to say 4) 'There are material objects' is a neces-
sary truth. But we should resist this temptation, for it in reality is
not a necessary proposition or an *a priori* truth. It remains a contin-
gent proposition as Baier's own fantasy case shows. We can conceive
of a situation in which no one was aware of physical objects and in
which there might be no physical objects. Suppose as a result of a cat-
aclysmic nuclear war there are only a few survivors left on earth. Pic-

[21] *Ibid.*
[22] *Ibid.,* p. 27.
[23] *Ibid.*

ture them being blown about in the air by heavy winds too far from each other to see each other; totally paralyzed, their tactile, but not their visual senses destroyed. Suppose further they are looking up into the sky seeing only what is above them. Thick smoke and heavy clouds hide all material objects they might otherwise see from the corner of their eyes, as well as the moon, the sun and the stars. Yet, as Baier points out, they might be perceiving something, i.e., they "might see flashes of lightning, rainbows, or auroras, hear claps of thunder and howling storms" and the like.[24] Nevertheless, the objects of their perception would not be material objects, but various visual, auditory and olfactory phenomena. Now perhaps perception entails that the percipient have a body, and thus we would still have at least one material object on our hands. But it is *conceivable*—that is to say it is logically possible—that only the phenomena seen by the percipient remains, i.e., lightning, clouds, wind, thick smoke, etc., without there being a percipient actually to perceive it. That is to say, we can describe a state of affairs in which only this exists. Thus we can conceive of what it would be like for there to be no material objects and thus 4) 'There are material objects' is not an *a priori* truth.

This indeed does knock out the necessary status of 4) 'There are material objects'; but, it might be replied that Baier's argument about how we learn 'material object', 'rock', 'turtle', 'thing' and the like establishes the necessary status of 5) 'There *were* material objects'. *Given* the use of these terms, i.e., 'sock', 'bottle', 'thing', it is "indubitable that at least at the time when the child began to learn his language, there were material objects." But this only shows that 5) has basically the same kind of status that 'There are an infinite number of natural numbers' has. Given the truth of certain *empirical states* of affairs, viz., that there are or were some things we call rocks, trees, flies, dirt and the like, and given that some people come to learn that there are such objects and come to use 'rocks', 'trees', 'flies', 'dirt' and the like as labels for these things, for which 'material object' is an umbrella term, then it follows that 'There were material objects' is true. But its truth depends on these empirical conditions and thus it is not an *a priori* truth. For the truth of 5), as in the case of 'mathematical entities', rests on the truth of certain non-linguistic empirical facts, i.e., that there at one time were rocks, trees, dirt, flies and the

[24] *Ibid.,* p. 28.

like. That there were and still are such entities is an empirical truism
but this hardly relieves statements like 'There were rocks' of their
empirical status.

The case, however, with 'God' is very different. It is not learned
tralinguistically; it is not an umbrella term for objects we come to
learn ostensively. Malcolm and Hartshorne, like Anselm, want to say
that given the use of 'God'—a term whose meaning we do not learn
by having God pointed out to us—we, if we will reflect on its
meaning, can come to understand that 'There is a God' is an *a priori*
truth (a logical necessity). It is not, as in the other cases, that we
can derive 'There is a God' from certain empirical statements of non-
linguistic fact plus certain linguistic conventions.

6) 'There is a universe'. This appears to be an existential proposi-
tion, but what could conceivably falsify it or what would count as
evidence against its truth? It is tempting to say that nothing could con-
ceivably falsify it. This temptation should be resisted. To see what is
involved here we should first come to recognize that 6) needs inter-
pretation. But on its two most plausible readings it is either nonsense
or analytic. If 'universe' is a very generic term for 'All the things there
are' then 6) becomes:

6') 'There is all the things there are'

or more charitably and grammatically:

6") 'There are all the things there are'.

But here, depending on how we take 'There are', we either have a
tautology or nonsense. We have a tautology when 'There are' means
'exists', for then we are saying 'All the things there are exist' or 'All
the things that exist exist'. We have nonsense if 'There are' functions
as it does when we exclaim 'There are all the Beatles together'.

If we do not treat 'universe' as a generic term for 'All the things
there are' or (if this is not a pleonasm) 'All the finite things there are'
then 'the universe' is a phrase without meaning. So again with 6) we
do not have an existential factual statement that is a necessary proposi-
tion or an *a priori* truth.

IV

There is another line of argument against Findlay and Smart that has recently been taken by Bowman Clarke.[25] Clarke attacks their claim "that logically true propositions assert nothing but merely reflect our use of words, the arbitrary conventions of our language." [26] He attempts to show that such a claim is mistaken if it is taken in a way that would undermine a construal of 'There is a God' as being 1) logically necessary and 2) non-vacuous and assertive. Clarke, unlike a classical rationalist, is perfectly prepared to concede that "There is a clear and intelligible distinction which can be made between logically true propositions and factually true propositions." [27] But, he argues, it is not a fact that the one 'asserts nothing' and the other does, nor is it a "fact that one 'reflects our use of words' and the other does not." [28] It is not true, Clarke is at pains to claim, that if 'There is a God' is a logically necessary truth, that it then merely reflects our use of words and asserts nothing whatsoever.[29] Rather it asserts a necessary state-of-affairs and its denial asserts an impossible state-of-affairs.[30]

Surely Clarke is correct in asserting that analytic statements or logically true propositions "in a language which describes the world," e.g., any natural language "asserts nothing whatsoever about terms, words, rules or conventions. They are indeed not statements about language." [31] " 'Puppies' is an English word that has the same meaning in English as the phrase 'young dogs' " is indeed a statement about language, but 'Puppies are young dogs' is not a meta-linguistic statement but is in the object-language. According to Clarke, it asserts a necessary state-of-affairs.

Indeed, Clarke continues, it does not assert a contingent fact but it does not follow from this that it asserts nothing or that it is uninterpreted. It most certainly is interpreted as are many analytical statements or necessary propositions. They have subject and predicate

[25] Bowman Clarke, "Linguistic Analysis and Philosophy of Religion," The Monist, Vol. 47, No. 3 (1963), pp. 365-86. But see, in criticism, Adel Daher, "God and Logical Necessity," Philosophical Studies (National University of Ireland), Vol. XVIII (1969).
[26] Ibid., p. 380.
[27] Ibid., p. 383.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid., p. 397.
[30] Ibid., p. 382.
[31] Ibid.

terms and the subject terms at least are referential; 'Puppies are young dogs', Clarke in effect argues, is not a vacuous formula. Similarly, 'A is red and A is not red' asserts something, namely "a state-of-affairs in which the state-of-affairs asserted by the first contingent proposition and the state-of-affairs asserted by the second contingent proposition are incompatible." [32] That is, it asserts a *necessary* state-of-affairs or a necessary fact. The proposition asserting it is most surely not uninterpreted and thus it is a mistake to say it asserts nothing when all that we can sensibly mean by that is that it does not assert an empirical state-of-affairs. Rather it asserts "a necessary state-of-affairs—one that could not be otherwise." [33]

As we have seen, such statements are *not* about language. In that sense it is incorrect to say they 'reflect our use of words' and if, alternatively, we mean that they "'disclose' to us something of the language," this is indeed true, but contingent propositions also disclose to us something about our language and yet we are still willing to say both that they tell us something non-linguistic and that they are assertive. But if this is so, then, it would seem, we have no grounds for denying logically necessary statements are also assertive. It is indeed true, Clarke stresses, that "a logically true proposition can be determined to be true solely on the basis of the syntactical and semantical rules alone, whereas a factually true proposition cannot," but this does not make logically true propositions empty or vacuous; it simply reflects that the fact that "a logically true proposition asserts a necessary state-of-affairs, one that could not be otherwise no matter what the contingent state-of-affairs might be...." [34] Since this is so, one can, Clarke argues, correctly assert, as he maintains Findlay correctly asserts, that 'There is a God' is logically necessary and still avoid Findlay's *reductio* that 'There is a God' becomes completely vacuous, for 'There is a God' asserts a necessary state-of-affairs or a necessary fact.

Even on Clarke's own grounds there are radical defects in his argument. He has not adequately met the standard Humean objections concerning necessary existence. One can indeed agree that logically necessary statements are not characteristically, if ever, about language while *not* agreeing that they assert some 'necessary fact' or 'necessary

[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.*
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 384.

state-of-affairs'. Indeed we may have some fairly intelligible paradigms of a 'necessary state-of-affairs'—a state-of-affairs that could not be otherwise. With all their corpulence and age, it could not be that either Erhard or Strauss could run the mile in less than four minutes. And it could not be the case that there are toadstools at the centre of the earth. That the sun will rise tomorrow is another necessity. But these necessary states-of-affairs are *factual* necessities, not the necessities Clarke needs. The propositions asserting them are *contingent* propositions, not *logically* necessary propositions asserting logically necessary states-of-affairs. But the very force of Smart's and Findlay's thrust is, of course, to point out that no sense has been given to '*logically* necessary fact' or '*logically* necessary state-of-affairs' or '*logically* impossible states-of-affairs'. Clarke makes it sound as if his phrases make sense by neglecting the qualifier 'logically'. He tells us "a logically false proposition asserts an impossible state-of-affairs...." This appears to make sense for 'an impossible state-of-affairs' has a use, viz., 'The state-of-affairs in Bonn is impossible' or 'The situation in Viet Nam is impossible'. But no use has been given for 'a *logically* impossible state-of-affairs', unless it is to be stipulated as an *ersatz* referent for a self-contradictory statement—even assuming we can intelligibily speak of the referent of a statement. But still how in such a circumstance a 'fact', 'situation', 'state-of-affairs' is being referred to remains utterly opaque.

When people have said self-contradictory and logically necessary statements are vacuous, they most certainly did not mean they were uninterpreted. As part of a natural language their individual terms, or at least the non-syncategormatic ones, have an application. What they were asserting is that the sentence as a whole is not used to assert anything, for such sentences do not make statements which amplify our knowledge, that is to say, they do not inform us, except by indirectly teaching us something about our language. 'Puppies are young' or 'Puppies are young dogs' do not tell us anything that we do not already know, if we know the meaning of 'puppy'. They assert no fact or non-linguistic state-of-affairs of which we might otherwise be unaware. No use at all has been given to a 'logically necessary state-of-affairs'. If X is a state-of-affairs or fact, it is something one might not be acquainted with, but it is still something with which one might come to be acquainted. But a logically necessary proposition does not tell us, directly or indirectly, of any non-linguistic state-of-affairs. It cannot

reveal to us any non-linguistic fact of which we might have been una-
ware. When people have incautiously said such propositions were
about language or reflected our use of language, they have meant to
say or at least should have meant to say that these utterances do not
inform us—facts concerning the function of language apart—about the
world. To the extent that they inform us at all, they inform us about
the uses of our language.[35] They do not do that by being statements
about the language but they reveal the unscheduled implications of the
language (and similar languages) in a way that no factual statement
can. 'My pencil is red' does not so reveal the workings of my language
but 'A red pencil is a coloured pencil' does. It does not assert some
elusive logically necessary state-of-affairs but it reveals a rule of
language, or more broadly a rule about the nature of certain concepts:
"You can't call X 'red' unless you also allow that X is coloured." It is
a fact that there is such a rule, but it is a rule about our language or
about the nature of our concepts. If we construe 'There is a God' to
mean 'There is a logically necessary being', so that 'There is a God'
becomes logically necessary, then 'There is a God' can no longer
assert a fact or 'a necessary state-of-affairs' or any state-of-affairs at
all. It will reveal, as 'Red things are coloured' reveals, something of
the workings of our language or the structure of our concepts. Thus
Clarke's labour to avoid Findlay's *reductio* comes to nought. We have
no idea of what a 'logically necessary state-of-affairs' or a 'logically
necessary fact' is like, and thus we have no understanding of 'logically
necessary existence'. If God's necessity is this kind of necessity then
we have no understanding of 'God'.

   To establish the fact that there is logically necessary existence or
that there are logically necessary beings, we must establish that there
are *a priori* existential propositions, i.e., propositions which categor-
ically assert the existence of something whose truth does not depend
on any non-linguistic empirical facts. While we should not simply take
it as a dogma that there are and can be no logically necessary existen-
tial propositions, it remains the case 1) that no plausible example of
such a proposition has been adduced and 2) that there are good

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[35] If this is said to be a way of informing us about the world, it is a way of
informing us about our *concepts,* about the *uses* or *functions* of language. That
is to say, it is not about English or German or French. We learn, for example,
something about the *use* of 'dog', 'hund', or 'chien'. But that is not a lesson in
English, German or French, but about the common employment of these terms.

theoretical reasons for believing that there are no such propositions. We can, of course, certainly say of many propositions, e.g., 'There are coloured things if there are red things', that they are *a priori* truths. What we have not been able to establish is that there are any categorical existential statements without hypothetical riders, e.g., 'There are coloured things', which are *a priori* truths.

I did not simply assume that there are no *a priori* existential statements. I examined alleged counter-examples to what seems to be evidently true, namely that there are no existential *a priori* truths, and I have shown that none of them count as a genuine disconfirmation of the claim that there are no *a priori* existential statements. In line with this I have examined 'There is a God' on its own merits as one such counter-example. If my arguments have been correct I have shown that the alleged counter-examples are only alleged counter-examples and not genuine counter-examples. In spite of the renewed interest in establishing by philosophical argument that there is a logically necessary being, we still are in such matters essentially with Hume. There is good reason to think that 'a logically necessary being' like 'round square' is a contradiction in terms. Thus *if* God is conceived of as a *logically* necessary being, we have very good reason to believe that this concept of God is self-contradictory and thus that it is a self-contradiction to assert that there is a God.[36]

[36] These arguments, of course, do not touch scholastic arguments which construe God's necessary existence in quite different terms. I have considered some of these arguments in my "God, Necessity and Falsifiability" in *Traces of God in a Secular Culture*, ed. by George F. McLean (New York: Alba House, 1973), pp. 271-304. See also the exchange between D. R. Duff-Forbes and John H. Hick in the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (June, 1972), pp. 473-88 and Terence Penelhum, *Religion and Rationality* (New York: Random House, 1971), pp. 31-48, 365-80.

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