

A Modal Support of Leibniz' Ontological Proof of the Necessary Being

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Today in period 4 we went over Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's modal proof of God's existence. Below is a more thorough review of what we looked at in class. Consider this an Introduction to Modal Logic. Categorical logic is about the logic of categorical statements (All cats are cute); conditional logic is about the logic of conditional statements (if p, then q), but modal logic is about the logic of possibility and necessity.

The word 'contingent' means 'may or may not be', whereas necessary means 'cannot not be'. You and I are contingent beings because we need not be, that is, our existence is not necessary—otherwise we would have always existed. The following is a review of the notation of modal logic:

Most up to date modal notation:

M = it is possibly the case that...

L = it is necessarily the case that...

\supset = if...then

\sim = negation sign (it is not the case that...)

\vee = or

\wedge = and

\equiv equivalence or if and only if

Also, Mp = it is possibly the case that p. Lp = it is necessarily the case that p. Mp and Lp can be translated:

$Mp = \sim L\sim p$ (it is not necessarily the case that it will not rain, hence it is possible that it will rain).

$Lp = \sim M\sim p$ (it is not possible that it will not rain, hence, it is necessarily going to rain).

Some basic modal propositions and theorems

1. $Mp \supset Lp$ (invalid) "If Sophia is possibly a mother, then Sophia is necessarily a mother".
2. $Mp \supset p$ (invalid) "If Sophia is possibly a mother, then she is a mother".
3. $p \supset Mp$ (valid) "If Sophia is a mother, then it is true that "Sophia is possibly a mother"".
Since Mp can be translated as $\sim L\sim p$, we can re-write this as: "If Sophia is a mother, then it is not necessarily the case that she is not a mother" (it is possible she's a mother, which is true).
4. $Lp \supset Mp$ (valid) "If it is necessarily the case that a triangle is three sided, then it is possible that they are (i.e., not necessarily not three sided, or $\sim L\sim p$).
5. $Lp \supset p$ (valid) "If it is necessarily the case that he's dead, then he's dead".
6. $Lp \supset Lp$ (valid)
7. $Lp \supset MLp$ (valid on the basis of #4) "If it is necessarily the case that he's dead, then it is possible that it is necessarily the case that he's dead" (note: what this says is not: it is possible that he's dead, but it is possible that he's necessarily dead", MLp).
8. $\sim MLp \supset \sim Lp$ (valid on the basis of the Law of Transposition. I.e., think of Denying Consequent) "If it is not possibly the case that he is necessarily dead, then it is not the case that he is necessarily dead". This is another way of saying that if he's necessarily dead, then it is possibly the case that he's necessarily dead"—and necessarily dead means "not possible that he's not dead".
9. $MLp \supset Mp$ (valid on the basis of #4)
10. $MLp \supset p$ (valid on the basis of #5)
11. $MLp \supset Lp$ (valid on the basis of #6)
12. $MLp \equiv Lp$ (valid on the basis of 11 and 7): $(MLp \supset Lp) \wedge (Lp \supset MLp)$

Extra (only if you are interested)

$MLp \wedge Lp \equiv \sim (\sim MLp \vee \sim Lp)$
 $\sim (\sim MLp \vee \sim Lp)$
 $\sim\sim (\sim MLp \supset \sim Lp)$
 $\sim MLp \supset \sim Lp$
 $Lp \supset MLp$ **QED**

Leibniz' Modal Proof is the following:

“If the Necessary Being is possible, then the Necessary Being exists.”

In other words, $MLp \supset Lp$

Why? Because the necessary being is necessary, which means the necessary being cannot not exist (otherwise it would not be the necessary being). As long as the necessary being is possible (i.e., is not a contradiction in terms, like “square circle”), then the necessary being exists.

The very minimum we can say about God is that God is eternal, necessarily exists. In other words, if God was created, then God is not God, but a created and contingent being. So, to be God is to be uncreated, that is, the necessary being.

What this proof maintains is that God is the only being whose existence can be proven from the very definition or idea of God. It is not possible to prove the existence of any contingent being from its definition alone. For example, does a flying horse exist? A flying horse is a horse with wings. There is nothing logically incompatible between the idea of ‘horse’ and ‘wings’, so it is possible that there are flying horses (Mp). But we cannot prove there is on the basis of the definition. That would be like arguing the following: $Mp \supset p$. That, of course, is invalid. But God is not a contingent being. God is the necessary being; that’s what it means to be God. Hence, $MLp \supset Lp$.

Many philosophers of religion point out that the experience we have of our own contingency (my awareness that I am not necessary, that although I exist, it is not necessary that I exist) is only possible **against the background of a simultaneous awareness of “the necessary being”** (I am aware that I am not it). It is in this sense that the human person has a pre-conscious and natural knowledge of God as “necessary being”, even though that awareness might not be explicit, but only implicit. And so “religion” (in the sense of the desire to establish harmony between oneself and this totally “Other” source of meaning and existence) is a natural inclination, which is why we see religion in every culture throughout history. Man is a naturally religious animal. Even so called “atheists” manifest a tendency to seek harmony between themselves and some totally “Other”, it’s just that they don’t believe that “Other” is God, but perhaps reality as a whole, or nature, or the universe, etc.

When we start from the Necessary Being, it is possible to deduce a host of other things, such as 1) there is only One Necessary Being, 2) the Necessary Being is not a quantity with parts, 3) the Necessary Being is immaterial, intelligent, unchanging, supremely good and beautiful, etc. But this is the area of Metaphysics, the philosophy of being.