The Semantic Argument and its implications for the likelihood of the Existence of God

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Objective of this lecture

- A *universal* property is a property that everything that exists has. Examples include such *formal* properties as 'being an object' or 'being identical to itself'. I will define 'formal' in what follows.

- The semantic argument (Rutten 2021) is an argument for the claim that there are no universal *non-formal* properties. For each *non-formal* property there exists an object that lacks that property.

- In this lecture I present my semantic argument and I show how its conclusion renders it likely – or at least significantly increases the likelihood – that God exists. God is understood as a personal being that is the first cause of the world. God is a *personal first cause*.

- I start with initial stage setting.

Stage setting

- An object is something that exists, such as a table, an electron, a tree, a tiger, a human being and God (if God exists).

- Objects have properties. John is a man and John's bike is red.

- A property is *formal* if and only if all objects in all possible worlds have it.

- 'Being an object' and 'being self-identical' are formal properties. For all objects in all possible worlds are objects and identical to themselves. 'Being a man' and 'being red' are *non-formal* properties.

- The claim that there are no universal non-formal properties amounts to the following. If property p is such that some object in some possible world lacks p, then there is an object *in the actual world* that lacks p.
  - I claim *modal collapse* for "lackings": Possible lackings are actual lackings.

Stage setting (cont.)

- Negative properties (e.g., 'Being not red') and relational properties (e.g., 'Being located north of Paris') are excluded. So it's more exactly claimed that there are no universal non-formal *positive intrinsic* properties.

- Each property (e.g., 'Being red') corresponds to a *concept* ('Red'). Each concept has a *reference* (e.g., all red objects). Two concepts are *identical* if and only if they have the same *meaning* (e.g., 'Object' and 'Entity').

- A *complex* concept (e.g., 'Unicorn', 'Vixen' or 'Red table') consists of *sub-concepts* ('Horn', 'Forehead' & 'Horse'; 'Female' & 'Fox'; 'Red' & 'Table').

- A *simple* concept is a concept that is not complex (e.g., 'Red' or 'Object').

- Subconcepts can themselves be either simple or complex. Hence we can *recursively* unfold a complex concept into a collection of simple concepts.

Stage setting (cont.)

- In addition to a reference, concepts also have a *reference set*. The reference set of a *simple* concept is the reference of that concept.
    - The reference set of 'Red' is (its reference and thus) the set of all red objects.

- The reference set of a *complex* concept is the union of the references of its subconcepts.
    - The reference set of 'Red bike' is the set of all red objects and all bikes. It contains red tables and blue bikes. The reference set of 'Vixen' is the set of all females and all foxes.

- Different concepts can have the same reference (as Frege has taught us).
    - 'Animals having a heart' and 'Animals having a kidney' are different concepts. They have a different meaning. Yet, each animal that has a heart has a kidney and vice versa.

- Different concepts can*not* have the same reference *set* (as I claim).
    - 'Animals having a heart' and 'Animals having a kidney' indeed have different reference sets. For 'heart' is a subconcept of the former and not of the latter. So the reference set of the former includes all hearts, whereas the reference set of the latter doesn't.

The semantic argument's core premise

- If two concepts have the same reference set, then they are identical *(semantic argument's core premise)*.

- Sameness of reference does not guarantee sameness of meaning. But sameness of reference sets *does* guarantee sameness of meaning.

- If two concepts have the same reference set, then those concepts cannot be distinguished from each other by tracing the references of their sub-concepts. Both concepts "reach out" to the world's objects in the same manner. This substantiates the assertion that they are in fact identical.

- Moreover, numerous alleged counterexamples of different concepts having the same reference set have been refuted (Rutten 2021). The core premise of the semantic argument thus has a relatively *high corroboration rate*.

The semantic argument stated

- Suppose for *reductio ad absurdum* that there is a non-formal universal property *p*.

- Let P be the concept that corresponds to *p*. Since *p* is universal, the reference of P is everything that exists. Concept P is either simple or complex.

- If P is simple, then the reference set of P (being the reference of P) is everything that exists.

- The concept 'Object' is simple. The reference set of 'Object' (being the reference of 'Object') is the collection of all objects. That is to say, it's everything that exists.

- Since P and 'Object' have the same reference set, P and 'Object' have the same meaning. P is identical to 'Object'. But then *p* is the property of 'Being an object'.

- Yet *p* is supposed to be a *non*-formal property. We arrive at a contradiction.

The semantic argument stated (cont.)

- If P is complex, then P is the conjunction of two or more simple subconcepts.

- Since P corresponds to universal property *p*, the reference of P is everything that exists. But then, since P is a *conjunction* of simple subconcepts, the reference of each simple subconcept of P is also everything that exists.

- The reference set of each simple subconcept of P (being the reference of that subconcept) is also everything that exists. So, again, since the reference set of 'Object' is also everything that exists, it follows that each simple subconcept of P has the same meaning as 'Object' and is therefore identical to 'Object'.

- But then P is the conjunction of two or more concepts that are all identical to 'Object'. Hence P is identical to 'Object' and *p* is the property of 'Being an object'.

- Yet *p* is supposed to be a *non*-formal property. We arrive again at a contradiction.

- We thus obtain the *conclusion* that there are no non-formal universal properties.

The weight of tradition: there are no universal properties if reality is grounded in opposites

- Throughout history, philosophers from various traditions have affirmed that reality is grounded in opposites. But then there are no universal properties.

- Heraclitus teaches that nature is a harmony or unity of opposites. For everything that exists, its opposite also exists.

- Aristotle affirms in his *On the Cosmos* that nature loves opposites. And in his *Rhetoric* he asserts that if something is possible, its opposite is also possible.

- Cicero argues in his *On the Nature of the Gods* that nature is constructed in such a way that everything has its opposite. Cicero notes that this was also the view of Epicurus, who called it the principle of *isonomia* or equal distribution.

- Spinoza asserts *Determinatio negatio est*. Determination is negation. To exist, to be determined, is to negate. For something to exist, its opposite must also exist.

- In his dialectics Hegel affirms the principle that reality unfolds through opposites.

- Many speculative postmodernists hold that reality is grounded in *differences*.

Implications of there being no universal properties

- Not everything is water (refuting Thales), fire, earth, a monad (refuting Leibniz), 'will to power' (refuting Nietzsche) or 'will to live' (refuting Schopenhauer).

- 'Being material' is not a universal property. So not everything is material. There are non-material or *immaterial* objects. So materialism fails.

- 'Being physical' and 'Being natural' are not universal properties either. There are *non-physical* and *super-natural* objects. Physicalism and naturalism fail.

- 'Being immanent' is not a universal property either. So there must be a transcendent realm of *transcendent* objects. Immanentism fails.

- Not everything is perishable. There are thus non-perishable, everlasting or *eternal* objects. And not everything is finite. So there are *infinite* objects.

- *Panpsychism* fails as well. For not everything has a mental aspect. There are objects without a mental aspect.

- *Empiricism* or *positivism* or *phenomenalism* fail as well. For 'Being observable' is not a universal property either. Not everything is observable.

Implications of no universal properties (cont.)

- Pantheism also fails. For 'Being divine' is not a universal property. Hence not everything is divine.

- 'Being mental' is not a universal property either. Not everything is mental. So also metaphysical *idealism* fails.

- *Solipsism* fails as well because 'Being the only object in the world' would be a universal property if solipsism were true. But there are no universal properties. The famous *problem of the existence of the external world* is therefore solved.

- Not everything is a concrete object. So there are *abstract* objects. We obtain as a corollary that Plato was in fact right after all to posit *abstracta*.

- Not everything is determined. So there are undetermined objects and thus there is genuine *free will*. For objective randomness is impossible (Rutten 2012).

- Not everything is contingent. So there exists a *necessarily existing* object. As a corollary we obtain a new ontological argument for there being a necessary being.

- Not everything is spatial or temporal. There are *a-spatial* and *a-temporal* objects.

Implications of no universal properties (cont.)

- Not everything that exists is actual. There exist non-actual objects. Hence *mere possibilia* indeed exist. Also, not everything is a composite of matter and form. So there are objects that exist as *pure form* – as Aristotle and Aquinas assert.

- Not everything is good. So there must be objects that are not good. Evil exists. This corollary opens the pathway to a radically new and unforeseen *theodicy*.

- Not everything is caused. So there must be *uncaused objects*.

- Not everything is a mereological composite. So there are mereological simples. There are *atoms*. There is thus indeed a fundamental or *ultimate level of reality*.

- Even the famous question of Leibniz can be answered. *Why is there something rather than nothing?* The answer is that there must be objects. Because else all properties would be universal due to the logical principle of *ex falso quodlibet*.

- Reality contains immaterial, non-physical, supernatural, transcendent, necessarily existing, uncaused, abstract, free, eternal, infinite, a-spatial and a-temporal objects.

- This is incompatible with common atheistic worldviews. Those objects naturally fit with a worldview that is diametrically opposed to atheism: *theism*. The absence of universal properties therefore *increases the likelihood of theism* significantly.

Increasing the likelihood of theism

- By now the recipe for deriving further corollaries of interest to long-standing debates in metaphysics will be clear enough. There is an abundance of corollaries.

- The conclusion of the semantic argument (i.e., there are no universal properties) begins to reveal itself as a *theory of everything*. For the entire world as we have traditionally always known it throughout the ages seems to be implied by it.

- That single formula that is not ad hoc and adequately describes and explains the entire reality is not a formula within cosmology or physics. It is a formula within *metaphysics*, namely the proposition that there are no universal properties.

- The conclusion that there are no universal properties acts as a epistemic *filter for worldviews*. *Monistic* worldviews (i.e., worldviews relying on there being a universal property) such as materialism, physicalism, naturalism, immanentism, panpsychism, idealism, pantheism, vitalism, positivism and solipsism *all fail*.

- Only *dualistic* worldviews such as theism and Platonism survive the epistemic filter. But since Platonism effectively entails theism (Rutten 2021) reasonably theism remains as feasible or viable worldview.

Increasing the likelihood of theism (cont.)

- There are no universal properties. So being cannot be restricted. It always "slips away" from any compulsive "Everything is X" corset. That is to say, being cannot be "squeezed" into any universalist mold. Being is radically free. The ultimate truth of being is therefore freedom. *Free at last*.

- But freedom is grounded in *subjectivity*. Freedom is a characteristic of *mind*. The mind is free because it transcends any formalism. Dialectically speaking, mind always has the capacity for *negation*. The absence of universal properties hence reasonably suggests that the ultimate ground of the world is a free conscious being. So the ultimate ground of reality can reasonably be referred to as *God*.

- The semantic argument thus reveals the spiritual ground of the world and shows us the intimate connection between language, reality, and the metaphysical ultimate.

- It is no wonder that theism emerged as the most likely worldview in our *linguistic* analysis. For it is indeed language, word or *logos*, that ultimately points us to the ultimate origin of the world. For the world is the world as it is thought by logos.