The Elusive God

The Elusive God

By

Yakir Z. Shoshani and Asher Z. Yahalom

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

The Elusive God

By Yakir Z. Shoshani and Asher Z. Yahalom

This book first published 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-3872-9
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-3872-6

CONTENTS

Part C: God and the World

PREFACE

What meaning can be ascribed to the existence of God and how can we convince ourselves and other people of this existence? The answers to these questions might be helpful in drawing the demarcation line between the believers in God's existence and the atheists who argue that God exists only in the minds of those experiencing this belief, but not beyond them.

Indeed, for many generations philosophers and theologists have attempted to attribute a meaning to the essence of God and to prove His existence. A brief critical review of these attempts, including the ideas and arguments of prominent thinkers and the criticism on them, is presented in the first part of this book.

This discussion raises the question: is there another way, more resilient to criticism, to justify the objective existence of God beyond human recognition? This question stimulates the drive to clarify the concept of existence in its widest sense – referring not only to the existence of physical entities, which can be perceived by human sensory organs, but also to spiritual entities that are not situated in space and time. Crucial steps in this endeavor are to analyze the significance of spiritual entities, to justify their objective existence, independently of Man, and to suggest some examples of such entities. One of the most important spiritual entities, the human soul including his free will, is discussed thoroughly in several chapters of this book.

The investigation into the meaning of essentially different types of entities is indeed a central objective of this book, and its elaboration serves as a basis from which our theistic view emerges. According to this view, discussed in Chapter 6 and elaborated in the following chapters, the simplest possibility to ascribe a coherent meaning to existence, and to explicate the connections between all the essentially different types of entities comprising the whole being, in all its complexity, is latent in the assumption that there exists a primary spiritual entity connected to all other types of entities. We argue that this primary entity can represent the meaning of God and thus can be used to explore His attributes.

Every chapter in Parts B and C of this book deals with a different characterization of God, such as His omnipresence, His unity, His being the first cause and the creator of the universe, His being the source of human wisdom, His appearance in physical reality and more.

However, this book does not refer to specific beliefs of the monotheistic and other religions such as the Divine Providence, the existence of Hell and Heavens, the punishment of the sinners and other beliefs described in the Holy Scripts and their interpretations. It refrains from polemic controversies, in order to focus the attention on the philosophical and scientific ideas and arguments justifying God's existence and His fundamental characterization.

PART A:

ATTEMPTS TO JUSTIFY GOD'S EXISTENCE

CHAPTER 1

THE PERSEVERANCE OF FAITH

When the first landing of man on the Moon in July 1969 was shown on TV, I (Yakir) asked my father to join me in watching it. This was a very peculiar and even outrageous request since until that day he never watched television or listened to the radio. He devoted all his spare time to studying the Holy Scripts, the Bible, the Talmud and especially the mystic books of the Kabala with which he was extremely fascinated. Even when he went to his shop he took with him a holy book that he read when he was not busy serving his customers. In an attempt to persuade him to accede to the request I provoked him as follows:

"Dad, every month you read in the pray of the Moon [a prayer said by Orthodox Jews once a month when the Moon is full]: "…we dance against you and we cannot touch thee…", but now the Americans launched a man to the Moon, and in a short while you will be able to see him walking there".

He diverted his eyes from his book, pondered a few seconds and replied:

"Since this is so important for you I will accept but this time your request."

We watched silently how Neil Armstrong stepped down the spacecraft "Eagle" and declared his famous phrase: "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind".

We saw him walking jumpingly on the desolate face of the Moon and saw the black sky above him. When the program was over I turned to my father with a winning look smeared all over my face:

"What do you say Dad, is it possible to touch the Moon or not?"

And he replied smiling:

"What, didn't you know? Thousands of years ago the Prophet said: Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down…" In citing this verse, he specifically pronounced the word

"eagle", alluding that the Bible had predicted this landing on the Moon. Now I was completely surprised:

"Who was this prophet?" I asked?

"Now go and look for it," he replied satisfactorily and returned to his studies.

Indeed, I worked very hard (because Google was not available at that time) and found the origin of this verse in the Old Testament: the book of Obadiah, chapter 1 verse 4.

I always recall this story when I think about the immunity and resilience of the belief in God and the Holy Scripts for many generations, against scientific and technological advances. How is it possible to explain the phenomenon that, during the thousands of years in which far reaching cultural, social and scientific developments took place, the vast majority of mankind believed, and still believe today, in the existence of a super-being who created the universe, with divine intelligence and capabilities?

The atheists might suggest a rather simple explanation for the belief in God and the perseverance of religions throughout ages. Their basic argument relies on anthropological, cultural and social processes that occurred when mankind began to develop. They might claim that the origin of such a belief is in the very old era when Man was exposed to threatening and destructive natural phenomena and tried to protect himself by various means. From the regularity related to the periodic motions of the Earth and the Moon, he understood that there is a sort of order in Nature, and so there should be reasons for the phenomena threatening his survival. Since he did not recognize these reasons, he related them to supreme and very powerful beings that he envisaged in his own form or forms of different animals or other objects. From his experience with his relations with angry and dangerous people he learned that they could be appeased by nice words, by asking for forgiveness and by giving presents. He transferred this behavioral pattern to his attitude to the mysterious and powerful super-beings who, according to his feelings, dominated his fate. This belief in supreme powers was enhanced when several people took advantage of it for their own benefit by pretending to have miraculous features enabling them to have direct contacts with these powers. The rhetoric ability and strong personality of these "priests" stimulated many people to follow them, and so a new rank that strengthened and preserved the belief in the existence of the supreme powers was established. This rank took advantage of this belief to improve its domination and standard of living. Such a state of affairs has prevailed

until today in primitive tribes in Asia and Africa. In more advanced cultures a hierarchy between all the supreme powers, headed by the most important one, like Zeus in ancient Greece, was formed. At a more advanced stage, as happened with the advent of Judaism and the other monotheistic religions emerging from it, the belief in the existence of all the supreme powers was abandoned and there remained only their head, who now was transformed into a spiritual super-being called "God".

However, such a naïve description does not explain the power, perseverance and resilience of the belief in God throughout thousands of years. Nowadays when Man recognizes thoroughly the laws of Nature and uses them in order to explain and predict phenomena that were once thought to be miraculous, such as the rainbow or solar eclipse, why are there so many people who uphold the belief in God? It is true that our understanding of the universe and especially ourselves as cognitive beings is rather limited, and there are many open questions that cannot be answered within the framework of existing theories. Yet the history of science encourages us to believe that there will come a day when all these troubling questions will be resolved. Why then did so many great scientists and philosophers in the past, like Descartes, Newton, Leibniz, Faraday and Einstein, believe in the existence of God and the Divine Design of the universe? Why today, in the 21st century, are there so many religious scientists who adhere to the Holy Scripts and behave by their commands? These questions and many others that we will discuss later set before us an intellectual challenge to explore the questions of the existence of God as a being transcendent to Man and to suggest possible meanings and arguments for such an existence.

As a first step in this investigation, there is a need to find out what is the significance of a belief, not necessarily in the theistic context, what are its sources and what is its measure of relevance in our life. Several examples might clarify this significance.

When someone buys a lottery ticket he is not sure whether he will win any prize, but he believes and hopes that there is a chance that he will win – maybe even first prize. This belief is tightly related to the uncertainty emerging from the limitation of our knowledge as far as future events are concerned. In a similar situation is the writer who begins to write his book, looking at the blank sheet facing him. In his head he weaves the story's plot, the relationship between the different characters and the events in which they participate. He believes that eventually his book will be completed and published, but he is not sure about that. Everyone who begins a new

initiative – a businessman, a creator or a politician – hopes to succeed in it, but he always has a doubt that he might fail.

Is every future event shrouded in mystery? Is there a future event that can be predicted with absolute certainty? When I open the faucet at home, can I not foresee for sure that a stream of water will flow from it? A negative answer might be argued, because it might happen that at the same moment of my opening of the faucet, the water supply to my residence area was stopped due to a technical malfunction. But let us suppose that the water supply to my residence was not stopped. Can I be sure that water will flow from the faucet? The reason for my confidence is that when we open the faucet, a barrier is diverted and the water flows down owing to gravity. But why am I sure that the Earth's gravity will prevail forever? Is it not possible that at the exact moment that I open the faucet, the Earth will lose its gravity and stop pulling water down? Anyone who has studied physics will rightly respond that the gravity of the Earth emerges as a special case of the universal law of gravity suggested by Newton in the 17th century. According to this law any two bodies attract each other, and since the mass of the Earth is much larger than the mass of any body found on it, that body will be pulled down to the Earth. But can we be sure that this law will exist forever? Indeed, this and other physical laws have been confirmed in countless experiments and observations for generations. But can we definitely conclude that a general law emerging from a finite number of experimental or observational findings will prevail forever in the future? Wherefrom stems our confidence that in the future something will not occur that will cause a deviation from those laws, as has often happened in the past? This question, known as the "Induction problem", was raised by the British philosopher David Hume in his book *Treatise of Human Nature* (Hume, 1962), first published in the 18th century. This problem has been discussed by many prominent philosophers for generations, but their intellectual efforts did not yield a satisfactory resolution. A simple example to illustrate the induction problem is as follows: in every second in which I lived in the past, I also survived a second later. As I have witnessed this statement billions of times in my life I can formulate a general law whereby "In every second that I will live in the future I will survive a second later". This law has been confirmed numerous times in my past, many more times than the laws of physics have been confirmed. Hence, I can conclude that I shall live forever. However, everyone knows that his life span is finite. Why then does the induction principle fail when it comes to the most important issue in my life – my very existence? We see, therefore, that confirmation by experiments or observations does not instill confidence in the existence of a general law. Belief has a crucial role in the development of science.

What about events that happened in the past? Can we have certain knowledge about them? Here, too, a positive answer depends on our faith that our memory is not playing tricks on us, for many times, especially when it comes to memories of the distant past, we do not have confidence about the details of the events that happened. The obvious conclusion from this discussion is that a broad spectrum of beliefs, rather than certain knowledge, serves as an infrastructure for our perception of the world and ourselves.

Some people argue that certain and absolute knowledge exists in mathematics and logic. For example, the existence of known laws in geometry, developed in ancient Greece by Euclid, or algebra are independent of any faith at all. However, in this context, complex philosophical questions arise that, owing to the limited scope of this book, we will not discuss in detail. The first question is: what is the origin of the axioms of mathematical theories? Why did Euclid decide to base geometry on five axioms, and what were his justifications in selecting these axioms? Of course, the origin was beyond mathematics and probably resulted from an intuitive grasp of reality. Another interesting question is: do mathematical concepts and theorems exist beyond human cognitive power? For example, did Pythagoras' theorem exist before Man was created? What enables us to use mathematical concepts and theorems in the description of nature? This last question has been discussed by highly distinguished physicists like Wigner, Einstein and Feynman. How does it happen that mathematics is the most reliable instrument to describe the laws of nature? Does the equality $2 + 2 = 4$ exist beyond human cognitive capacity, i.e. can it be attributed to the world independently of Man's existence? Is there a possible situation where this equality is not valid, as happened with Winston Smith, the hero of the book *1984* by George Orwell? In this context it should be noted that the statements of Euclidean geometry are valid to a high degree of precision in the vicinity of the Earth. However, according to the theory of general relativity, the proper geometry to describe space in zones of very high mass density, for example, near black holes or neutron stars, is not Euclidean and its characterization depends on mass distribution in space and time (the same is true for lesser mass densities like that of the Sun; it is precisely this mass density that causes the Earth to move in an orbit instead of in straight lines).

We see then that an array of beliefs constitutes a solid and necessary basis in our cognitive capacity, enabling us to know our environment and ourselves and survive in uncertain conditions. What is the origin of these beliefs? We have seen that the experimental sciences cannot justify them because their very existence is based on a broad basis of beliefs or

hypotheses that, in principle, cannot be confirmed by means of any experiment or observation. Mathematics and logic cannot help either because, on the one hand, the theorems emerging from the axioms of these theories are not necessarily related to the real and objective world independent of human cognition, and on the other hand, meta-mathematical assumptions and beliefs are latent in their axiomatic basis. We believe that at least part of the theorems of mathematics can be used in the description of the objective world, but this belief cannot be justified in a rational way or otherwise.

One of the most interesting methods in philosophy and experimental science to explain a situation or to justify it is to show how a system including a large number of entities can be explained by another system including fewer components. The ultimate goal is to justify the plurality in reality in terms of unity. For example, in physics we strive to explain many phenomena by as few fundamental laws as possible, e.g. a huge number of mechanical phenomena on Earth and in the solar system can be satisfactorily explained and predicted using the three laws of Newtonian mechanics and the universal law of gravity. In chemistry we explain the existence and properties of a huge number of materials by the properties of 94 natural chemical elements known today (a total of 118 elements are known but 24 of those are synthetic elements). Atomic physics has succeeded in satisfactorily explaining the existence and properties of these elements based on an atomic structure consisting of three particles: electrons, protons and neutrons. This reductionistic quest is very old. It was first introduced by the Greek philosopher Thales about 2,500 years ago. He stated that everything is made of water, and thus introduced the first monistic description of reality. The following philosophers have taken on this idea using a variety of materials in nature as the origin of plurality. Until modern times the accepted theory was that of the Greek philosopher Empedocles, that there are four basic elements: earth, air, fire and water. It should be noted that the monistic approach of Thales was elaborated by the Greek philosopher Anaximandros, who argued that the origin of all materials is not a material observed in reality, but rather an unknown entity that he called "the unlimited" (*apeiron*).

If we take this monistic approach to explain the multiplicity of existing beliefs, we can suggest a small number of core and basic beliefs, from which all the other beliefs will emerge. The theistic idea suggests that the most basic belief is the existence of God who is the source of all other forms of existence in the objective world as well as in human consciousness. One of the objectives of this book is to elaborate this belief and the arguments

justifying it, and to examine whether and to what extent it can be used as the primary belief.

In the course of history many philosophers have attempted to prove the existence of God using arguments related to the human consciousness and the world, and as we will see in the subsequent chapters, their efforts bore no fruit since their arguments were severely criticized. In contrast to that, other philosophers and theologians have argued that the belief in God does not have to be justified either by logic or by any experimental or observational finding, since the existence of God is *sui generis*, namely, it is a self-generating entity and as such, it is not conditioned and it cannot be accounted for or reduced by anything beyond it. This was the approach of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1996; Pals, 1986) who called for the defense of the faith in God and in the religious experience associated with it against philosophical and theological threats that emerged when several philosophers in the 18th century, like David Hume and Immanuel Kant, attempted rather successfully to refute and discard the proofs of the existence of God suggested in the Middle Ages by St. Anselm and Thomas Aquinas. (These proofs and the criticism on them will be discussed in the following chapters.)

The faith in God and the Holy Script suffered attacks from an additional direction. Since the Renaissance, the rapid developments of the empirical scene and mathematics suggested explanations of natural phenomena, like the rainbow, solar eclipse or the motion of the planets in their orbits, that had previously been considered by religions as signs and demonstrations of God's involvement in the universe. Moreover, several scientific theories supported by experimental or observational findings, e.g. the Heliocentric model stating that the Earth and all the other planets revolve around the Sun, seemed to contradict the Old Testament. The belief that God is *sui generis* immunes the faith in His existence and in the Holy Scripts against scientific or philosophical criticism, because according to this approach the existence of God and his characterization cannot be conditioned by a "truth" related to logic or to the sciences. The existence of God is the primary truth that serves as the infrastructure for explaining the unity of all the layers of being including the human consciousness, or, as Einstein phrased it, "Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind".

Paul Tillich, a philosopher and theologian of the 20th century, went far beyond Einstein (Tillich, 1951), and claimed that the statement "God exists" puts God on the same level as other existing entities, although God is beyond existence and He enables the existence of all the other entities. This

attitude raises the question of the existence of God in all its acuteness. Is it possible to attribute any meaning to existence beyond familiar beings and experience? Emmanuel Levinas commented on this question in his book *Of God who comes to mind* (Levinas, 1986). He argued that the Biblical God is not similar to any concept characterized by known criteria, or that can appear to be true or false. He signifies the transcendent entity that is beyond any known being. In other words, in contrast to the situation in which the subject creates the significance of its concepts, the recognition of God indicates an entity that breaks through the subject who knows it, beyond the Cartesian "I think" (*cogito*). Yet Levinas does not suggest an explanation or justification for this breakthrough.

The position of believing in the existence of God based on religious experience is exposed to the piercing criticism of the atheists. They have no objection to the existence of such an experience in itself, but they totally reject the existence of God as a transcendental being independent of the human cognitive capacity. The main question for them is: what is the status of the knowledge acquired in the religious experience? Is it equivalent to the knowledge acquired in the scientific investigation of reality? For example, William James (1957) argues that the religious experience is a psychological phenomenon, and therefore its cognitive content has no meaning or validity beyond the person experiencing it. Imagine a person who is ecstatic owing to intoxication, drug use, an epileptic seizure or a neurotic disorder. Suppose that he claims that around him there are strange beings such as demons or angels. Will someone think that these entities exist beyond his imagination? The brain researcher Michael Persinger (1987) used a device that allowed a stimulation of well-defined zones in the brain through the skull bones using a strong magnetic field of high frequencies. When the temporal lobes of his brain were stimulated, he was surprised to discover that he experienced the existence of God for the first time. In their book *The illusions of the brain* (1999), W.S. Ramachandran and Sandra Blakeslee described additional cases where epileptic people suffering from seizures in the temporal lobes of their brain had religious and spiritual experiences of high intensity. They imagined that they had a direct contact with God and his angels. Is it possible that God’s disciples in the past, described in the Holy Scripts, were nothing but epileptics, and that their "religious enlightenment" happened when they had a seizure? Or, perhaps God communicates with his emissaries through the temporal lobes? Maybe religious experience and a deep faith in God are neurological disorders?

However, the issue of the relationship between human experiences originating in his consciousness and the existence of entities beyond the

human cognitive capacity and independent of it is not unique to the context of the existence of God. For, on the basis of the atheistic view described above, it can be argued that we cannot infer from our feelings and experience that an objective world, external to our being and independent of our consciousness, truly does exist. Why in this case do the atheists believe in the existence of an objective reality beyond human cognitive power but discard the objective existence of God, even though it too stems from cognitive experience?

This question raises the need for a thorough discussion on the meaning of existence, which will constitute the core of Chapter 6. This discussion is important because when an atheist argues that God does not exist, he should explain his views about three main issues:

1. What does he mean by saying that something exists, namely, what are the criteria by which he determines whether an entity exists or not?

2. What meaning does he attribute to the concept of "God" that he does not believe to exist? For generations people have characterized this concept in different ways.

3. How can the definition of existence be applied in order to justify the non-existence of "God"? For example, when I say "there is no milk in the fridge", I am well aware of the meanings of "milk" and "fridge" according to their physical properties. I also have clear criteria for deciding whether they exist or not, namely, that they are observables and can be perceived by our sensory organs. However, the use of observability as a unique criterion for determining existence is very problematic. As we shall see in Chapter 6, several layers of being cannot be perceived either directly via the sensory organ, or indirectly by using detecting instruments.

CHAPTER 2

ST. ANSELM'S LOGICAL-ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Many people discover God after having a profound experience. Sometimes they feel that a miracle happened to them when they recovered from a serious illness or were saved from death in an accident. In other cases, they turn to God in times of agony and despair, as we read in the book of Psalms: "Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy" (Psalm 130, 1-2). They pray and feel that God responds to their prayers. It is also possible that a person who explores the secrets of Nature comes to a recognition that it is impossible that the reality around us, with all its complexity and beauty, was created completely randomly, without the guidance and planning of a divine creator. These people do not need proof that God exists. They feel His omnipresence deeply and directly. For them, believing in the existence of God is a primary and basic principle prior to any other knowledge. However, when these people try to convince others who did not have an experience similar to theirs, that God exists, they encounter a very complex problem. They are required to suggest a logical or scientific justification for the existence of God.

Such was the situation of the monk St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), one of the greatest theologians of the Middle Ages, who tried to prove the existence of God using the laws of logic that were known at the time. In the prayer that opens the second chapter of his book *Proslogion* (St. Anselm, 1962), he asks God to inspire in him the understanding of his existence and characterization, namely, to enable him to prove that God is the greatest entity that can be thought of (the greatest thinkable entity). He felt that God answered his prayers and that he could prove clearly and definitively the existence of God based on the mentioned characterization.

Many philosophers and theologians, including contemporary thinkers, have thoroughly examined the validity of this argument, known as the "logical ontological proof of God's existence", and several of them have criticized it in different ways.

The arguments presented in the *Proslogion* are somewhat unclear, but in modern phrasing one can view them as proof using the method of *reductio ad absurdum*. According to this method, one tries to prove a statement by showing that if this statement were not true it would lead to a contradiction. Anselm suggested the following steps in his proof:

1. Let us assume that God as defined by Anselm exists only in the mind but not in reality. (This is the assumption that Anselm wants to disprove.)

2. Existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind alone, that is, if there are two entities that you can imagine, A and B, both having the same properties, except that A exists in reality and B does not, then A is a greater entity than B.

3. An entity that has all the properties of God, according to step 1, and in addition exists in reality can be thought of.

4. According to steps 1 and 2, the entity that has the characterization of God and also exists in reality is greater than God.

5. According to step 4 we can think of an entity greater than God.

6. But on the basis of Anselm's definition of God, it is impossible to think about a being greater than God (as this is in contradiction to Anselm's definition that God is the greatest thinkable being).

7. The conclusion: the contradiction which we saw in step 6 shows that assumption 1 was wrong, meaning that it is impossible that God exists only in thought. God must exist also in reality.

This proof is interesting because it is *a priori*, i.e. it stems only from the meaning that Anselm ascribed to God, and it does not depend on the state of affairs in the world, namely, it is not based on any experimental or observational finding. The nucleus of the proof is this: if indeed I can think of entity A and there is no other entity greater than it, then A must exist in reality. The reason for that is as follows: if entity A did not exist in reality, I could think about another entity, B, that has all the properties of entity A, but in addition it exists. Then it would be wrong to claim that entity A is the greatest entity that can be thought of, because entity B, which can also be conceived, is greater than A.

Although this argument has a noteworthy cleverness, attempts to refute it had already been suggested in the time of Anselm. The monk Gaunilo wrote a reply to the *Proslogion* entitled, ironically, *Reply on Behalf of the Fool*, where he offered several arguments to disclaim the validity of Anselm's proof (St. Anselm, 1979). The most brilliant and famous one goes as follows:

If Anselm's argument for the existence of God is valid, then we can give an equally valid argument for the absurd claim that the greatest imaginable lost island exists in reality and not just in the mind. Gaunilo used the logical structure of the argument presented by Anselm to prove his claim. He suggested replacing "God" in steps 1 to 7 listed above with the "greatest lost island", and in this way prove that such an island exists.

Following this criticism, Anselm wrote a book of reply to Gaunilo in which he claimed that the analogy suggested by Gaunilo for God being the greatest thinkable entity with the greatest lost island is invalid. The reason for that is related to the distinction between two types of entities – a necessary entity and a contingent entity. The existence of the necessary entity is independent of, or not related to, the existence of other beings, while the existence of a contingent entity depends on the existence of other beings. Therefore, the necessary entity must exist because its existence does not depend on other entities. However, a contingent entity can exist only for a limited period of time, after which it disappears because the conditions enabling its existence ceased to prevail.

Humans, animals, plants, molecules and even stars are contingent beings. Thus, for example, when the nuclear fusion process on a star like our Sun ends, the star ceases to exist in its regular form. Molecules too are contingent entities because they can be decomposed into the chemical elements constituting them by using heat, electric current or other means. On the other hand, we believe that the fundamental laws of nature can be considered as necessary beings because their existence does not depend on other beings.

The problem with "the greatest lost island" theory is that it is a contingent entity because its existence depends on the existence of other entities, for example, an ocean or another large body of water in which it is situated. Furthermore, we cannot increase the entity "island" unlimitedly because from a certain size the entity ceases to be an island.

However, the greatest thinkable entity, i.e. the entity for it is impossible to think of one greater, must be a necessary entity by definition, because it

cannot be dependent on another entity. Gaunilo failed in his mission, and therefore the logical ontological argument of Anselm held its valid position until the next fierce criticism conducted by David Hume and Immanuel Kant in the 18th century.

Kant's opposition to the logical ontological proof was based on his central claim that existence cannot be considered a feature or characterization (predicate) of an entity. The reason for this is that the concept C fits the object O only when the collection of features of C is identical to the collection of features of O, for otherwise C would not be the concept corresponding to O. For example, the number of dollars in a real 100 dollar bill is exactly the same as the number of dollars in a "100-dollar" concept in my mind. Also, when I say that my cat that I think about exists in reality, I add no feature to the concept of my cat that is latent in my mind.

Several philosophers claim that this Kantian argument cannot be clarified and that it is impossible to prove it in a logical manner, and thus those who support this Kantian criticism of St. Anselm's argument for the existence of God are trying to convince us of its truth only by suggesting examples.

But suppose that Kant is right and existence cannot be considered a feature of a concept that can be thought of. How does this argument refute the logical ontological argument? The answer lies in step 2 of Anselm's proof which states that an entity existing in reality is greater than the same entity existing only in the mind. In what sense? In reality the entity has an additional feature that improves it compared to the entity existing only in my thought. If Kant is indeed correct, and the existence in reality of a conceptual entity does not add a feature to this entity, step 2 of the argument is canceled out and the proof structure collapses.

Some philosophers, including Stephen Davis (1997) and Alvin Plantinga (1967) hold the opinion, based on the arguments mentioned earlier and others, that the starting point of Kant is erroneous. Therefore, in their opinion, he was not able to refute Anselm's proof. Their first claim is that Kant did not suggest a clear argument as to why the existence of a thinkable entity does not add value to this entity. I know, for example, that I can use a real 100 dollar bill to purchase products, namely, this bill has a buying power, whereas I cannot buy anything with the concept, or idea, of "100 dollars" in my mind. I can imagine having even a million dollars in my purse, but with the existence of this concept in my mind I do not really become rich. Furthermore, Anselm did not assume in any part of his proof that the existence of an entity is an additional feature of this entity, but

argued that the concept referring to an entity becomes greater when we know that it exists in reality.

Another brilliant criticism of the logical ontological argument was suggested in the 20th century by Rowe (1973). His main argument is that, in his proof, Anselm latently assumed the validity of the conclusion that he wanted to prove, namely, that God exists in reality. This is implicitly assumed in step 4. At this stage, Anselm assumes that the greatest entity that can be imagined can exist also in reality. If this possibility could not be realized, it would not be possible to think about the God of Anselm as the greatest entity. Wherefrom had Anselm the knowledge about the possibility of the existence of the greatest thinkable entity? I can think of numerous things that I know for a fact from my experience cannot exist. For example, I can think of a horse with wings and about the possibility of the existence of such a horse in reality, but this assumption has a sense if, and only if, such a horse does exist in reality, or at least if I had a convincing justification that this horse could exist in reality. Put differently, we can know about the existence in reality of a concept only *ad hoc*, after it was observed, or after we are convinced by other ways of its existence. Therefore, what Anselm proved is this: if there was a possibility for "the greatest thinkable entity" to exist in reality then it would have existed in reality. But Anselm did not show that this possibility exists.

Davis claimed that this criticism of the logical ontological argument is problematic. He argued that he could believe that a particular entity A exists without knowing that A exists if this belief did not lead to a contradiction in his arguments. For example, I cannot believe that there is a married bachelor because this assumption includes a contradiction. The term "married" means "not a bachelor". However, I can believe in the existence of life on other planets even if for now no such creatures have been discovered. The history of science shows that in many cases scientists suggested the existence of entities that were not known at the time of their prediction, and then these entities were later discovered in an experiment or observation. Thus, the physicist James Maxwell predicted the existence of electromagnetic waves in the mid-19th century, and this existence was confirmed a few years after this prediction by Heinrich Hertz. It seems to us that this argument is quite weak because even Davis agrees that the existence of an entity that can be thought to exist is guaranteed only in retrospect.

It seems to us that the main problem of the logical ontological argument lies in the concept of God as the "greatest entity that can be thought of" – that Anselm wanted to exist in reality. This characterization of God calls for the

existence of criteria for comparing the greatness of two distinct concepts. Without these criteria, the "greatest thinkable entity" would be meaningless. It can be argued that the two concepts A and B can be compared by using their features. However, the only possibility to define such a comparison uniquely is as follows: A is greater than B if, and only if, A has all the features of B and one or several additional features. Attempts to define this comparison by a different method will necessitate attributing relative weights to every feature of the compared concepts. In this case, two questions arise: according to what principles can we determine these weights, and how can we justify these principles? We come then to the conclusion that A is greater than B if, and only if, A includes B and has some additional features not present in B. As a result, the greatest concept that can be thought of, or St. Anselm's God, must include all the other concepts and several additional features not present in any one of them. Put differently, the meaning of God includes all entities – the thinkable concepts as well as the existing entities that are also conceptualized in the human cognition. In fact, this is the pantheistic view of Spinoza, who argued in his book *Ethics* (Spinoza, 2000) that "everything is in God" (part 1, theorem 15).

It should be noted that this meaning of God is tightly bound to human knowledge. For example, in the era of Anselm, electro-magnetic waves, elementary particles like the electron or the quark, and numerous other technologies were not known, so the God of Anselm did not include them. Hence Anselm's meaning of God evolves with time – a result quite unacceptable for existing religions. Moreover, what will happen if the human race were to become extinct? In this unfortunate era there will be no thinkable entity, so according to Anselm, God will cease to exist. Anselm could argue against this criticism by saying that God includes all human thinkable entities in the past and future. Furthermore, God's unity is ontologically prior to the plurality of entities that emerge from His being. However, this approach raises several insurmountable problems, including the emergence of plurality from the divine unity. We shall deal with this problem in Chapter 14.

Moreover, we also believe that this meaning of God, which we will return to later, is empty of any content in the sense that it does not add anything to our consciousness or to our experience. After all, what is the point of grouping all the concepts and entities that exist in reality into a group and calling it "God"? What reason is sufficient for upholding this grouping? Suppose we decided to group all vegetables and animals into one group that I called "Vegmal" – in what way would such a grouping enrich or refine our

knowledge? In physics, chemistry or biology, a grouping serves as a means of classification, which in turn helps in devising theories in these fields. What is the point of grouping all entities of all levels of existence under the wings of one concept?

These and other questions and criticisms against the logical ontological argument motivated us to look for a different meaning of "God" that, on the one hand, can enhance our understanding of all experience levels, including the objective universe and human cognition, and on the other hand, would allow us to attribute to this concept existence independent of human cognition. But before elaborating on this discussion, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the term "existence" in its widest context.

CHAPTER 3

THOMAS AQUINAS' ARGUMENTS

Viewing reality through the prism of causality raises complex questions. An interesting one is: is there a first link in the chain of causality from which stems the current situation in the world, as the three monotheistic religions claim? Perhaps Aristotle was right in arguing that since the universe always existed, the chain of causation is infinite. This Aristotelian view was upheld by many philosophers for thousands of years. In contrast, the theistic view, described in the first chapter in the book of Genesis, holds that God who created the world is the "first cause", and all the events that happened after creation emerged from Him. The question of "What was the cause of God's existence" is answered thus: the existence of God does not need any cause because the very existence and meaning of causation in the world of phenomena emerge from Him. Therefore, it can be said, at least intuitively, that God is the cause of Himself (*causa sui*).

This idea stands in one of the most famous proofs for the existence of God given by Thomas Aquinas. In his book *Summa Theologica* (Aquinas, 1947) he suggested several ways to justify the existence of God that have been the focus of debate since his era up to our days. The "first way" is argued as follows:

It is clear that our senses perceive objects that are in motion. But what moves is driven by something else. If this "mover" cannot move itself, it also needs to be driven by something else, and so on. But this process cannot go on indefinitely. Therefore, there must exist a first mover that is not moved by any other entity. This unmoving mover is grasped as God.

The logical format of this argument is therefore:

1. All moving bodies are driven by something else.
2. Infinite regression to the past is not possible.
3. Therefore, there must exist a primary mover which is not moved by something else. This primary mover is understood as God.

There are several problematic points in this proof, but due to the limited scope of this discussion we cannot deal with them all in depth. The first problem refers to premise 1. It is well known that according to the law of inertia in Newtonian mechanics, a body's movement in a straight line and its constant speed does not need external force, or a mover, so premise 1 is not true. Furthermore, the distinction between a body at rest and a moving body in the conditions specified above is not possible unless one specifies the frame of the observer. However, this flaw can be corrected by changing statement 1 as follows:

1*. Every body moving with acceleration, i.e. with varying speed, or not in a straight line, is moved by something else.

This change does not impair the proof of Aquinas and is consistent with the second law of Newton.

Premise 2 in Aquinas' proof is much more problematic. Why is infinite regression to the past not possible? This question also arises in the "second way" to justify the existence of God suggested in Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, which can be seen as parallel to the "first way". The steps of this proof are:

4. Every phenomenon has one cause or several causes.

5. Infinite regression to the past is not possible.

6. Therefore there must exist a first cause from which everything emerged.

What is the justification for premise 5? Aquinas commentators believe that he was not opposed to an infinite chain of causes and effects, but he referred in premise 5 to a special type of causality. These researchers believe that in his writings, Aquinas makes a distinction between two types of causality which they call linear and hierarchical causality. Linear causality means that if A is the cause for B then B may continue to exist when A ceases to exist after causing B. For example, if the cause for the road being wet is the rain, the road remains wet after the rain stops. Also, my parents were the cause for my existence but they do not exist now. However, in hierarchical causality, if A is the cause for B then B exists only as long as A exists, namely, B disappears when A ceases to exist. For example, if the cause for the movement of a body of iron on a table is a magnet under the table, the body's movement stops a very short while after the magnet is removed. These researchers argue that in premise 5, Aquinas referred to hierarchical causality. Aquinas believed, although he did not provide an explanation for

this belief, that since at this moment the reality does not include an infinite number of entities, there could not be an infinite chain of hierarchical causality. Put differently, if an infinite chain of hierarchical causality existed in the past, then the infinite number of entities constituting the causes of the events in the chain should still exist. Therefore, such an infinite causal chain is impossible, so premise 5 is valid.

However, even if we agree to accept the "second way" according to the mentioned interpretation, we can still claim that premise 6 does not result from premises 4 and 5, since there may exist several initial causes from which everything emerged. The belief that there is only one primary cause is associated with striving to get the simplest explanation to the phenomena in the world. If we assume the existence of several primary causes then several questions arise: how many of these causes exist? How are they determined? As we have seen in the previous chapter, the desire for a monistic explanation is age-old in science and philosophy.

The distinction between linear and hierarchical causality is used also in the "third way" suggested by Aquinas for proving God's existence. In this way, Aquinas followed Anselm's distinction between necessary and contingent entities (see Chapter 2). As mentioned there, the existence of contingent entities depends on the existence of other beings, and therefore these entities are transient – they are created and annihilated. In contrast, the necessary entities' existence is not dependent on the existence of other entities. In the "third way", described in *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas is trying to prove that there must exist a primary necessary entity from which everything else emerged, recognized by the believers as God.

Plantinga presented the logical pattern of this "third way" to prove God's existence as follows (Plantinga, 1967):

7. Suppose that there now exist only contingent entities.

8. What cannot exist at a particular time ceases to exist.

9. Therefore, if all entities were contingent, then at a certain time, T, nothing existed.

10. The cause for something that begins to exist is something that already exists.

11. Thus, as of time T onward, nothing existed, so now there is nothing that exists.

12. We have reached a contradiction, and therefore premise 7 is false, namely, there now exist necessary entities.

13. Every necessary entity stems (logically) from another necessary entity or from itself.

14. There could not exist in the past an infinite series of necessary entities. If that was the case then the world would now contain infinite necessary entities.

15. Thus there is a necessary entity containing its necessity. This is the entity understood by the believers as God.

Aquinas was aware that claim 9 is problematic because it is not clear why all the contingent entities will be annihilated at the same time. In other words, the probability that all the contingent entities will cease to exist at exactly the same time is extremely tiny. But if we assume infinite time duration in the past, every event, even if the probability of its appearance is very tiny, will be realized at a certain time. At this time, all contingent entities will cease to exist.

Yet, claim 13 still requires clarification: how can we interpret that a necessary entity, B, emerges from another necessary entity, A? Does A logically imply B? The answer is negative, because according to logic the proposition "A implies B" is true when A is false. However, if A is a necessary entity, the proposition "A is false" would not be valid. In other words, if entity B is necessary the proposition "B exists" is indisputably true, and there is no need to derive it from another proposition A. Hence the proposition "A implies B" is worthless because ontologically the necessary existence of B cannot occur because another entity exists. The conclusion from this discussion is therefore that it is impossible for a relation of logical implication to exist between two necessary entities.

The arguments discussed in the "third way" lead then to the following conclusion, which is also supported by modern physics: the plurality of contingent entities in our universe, which are created and annihilated, must stem from several necessary entities whose existence is not dependent on anything else. However, Aquinas fails to show why there exists only one necessary entity from which everything else emerged, because he does not suggest any meaning of emergence relation between two necessary entities that is immune from criticism. Furthermore, the idea that the primary necessary entity includes its own cause of existence is very problematic because it raises several difficult questions, for example: what is the reason

for the existence of the primary necessary entities? How did the other necessary entities emerge from it?

Against this criticism it can be argued that, since a necessary entity is eternal, because it is not created or annihilated, the concept of causality cannot be attributed to it.

This discussion leads to the fundamental question: what is the source of our faith in the principle of causality? Resolving this question, which runs through the chronicles of philosophy, will help to further substantiate the idea that the existence of a necessary entity does not emerge from any cause.

Modern physics explains causality in terms of the forces between the bodies and particles in the universe. This view was one of the most important results of Newton's mechanics, developed in the 17th century. Until then the dominating paradigm was the Aristotelian theory that stated four causes for the existence of an entity. One of these causes was the final cause. Aristotle believed that the existence of every entity in the world must have a purpose for which it was created, and it would aspire to fulfill this purpose if no constraints were exerted on it. For example, he argued that each of the four elements believed to exist at this time – air, water, fire and earth – had a clear purpose. Fire goes up and earth falls down. His prediction was therefore that heavy bodies will fall down faster than lighter bodies. It is possible that Aristotle came to that belief about the final cause owing to his investigations in biology and botany. But Galileo’s experiments refuted Aristotle's prediction regarding falling bodies. He showed that a heavy body and a light body, falling simultaneously to the ground from the same height, reached the ground at the same time. Newtonian mechanics, based on the works of Galileo, Kepler and others, changed the direction of causality from the future into the past and the present. According to this theory, the behavior of any physical system is determined solely by the sum of the forces and moments acting on it. Therefore, to investigate the principle of causality, we need to explore the fundamental forces in the universe including their characterizations and sources.

Modern physics believes in the existence of four fundamental forces (interactions) – gravity, electromagnetism, strong force, and weak force. The two first forces operate in the macroscopic world and thus are known in everyday life. For example, the force of gravity is displayed in the motion of the moon, the planets and other celestial bodies. Electromagnetic force determines chemical processes related to the creation and decomposition of chemical compounds, and properties of chemical elements and their