Benedikt Paul Göcke
Ruhr-Universität Bochum
Benedikt.Goecke@rub.de

THE ORIGIN OF ORIGINS
A METAPHYSICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD IN THE TRADITION OF *DE ENTE ET ESSENTIA*

> Creationem esse non tantum fides tenet, sed etiam ratio demonstrat.
> (Not only does faith maintain that creation exists, but reason also demonstrates it.)
>
> (Thomas Aquinas)

Abstract: *In current theology the possibility of conclusive arguments for the existence of God is largely rejected by reference to Hume or Kant. Purportedly post-metaphysical surrogates are put in place of a metaphysically founded theology, where either the existence of God may be believed in only as a rational possibility, or else a radical constructivism about the existence of God is fallen into. Nevertheless, in the following, a conclusive metaphysical argument for the existence of God in the tradition of scholastic metaphysics is formulated. It is shown that theological talk of creatio ex nihilo is only the other side of this metaphysical argument: Whoever accepts creatio ex nihilo cannot consistently deny the soundness of the argument.*[1]

Keywords: *The existence of God, de ente et essentia, creatio ex nihilo, metaphysically founded theology*

1. The Essences of Things are Abstract Entities

The metaphysical argument for the existence of God has four parts. The first part of the argument may be formulated as follows:

1) I can understand what kind of thing, a thing would be if it existed.
2) If I can understand what kind of thing, a thing would be if it existed then, regardless of whether it existed, I can understand what the essence of such a thing is.

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[1] I have already argued in Göcke (2021a) for the thesis that sound arguments for the existence of God are possible. I have already analyzed the general structure of philosophical arguments for the existence of God in Göcke (2020a) and Göcke (2013). That theology is necessarily a metaphysical discipline, since its primary object – God – is a metaphysical entity, I have shown in Göcke (2019) and Göcke (2021b). The present article may be understood as a continuation of Göcke (2022).

3) I can understand the essence of such a thing, whether or not it exists, only if there is the essence of such a thing, whether or not it exists.

4) If there is the essence of such a thing, regardless of whether it exists, then if it is possible for two different cognitive subjects to understand what the essence of such a thing is, then the essence of a thing is not a subjective construct.

5) It is possible for two different cognitive subjects to understand what the essence of a thing is.

6) The essence of a thing is not a subjective construct.

7) If the essence of a thing is not a subjective construct, then it is either an intersubjective construct or an abstract entity.

8) The essence of a thing is either an intersubjective construct or an abstract entity.

9) If the essence of a thing is an intersubjective construct, then if there are no intersubjective constructs, then there are no essences of things.

10) It is not the case that: if there are no intersubjective constructs, then there are no essences of things.

11) It is not the case that: the essence of a thing is an intersubjective construct.

So:

12) The essence of a thing is an abstract entity.

In propositional logic, the argument has the following form:

1) A Premise 1
2) $A \supset B$ Premise 2
3) $B \supset C$ Premise 3
4) $C \supset (D \supset E)$ Premise 4
5) D Premise 5
6) E Premise 6, follows from premisses 1 to 5.
7) $E \supset (F \vee G)$ Premise 7
8) $F \vee G$ Premise 8, follows by MP ((6)/(7))
9) $F \supset (H \supset I)$ Premise 9
10) $\neg (H \supset I)$ Premise 10
11) $\neg F$ Premise 11.

Therefore:

12) G Follows from premises 1 to 11.

Because it cannot be the case that the premises (1) – (11) are true, and the conclusion (12) is false, the argument is deductively valid. Furthermore, if the premises are true, then the argument is a deductively sound argument, which implies the truth of the conclusion.

Premise (1) is true because its negation states that it is not the case that I can understand what kind of thing, a thing would be if it existed. So the negation of (1) not only implies that I cannot understand what a Tyrannosaurus Rex or a unicorn would be, respectively, if a Tyrannosaurus Rex or a unicorn existed, but also that I cannot understand what a Higgs boson, a horse, or an electron is, as it presupposes that I can understand what kind of thing a Higgs boson, a horse, or an electron, if any such thing existed, would be. But since I can understand what a Tyrannosaurus Rex, a unicorn, a Higgs boson, a horse or an electron is, regardless of their existence, the negation of premise (1) must be rejected.

Premise (2) is conceptually true, because the concept of essence denotes only the kind to which a thing would belong, if it existed. The wholeness of a thing is its essence: As Thomas Aquinas says in *de ente et essentia* [14]: „Ex his enim que dicta sunt patet quod essentia est illud quod per diffinitionem rei significatur."[2]

Premise (3) is true because it is an ontological implication of premises (1) – (2): It is only possible that I can understand the essence of a thing, whether or not it exists, if the essence of a thing, regardless of whether it exists, exists [$\neg\Diamond(K_s e \wedge \neg\exists x\ (x=e)$)]. If the essence of a thing that does not exist did not exist independently of the existence of that thing, then the existence of the essence of a thing would necessarily be tied to the existence of a thing with that essence. In that case, I could only understand the essences of things that exist. But, because I can not only understand the essences of things that no

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2   See: Kerr (2018: 40): "Essence is thus the principle of knowability of a thing insofar as it permits us to recognise the thing as one type of thing rather than another." This understanding of the essence of a thing goes back to the Aristotelian concept of *to ti en einai*, See: also *Metaphysics* Z, 4. In the Thomistic work, especially clearly in *de ente et essentia*, the concept of essence can be understood as follows: "Essence, then, is a principle of a finite being such that it is a necessary though not sufficient condition for the existence of such a being. Essence, then, is that through which and in which a thing has *esse*. Aquinas accordingly holds that beings are things that have essences such that beings are the type of things they are on account of the essences that they have" (Kerr (2015: 37). See also Kerr (2018: 38): „[E]ssence for Aquinas is the principle by means of which a concrete thing is the type of thing that it is and no other. It follows, then, that the essence of a thing is signified by its definition indicating what (*quid*) the thing in question is. And thus essence has commonly been taken to be synonymous with quiddity." John Locke understood the essence of a thing as follows: „[It is] the very being of any thing, whereby it is, what it is." (Locke 1975, III, III, 15). That I can understand what the essence of a thing is if it existed does not imply that I have complete knowledge of that essence *per se*, but that I can understand essential features of that essence. The fact that I can understand the essence of a thing also does not imply that errors are excluded, and that in the further course of scientific research I could not arrive at revised findings of the essence of a thing: *Nihil in intellectu nisi prius in sensu*. But it does not follow from this that it is wrong that I can understand what the essence of a thing is if it existed. Those who wish can read the argument in relation to electrons, which have a scientifically well-defined essence: We understand what an electron would be by its nature if it existed.

longer exist – I understand what a Tyrannosaurus Rex would be like if it existed – but I can also understand the essences of things that have never existed, I understand what a unicorn would be like if it existed. The negation of premise (3) is therefore false.[3]

Premise (4) is true: Although there is the essence of a thing independent of the existence of such a thing, it could be the case that the essence of such a thing only exists in the form of a subjective construct of my consciousness. If this were true then, because the contents of my consciousness are necessarily only accessible to me, there would be exactly one person who would have access to the essence of such a thing, understood as a subjective construct: *viz* me. So if it is possible that at least two different cognitive subjects can understand one and the same essence of a thing, if it is therefore possible that at least two cognitive subjects can understand what kind of thing something would be if it existed, then the essence of such a thing cannot be a subjective construct of my consciousness.[4]

Premise (5) is true: The negation of premise (5) says that it is not possible that there could be at least two cognitive subjects who could understand one and the same essence of a thing, if it existed. The negation of premise (5) thus implies that intersubjective communication about one and the same essence of a thing is impossible, since each participant in the discourse could only refer to his own subjective construct which, by definition, is distinct from the subjective constructs of the other participants in the discourse: It would not be a common topic of conversation. If it were not possible for at least two cognitive subjects to understand the essence of a thing, then we would not be able to understand what other people are trying to express when they say what the essence of a thing would be if it existed. Since such successful human communication is possible – a successful conversation, for example, about what a Tyrannosaurus Rex or a Higgs boson are according to their type is possible – premise (5) is true.

The truth of premise (6) follows from the truth of premises (1) – (5).

Premise (7) is true: It names the two plausible ways of understanding the specific form of the existence of essences of things, when they are not subjective constructs: On the one hand, they could be intersubjective constructs and, on the other hand, they could be abstract entities. There do not seem to be any further options.[5]

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3   Our understanding of essences is therfore akin to our understanding of general concepts. See: Künne (2009: 47): „To possess the concept of (an) F is to be able to think of something as being, or as not being (an) F."

4   For further critique of constructivism, see: Boghossian (2013).

5   That that which is initially referred to as an abstract entity could be determined, in the Augustinian sense, in the course of its further ontological determination, as the idea of God, or part of the essence of God, is not excluded at this point, but cannot be called an option, because the existence of God has not yet been proven. The conclusiveness of the argument remains unaffected and the concept of the abstract entity could be

The truth of premise (8) follows validly by propositional calculus from the truth of premises (1) – (7).

Premise (9) is true: It merely explicates the logical implication that would result if it were true that the essences of things are intersubjective constructs: If an intersubjective construct in one form or another presupposes the existence of rational language users, then there could be no essences of things if there were no rational language-users.

Premise (10) is true: Although there are social constructs that would not exist without the existence of humans, it is not the case that if humans did not exist, there would be no essences of things.[6] First, convincing abductive arguments speak for the truth of the thesis that there existed things that had a certain essence long before humans existed: the sun of our planetary system, for example, i.e. that thing to which we refer when we speak of the sun of our planetary system. According to our best scientific theories the sun existed when humans did not exist, and would have existed had no humans developed, as was possible at that time.[7] So there are essences of things that are not intersubjective constructs. Second, performative philosophical arguments speak in favor of the truth of the thesis that there must be things that have a certain essence, independently of intersubjective constructional

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replaced by the concept of an entity independent of human consciousness. The question of the ontological status of the essences of things is also known as the universal dispute and, in the case of the Augustinian option, amounts to a scholastic realism. See: Feser (2017: 102): "Scholastic realism affirms that universals exist only either in the things that instantiate them, or in intellects which entertain them. It agrees that there is no Platonic 'third realm' independent both of the material world and of all intellects. However, the Scholastic realist agrees with the Platonist that there must be some realm distinct both from the material world and from human and other finite intellects. In particular – and endorsing a thesis famously associated with Saint Augustine – it holds that universals, propositions, mathematical and logical truths, and necessities and possibilities exist in an *infinite*, *eternal*, *divine* intellect."

6 This is the thesis of metaphysical realism. See: Lowe (2008: 9): "Metaphysical realism is the view that most of the objects that populate the world exist independently of our thought and have their natures independently of how, if at all, we conceive of them." See also Alston (2002: 97–98): "[T]he kind of metaphysical realism being considered here [...] is opposed to the view that whatever there is, is constituted, at least in part, by our cognitive relations thereto, by the ways we conceptualize it or construe it, by the language we use to talk about it or the conceptual scheme(s) we use to think of it." See also Miller (2002: 13): [Metaphysical realism is the view] that the reality of the external world of concrete objects, and the truth about such reality, are what they are independently of our cognition of them. They are what they are independently of human beliefs, conceptualizations, descriptions, sentences, perceptions, conventions, languages, and so on." See Göcke (2020c) for further arguments for why theology is committed to metaphysical realism.

7 For example Nolt (2004: 71–72) argues for this thesis: „(1) The cosmos existed and had structure before we existed and (2) During some of this time, it was possible that we would never exist. From these premises it follows that (3) The cosmos has structure that would have existed even if we never had. Therefore (4) The cosmos has structure that is independent of our cognition – i.e., intrinsic structure."

achievements. Even the intersubjective constructivist, if he wishes to eschew solipsism, must presuppose that there exist, independently of him, things with certain essences which must logically precede the processes of intersubjective construction, *viz*: rational language users. Anyone who denies this and wishes to avoid solipsism must argue that rational language users have like Münchhausen, constructed themselves into being as a linguistic community, out of nothing, before they could agree on intersubjective constructs, which is simply absurd, because it is contradictory.[8]

The truth of premise (11) follows soundly from the truth of premises (1) – (10).

The truth of the conclusion (12) in turn follows validly by propositional calculus from the truth of the premises (1) – (11), by which is proven: The essence of a thing is an abstract entity.

2. The Cause of the Existence of a Thing is an already existing Thing

The second part of the argument assumes the conclusion of the first part of the argument as true, and may be formulated as an argument in propositional logic, as follows:

1) The essence of a thing is an abstract entity.
2) If the essence of a thing is an abstract entity, then the existence of a thing is something added to its essence.
3) If the existence of a thing is something added to its essence, then there is a cause for the essence of an existing thing having existence.
4) If there is a cause for the essence of an existing thing having existence, then the cause of the existence of that thing is either the essence of that thing itself, or the essence of another thing, or a pre-existing thing.
5) If the cause of the existence of this thing is the essence of this thing itself, or the essence of another thing, then it is possible that abstract entities are causally efficacious.
6) It is not possible that abstract entities are causally efficacious.

So:

7) The cause of the existence of a thing is a pre-existing thing.

In propositional calculus, the argument has the following form:

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8   As Cramer (2010: 27) formulates it: „For that which has experiences cannot be an experience that is had. The subject that has experiences, perception and thinking, that which perceives and thinks, is an existence (*Dasein*) in the sense in which pre-Kantian metaphysics meant an existence (*Dasein*), or existence (*Existenz*), when it assumed that something existed in the cosmological proof."

1) G   Premise 1/logical consequence of Part 1.
2) G ⊃ J   Premise 2
3) J ⊃ K   Premise 3
4) K ⊃ (L ∨ M)   Premise 4
5) L ⊃ N   Premise 5
6) ¬N   Premise 6

Therefore:

7) M   Conclusion, follows from premisses 1 to 6

The argument is deductively valid: The negation of the conclusion (7) leads to a logical contradiction. So, if the premises are true then, necessarily, the conclusion is also true.

The truth of premise (1) was justified in the first part of the argument.

Premise (2) is true: If the essence of a thing is an abstract entity that exists regardless of whether there is such a thing, then, if there is an ontological difference between the existence of a thing with a certain essence and the existence of the essence of that thing, the existence of a thing must be something that is ontologically added to its essence. There is a difference between the existence of a thing and the existence of its essence: For example, only existing things can be causally effective, and may be grasped with the five senses. Only an existing Tyrannosaurus Rex, not its essence, can eat me or be watched by me. Only an existing Higgs boson, but not its essence, can in principle be proven experimentally. Hence it follows that the existence of a thing must be something ontologically added to its essence. As Thomas Aquinas puts it in *de ente et essentia* [94ff]:

Quicquid enim non est de intellectu essentie vel quiditatis, hoc est adveniens extra faciens compositionem cum essentia, quia nulla essentia sine hiis que sunt partes essentie intelligi potest. Omnis autem essentia vel quiditas potest intelligi sine hoc quod aliquid intelligatur de esse suo: possum enim intelligere quid est homo vel fenix et tamen ignorare an esse habeat in rerum natura, ergo patet quod esse est aliud ab essentia vel quiditas sit ipsum suum esse.[9]

Premise (3) is true if the Principle of Sufficient Reason is assumed, since premise (3) is an application of the Principle of Sufficient Reason.[10]

The Principle of Sufficient Reason has an ontological and an epistemological component. The ontological component says that there is

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9   See Feser (2017: 118): "[T]he existence of the creatures that do exist must be really distinct from their essences, otherwise one *could* know of their existence merely from knowing their essences." Although the existence of a thing is something added to its essence, and in this sense there is an ontological distinction between the existence of a thing and the existence of its essence, the existence of an existing thing in the act of its existence is nothing separable from its essence in the sense of: It is not a preexisting thing to which an essence is assigned.

10 For further analysis of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, see: Pruss (2011).

a reason for everything that happens. The epistemological component says that whoever can understand that reason is able to understand why what is happening is happening. With regard to the existence of a thing, the Principle of Sufficient Reason in its entirety states that if a thing exists, there is a cause for its existence that enables those who can understand those causes to understand why the existing thing exists. Anyone who denies the Principle of Sufficient Reason claims that there can exist things whose existence has no cause. The intelligibility of our understanding of reality excludes the existence of things whose existence has no cause. The Principle of Sufficient Reason is a basic axiom of our rational understanding of reality and constitutive of the scientific development of reality. It follows that the denial of the Principle of Sufficient Reason goes hand in hand with denial of the intelligibility of reality and the possibility of scientific development. Premise (3) can only be negated by those who are willing to give up the intelligibility of reality and the possibility of its scientific development.[11]

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11   See: Hermanni (2017: 295): „The principle of sufficient reason seems to be a fundamental principle of our use of reason, a principle which assumes the continuous recognizability of the real, and is therefore the 'basis of all science'. But does it also have objective validity? Since it has proven itself in all previous cases, one may assume so with some justification." See: also Göcke (2020b) for an analysis of the Principle of Sufficient Reason in the work of Karl Christian Friedrich Krause and Arthur Schopenhauer: Krause argued that the Principle of Sufficient Reason itself needs a ground, and this ground can only be God himself. See: Krause (1869: 259): „Now, however, the Principle of Sufficient Reason and the Principle itself are definitely finite [...], consequently, even with regard to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, this principle must also be applied to itself: It must be asked about the reason for the Reason, about the why of the why, about the way through the through (*dem Durch des Durch*)." See: also Krause (1869: 300): „As soon as the finite spirit got there, the thought: essence or God (*Wesen oder Gott*) would become recognized as the fundamental truth, and then the thought: reason, and likewise the thought of the reason for reason; In this way the general validity of the Principle of Sufficient Reason would also become recognizable to it. Because essence (*Wesen*) is thought as being everything by and in itself (*als alles an und in sich seiend*), it is just thought of as the ground of everything. Consequently, the Principle of Sufficient Reason applies to everything finite, and it is therefore the basic thought: being or God (*Wesen oder Gott*). Also, at the same time, [it is] the ground of the authority of the general applicability of the Principle of Sufficient Reason to everything finite, according to any essence (*Wesenheit*), in any respect. Cramer argues in a similar way (2017: 53): „The fact that one has to go over from reason to reason (*von Grund zu Grund*) is to say the Principle of Sufficient Reason is in itself already related to the reason with no reason (*dem grundlosen Grund*). The Principle of Sufficient Reason is in the reason with no reason from the beginning. The cosmological proof is therefore not conclusive. It does not start from conditioned existence and first concludes unconditional existence. But that which makes it necessary to relate contingent existence to a ground of its existence is the groundless." If this is accepted, if God is therefore the *ratio essendi* of all things, and so also of all principles of knowledge, then every *ratio cognoscendi* of the existence of God, which is based on the Principle of Sufficient Reason presupposes the existence of God and is, *sensu strictu*, circular. Krause accepted this and saw the function of proofs of God as didactic and anamnetic. See Göcke (2012) for a further analysis of this position, which

Premise (4) is true because it only specifies what the cause of the existence of a thing could be: either the essence of this thing itself, the essence of another thing, or a pre-existing thing. As Thomas Aquinas says in *de ente et essentia* [127]: "Omne autem quod convenit alicui vel est causatum ex principiis naturae sue, sicut risibile in homine; vel advenit ab aliquo principio extrinseco, sicut lumen in aere ex influentia solis.

Premise (5) is true: Because the essences of things are abstract entities, abstract entities must be able to be causally efficacious, if there is any question of their being causes of the existence of a thing.

Premise (6) is true: It is ruled out that abstract entities are causally efficacious. Abstract entities, like the number 3, cannot by themselves have any causal influence on reality. Since the essences of things are abstract entities, it follows that no essence of a thing, *qua* essence, can add existence to a thing by itself. A thing would have to already exist in order to add existence to its essence, which is a contradiction and therefore ruled out as a possibility. As Thomas Aquinas put it in *de ente et essentia* [131f]:

> Non autem potest esse quod ipsum esse sit causatum ab ipsa forma vel quiditate rei, dico sicut a causa efficiente, quia sic aliqua res esset sui ipsius causa et aliqua res se ipsam in esse produceret: quod est impossibile. Ergo oportet quod omnis talis res cuius esse est aliud quam natura sua habeat esse ab alio.

Because the truth of the conclusion is implied by the truth of premises (1) – (6), and the truth of the premises has been demonstrated, it follows that it is true that the cause of the existence of a thing is a pre-existing thing.

3. There is a Thing whose Existence is Identical to its Essence

The third part of the argument assumes the truth of the conclusion of the second part, and may be formulated as follows:

1) The cause of the existence of a thing is a pre-existing thing.
2) If the cause of the existence of that thing is a pre-existing thing, then that cause is either a pre-existing thing, the existence of the essence of which is itself an additional thing, or a pre-existing thing, the essence of which is identical to its existence.
3) If the cause is a pre-existing thing, the existence of which is itself something additional to its essence, then there is either an infinite hierarchical series of causes of existence, or this cause is a pre-existing thing, the essence of which is identical to its existence.

will not be pursued further in the following, since it does not affect the soundess of the argument. From a Krausist point of view, it only leads to a hermeneutical re-regulation of the systematic position of the argument in the overall system of philosophy.

4) It is not the case that there is an infinite hierarchically ordered series of causes of existence.

5) The cause of the existence of a thing is a pre-existing thing, the essence of which is identical to its existence.

6) If the cause of a thing's existence is a pre-existing thing whose essence is identical to its existence, then there is a pre-existing thing whose existence is identical to its essence.

So:

7) There is a pre-existing thing whose existence is identical to its essence.

The argument has the following form in propositional logic:

1) M   Premise 1, conclusion of the second part
2) M ⊃ (O ∨ P)   Premise 2
3) O ⊃ (Q ∨ P)   Premise 3
4) ¬ Q   Premise 4
5) P   Premise 5
6) P ⊃ T   Premise 6

Also:

7) T   Conclusion, follows from premisses 1 to 6.

As this argument is also valid from the point of view of propositional calculus, the truth of the premises is also decisive here.

Premise (1) is true, as the second part of the argument has shown.

Premise (2) is also true: Logically there are only two possibilities: Either the existence of a pre-existing thing is something additional to its essence, or it is not the case that the existence of a pre-existing thing is something additional to its essence.[12]

If the cause of the existence of a thing is a pre-existing thing, then that thing is either one such that its existence is ontologically something additional to its essence, or it is a pre-existing thing whose existence does not add to its essence, which means that its essence is identical with its existence: If there is an existing thing the existence of which is nothing additional to its essence, then this thing must be such that its existence is identical with its essence. It would have to exist from out of itself and thus be pure being (pure existence) in the full sense of the word: *actus purus*, *esse ipse subsistens* and *esse tantum*.[13]

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12 It comes into question why a thing exists in the here and now. See Feser 2017: 26): "[W]hat makes it true that the coffee exists *here* and *now*, and at any particular moment that it exists? What *keeps* it in existence?"

13 See Feser (2017: 119): "If existence were just part of what it is, then it would not need something else to cause it, and there would not be anything in it that could give it the potential to go out of existence."

Premise (3) is true: If the cause is an already existing thing, then there are only the two possibilities mentioned in premise (2): If the cause is a thing whose existence is something additional to its essence, then there is either for any cause whose existence is not identical to its essence, another pre-existing cause that causes its existence, or there is a cause whose existence is identical to its essence. If we hypothetically rule out the case that there is a cause whose existence is identical to its essence, the following case arises: If for every pre-existing thing whose existence is something to be added to its essence, there is another pre-existing thing that causes the existence of the thing that is dependent on it, then there is an infinite hierarchical series of causes of existence. The series of causes is (countably) infinite, since for every existing thing there is an existing thing that causes its existence. The series of causes is ordered hierarchically, since the existence of a thing x depends on the existence of a thing y which causes the existence of x, the existence of which in turn depends on a thing z which causes the existence of y and already exists, etc. So if z did not exist, then y would not be able to exist and therefore x would not be able to exist. The only alternative to this infinite hierarchically ordered series of causes of existence is given by the existence of a thing whose existence is identical to its essence, which therefore does not need a cause for its existence, since the question cannot be posed.[14]

Premise (4) is true: It is not the case that there can be an infinite hierarchically ordered series of causes of existence. Therefore there is no infinite hierarchically ordered series of causes of existence. First: An infinite hierarchically ordered series of causes of existence is not possible, because for every existing thing chosen arbitrarily in this series it would be true that it is not the case that it can cause the existence of a thing hierarchically subordinate to it, since every one of those existing things would have to rely for their existence on an already existing thing superior to it. It would therefore apply to all existing things of the infinite hierarchically ordered series of causes of existence that they cannot by themselves cause the existence of the things that are hierarchically subordinate to them, since they are dependent on receiving their existence from an already existing thing above them. The question now is: Can there be such an infinite hierarchically ordered series if every thing in this series receives its existence from another thing? i.e: There is no existing thing that can cause the existence of a thing without it already having received

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14   See also Feser (2017. 23): "[T]he idea of a hierarchical series is best introduced by thinking in terms of a sequence whose members exist all together at a single moment of time, such as the cup which is held up by the desk which is help up by the floor. So, when it is said that such a series must have a first member, the claim is *not* that the series has to be traced back to some beginning point in the past (as the Big Bang, say). The idea is rather this. Since the desk, the floor, and the foundation have no power of their own to hold the cup aloft, the series could not exist in the first place unless there were something that *did* have the power to hold up these intermediaries, and the cup with them, *without* having to be held up *itself*."

it from another thing. This cannot be, since there is nothing that could first and foremost lend existence to such a series: Where is the existence of things that constitutes this series supposed to come from, if there is nothing that can give existence to a thing from itself? For logical reasons, there cannot be an infinite hierarchically ordered series of causes of existence, since it simply cannot *have* any existence. On the one hand, it would be as paradoxical as the assumption that there could be an infinite row of mirrors that are set up in such a way that each mirror reflects a beam of light exactly to a downstream mirror, but that there would be no light source that even emits a beam of light and can send it to a mirror. Or it would be as paradoxical as, on the other hand, the assumption that an infinite number of people could play „silent mail" so that every person passes on the word they have heard to the next person, even though there was never a person who was even given a word in the round.[15]

The truth of premise (5) follows conclusively from the truth of premises (1) – (4).

Premise (6) is true because it expresses only an ontological implication of premise (6): Something whose existence is identical to its essence can only then be the cause of the existence of a thing whose existence is something additional to its essence, if it exists.

The logical conclusion (7) follows: There is an already existing thing, the existence of which is identical to its essence.

4. God Exists

The fourth and last part of the argument assumes the conclusions of the previous arguments:

1) There is a pre-existing thing whose existence is identical to its essence.

2) If there is a pre-existing thing whose existence is identical to its essence, then there is exactly one thing whose existence is identical to its essence.

3) If there is exactly one thing whose existence is identical to its essence, then God exists.

15　See also Hermanni (2017: 293): „Varying a thought experiment by Hume, suppose that books reproduce like organisms, so that each book is conceived by another, and that the series of books therefore goes back to infinity. Also, suppose for a moment that the existence of each book is adequately explained by reference to the procreative activity of another. Although in this case one would have a sufficient explanation for the existence of each individual book, this would in no way explain the existence of the book series. Because since the explanation of an individual book would always refer to the existence of another book, the sum of the individual explanations would leave the question open, why there are books at all and why, of all things, these strange natural books."

So:

4)   God exists.

The argument has the following form in propositional calculus:

1)   T   Conclusion of part 3, premise 1
2)   T ⊃ R   Premise 2
3)   R ⊃ S   Premise 3

Therefore:

4)   S   Conclusion, follows from premises 1 to 3.

The argument is deductively valid.

The truth of premise (1) has already been shown.

Premise (2) is true: It says that there is exactly one thing whose essence is identical to its existence. While in the case of things that are not identical to their essence, there can be different things with the same essence, there can only be one thing whose essence is identical to its existence. This can be shown by *reductio ad absurdum* of the assumption that there can be more than one thing whose existence is identical to its essence. Let us assume that a and b are each something whose essence is identical to its existence: a is *esse tantum* and b is *esse tantum*, but a is not identical to b. Then, if a and b are not identical, there must be a property F that a has but not b (or vice versa). Let us assume that the reason a and b are different is that a has the property F, but b does not (or vice versa). In this case a is different from b, but at the same time no longer such a thing whose existence is identical with its essence, since in this case it would be a thing whose existence is identical with its essence and would also be F. But this contradicts the assumption that a and b are both *esse tantum*. Hence there can only be exactly one thing whose existence is identical to its essence. So if there is one thing whose essence is identical to its existence, then there is exactly one such a thing.[16]

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16   Thomas Aquinas formulates the argument in *de ente et essentia* [100ff] as follows: „[E]t hec res non potest esse nisi una et prima. quia impossibile est ut fiat plurificatio alicuius nisi per additionem alicuius differentie, sicut multiplicatur natura generis in species; vel per hoc quod forma recipitur in diversis materiis, sicut multiplicatur natura speciei in diversis individuis; vel per hoc quod unum est absolutum et aliud in aliquo receptum, sicut si esset quidam calor separatus, esset alius a calore non separato ex ipsa sua separatione. Si autem ponatur aliqua res, que sit esse tantum ita ut ipsum esse sit subsistens, hoc esse non recipiet additionem differentie, quia iam non esset esse tantum, sed esse et preter hoc forma aliqua; et multo minus reciperet additionem materie, quia iam esset esse non subsistens sed materiale. Unde relinquitur quod talis res que sit suum esse non potest esse nisi una; unde oportet quod in qualibet alia re preter eam aliud sit esse suum et aliud quiditas vel natura seu forma sua." For further arguments that there can only be exactly one thing whose essence is identical with its essence, see: Baldner/ Carroll (1997: 66ff). See: also Feser (2017: 121): "[F]or there to be more than one thing which is *that which just is existence itself*, there would have to be something that made it

Premise (3) may be viewed as a stipulative definition, or a semantic act of baptism, because it only specifies that that whose existence is identical to its essence is called „God". Although it is of a definitional character, there is some evidence in favor of calling the *esse tantum*, the *actus purus* and the *esse ipse subsistens* "God": Traditional theology holds that all things that do not exist in and of themselves, have their being from God. This is traditionally *all* things except God. Since that whose existence is identical with its essence is that from which everything has its being, the name „God" is appropriate.

Because of the truth of the premises (1) – (3), the conclusion follows soundly by propositional logic (4): God exists.

The four-part argument outlined is a sound metaphysical argument for the existence of God. In this sense it is a successful proof of God. Since the argument is deductively valid in toto, whoever wishes to *discredit* this argument must show that the truth of the premises does not follow from their justification. It does not follow from this that the premises are false, but it would be shown that the justification given does not provide sufficient grounds for assuming the truth of the conclusion. Whoever wishes to *refute* this argument, has to show that at least one premise is false. Sufficient reasons for the falsity of at least one premise must therefore be formulated *expressis verbis*.[17]

As demonstrated, the negation of the premises at least *prima* and *secunda facie* has absurd consequences, such as: the fact that we cannot understand

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the case that *this* instance of *that which just is existence itself* differed from that *instance*. And each such instance would, then, not really be *that which just is existence itself* after all, but rather that *that which just is existence itself* PLUS whatever the differentiating feature is. So, there really is no sense to be made of there being more than one of something which *just is* existence itself. And in that case there is no way to make sense of there being more than one of something whose essence and existence are not really distinct."

17 So it is not enough to counter a proof of God with some sweeping judgments, as Wendel (2020: 113) does: "For theoretical reason, knowledge of God is impossible, as it gets entangled in transcendental illusion and speculative dogmatism when it seeks to prove the existence of God, because knowledge of God is beyond the realm of possible experience." Why should that be true? Perhaps there are arguments for the existence of God to which Wendel's dictum applies, but as far as the argument outlined in this article is concerned, it is not true that it is entangled in "transcendental illusion" or "speculative dogmatism". That the existence of God cannot be proven, because God is not an object of possible experience and knowledge can only be obtained from objects of experience, is a mere dictum of Kantian philosophy that has long been rejected in analytical philosophy, and which Kant himself presupposed but did not justify. As Rhonheimer (2020 59) aptly put it: "Kant's Kritk der Metaphysik – his 'Critique of Pure Reason' – is a fascinating, ingeniously constructed attempt to get out of the dead ends of what he called the 'dogmatic' rationalism of German school philosophy and of the skeptical empiricism that flourished in the British Isles, but at the same time a gigantic mistake, because it completely misses its goal of a fundamental critique of metaphysics. Anyone who practices metaphysics in the classical tradition today need not feel affected in any way by Kant's critique of metaphysics, because it simply does not apply to what metaphysics was in the classical tradition and still is today."

what we are talking about when we talk about what kind of thing something would be if it existed; or that there is no essence of things independent of human consciousness; or that contingent things just exist; or that man has constructed himself into being; or that there is an infinite hierarchically ordered causal chain of causes of existence, etc. Therefore: The price for the refutation of the outlined argument for the existence of God, understood as *esse tantum*, seems simply too high for anyone to seriously wish to pay, anyone who would like to proceed on the assumption of the intelligibility of reality.[18]

5. *Creatio ex nihilo* and the Metaphysical Argument for the Existence of God

It is part of the Christian faith to understand God as the free Creator of the world *ex nihilo*.[19]

Before the divine act of creation, therefore, from a Christian point of view, there was nothing but God. The Christian faith thus implies that God did not create (ie *form*) the world from already existing things in the manner of the Platonic Demiurge.[20]

From a Christian point of view, the creation of the world is also not a one-off event in the past: The doctrine of the divine creation of the world *ex nihilo* rather leads to the thesis of *creatio continua*: Because existence is essential to no thing except God, i.e. Nothing but God could exist if God did not give them existence, it follows that the divine creation of the world continues *ex nihilo* as long as there exist things whose existence is not identical with their essence.[21]

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18   As Feser (2017: 15) expresses it: "The real debate is not between atheism and theism. The real debate is between theists of different stripes – Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, purely philosophical theists, and so forth – and begins where natural theology leaves off." See also Göcke (2019) and Göcke (2020a).

19   As it is formulated in the first chapter of *Dei Filius*: „Hic solus verus Deus bonitate sua et omnipotenti virtute non ad augendam suam beatitudinem, nec ad acquirendam, sed ad manifestandam perfectionem suam per bona, quae creaturis impertitur, liberrimo consilio simul ab initio temporis utramque de nihilo condidit creaturam, spiritualem et corporalem, angelicam videlicet et mundanam, ac deinde humanam quasi communem ex spiritu et corpore constitutam."

20   See Murray (2002: 94): "For the Christian, there is a world that exists and is what it is apart from all human conceptual commitments, because this world is created by an act of God. Thus there is a world that is the way it is in part because of the divine creative intentions that the world contain such-and-such kinds and such-and-such substances, simple and composite."

21   See also (Baldner/Carroll 1997: 48) on the Thomist foundations of this thought: "Aquinas spoke about the being of the creature as though it were something quite accidental to the creature, something that must be entirely caused by God. Of its own nature – that is, left completely to itself – the creature is non-being rather than being, and it must

The Christian belief in *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio continuans*, i.e. the belief that God created the world out of nothing and that it is continuously in existence, because no thing except God is essential to existence, is only the other side of the metaphysical argument outlined above for the existence of God. The metaphysical argument developed in the tradition of *de ente et essentia* not only formulates in purely philosophical means what *creatio ex nihilo* means; that things whose essence is not identical with their existence are given existence, but also demonstrates solely through human reason that there is God, understood as *actus purus*, *esse tantum* or *esse ipse*, also that God created the world from nothing and keeps it in being at every moment of its existence. To believe that God created the world from nothing and keeps it in being, every second of its being, is therefore to know that God exists. Christian theology, which continues by proceeding from *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio continuans*, cannot therefore deny the conclusiveness of the Thomistic argument for the existence of God without abandoning itself as a philosophically founded reflection of Christian faith.

Appendix: The Metaphysical Argument for the Existence of God

The metaphysical argument for the existence of God in the tradition of *de ente et essentia* reads, in its entirety, as follows:

a) I can understand what kind of thing a thing would be if it existed.

b) If I can understand what kind of thing a thing would be if it existed, then regardless of whether it existed, I can understand what the essence of such a thing is.

c) I can only understand the essence of such a thing, whether or not it exists, if there is the essence of such a thing, whether or not it exists.

d) If there is the essence of such a thing, regardless of whether it exists, then if it is possible for two different cognitive subjects to understand what the essence of such a thing is, then the essence of a thing is not a subjective construct.

e) It is possible for two different cognitive subjects to understand what the essence of a thing is.

f) The essence of a thing is not a subjective construct.

g) If the essence of a thing is not a subjective construct, then it is either an intersubjective construct or an abstract entity.

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be caused by God continuously lest it return to the non-being which it properly is. It is true to say that the creature is literally nothing without the creative causality of God. Nevertheless, we must remember that the being of creatures, far from being an accident, is the ultimate perfection or actuality of the creature (In 1 Sent. 8.1.3) [...] In giving being to the creature, God does not merely make the creature an extension of Himself; rather He gives the creature an inherent stability in being, i.e., a tendency to exist."

h) The essence of a thing is either an intersubjective construct or an abstract entity.

i) If the essence of a thing is an intersubjective construct, then if there are no intersubjective constructs, then there are no essences of things.

j) It is not the case: if there are no intersubjective constructs, then there are no essences of things.

k) It is not the case that: The essence of a thing is an intersubjective construct.

l) The essence of a thing is an abstract entity.

m) If the essence of a thing is an abstract entity, then the existence of a thing is something added to its essence.

n) If the existence of a thing is something additive to its essence, then there is a cause for the essence of an existing thing to add existence.

o) If there is a cause for the essence of an existing thing to have existence, then the cause of the existence of that thing is either the essence of that thing itself or the essence of another thing or a pre-existing thing.

p) If the cause of the existence of this thing is the essence of that thing itself or the essence of another thing, then it is possible that abstract entities are causally effective.

q) It is not possible for abstract entities to be causally effective.

r) The cause of the existence of this thing is a pre-existing thing.

s) If the cause of the existence of this thing is a pre-existing thing, then that cause is either a pre-existing thing, the existence of which is something additional to its essence, or a pre-existing thing, the essence of which is identical to its existence.

t) If the cause is a pre-existing thing, the existence of which is itself something additional to its essence, then there is either an infinitely hierarchical series of causes of existence, or this cause is a pre-existing thing, the essence of which is identical to its existence.

u) It is not the case that there is an infinite hierarchically ordered series of causes of existence.

v) The cause of a thing's existence is a pre-existing thing, the essence of which is identical to its existence.

w) If a thing's cause of existence is a pre-existing thing whose essence is identical to its existence, then there is a pre-existing thing whose existence is identical to its essence.

x) There is a pre-existing thing whose existence is identical to its essence.

y) If there is one pre-existing thing whose existence is identical to its essence, then there is exactly one thing whose existence is identical to its essence.

z) If there is just one thing whose existence is identical to its essence, then God exists.

So:

aa) God exists.

The argument has the following form in propositional logic:

a) A
b) A ⊃ B
c) B ⊃ C
d) C ⊃ (D ⊃ E)
e) D
f) E
g) E ⊃ (F ∨ G)
h) F ∨ G
i) F ⊃ (H ⊃ I)
j) ¬ (H ⊃ I)
k) ¬ F
l) G
m) G ⊃ J
n) J ⊃ K
o) K ⊃ (L ∨ M)
p) L ⊃ N
q) ¬N
r) M
s) M ⊃ (O ∨ P)
t) O ⊃ (Q ∨ P)
u) ¬ Q
v) P
w) P ⊃ T
x) T
y) T ⊃ R
z) R ⊃ S

Therefore:

aa) S

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