

The Cosmological Argument

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I wish to defend a version of the Cosmological Argument. But the phrase 'the Cosmological Argument' has been used to refer to various arguments, some of them very different from each other. Let me, then, say at the outset that with some of these I am either out of sympathy, or I am just plain unsure.

Take, for example, the argument for God's existence offered by Locke in Book IV, Chapter X of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. 'Man knows', says Locke, 'by an intuitive certainty that bare *nothing can no more produce any real being than it can be equal to two right angles*'. So for Locke, if anything exists it is caused to exist by something else. And Locke thinks that what belongs to anything that exists, its nature, must be derived from something else, and that God therefore exists. For if something exists, says Locke, it must have been caused to exist. This means that 'from eternity there has been something, since what was not from eternity had a beginning, and what had a beginning must be produced by something else'. But this argument is invalid. According to Locke, if something has existed from eternity, there is an eternal being. 'If, therefore', says Locke, 'we know there is some real being, and that nonentity cannot produce any real being, it is an evident demonstration, that from eternity there has been something'. But all Locke's argument shows is that there has always been something, which is quite compatible with there having been a whole host of different things. In other words, Locke thinks he has proved the equivalent of:

There is an X, such that, for every time t,
X occurs at t.

But all Locke proves, at best, is that, given the truth of his premises, for every time t, there is an X, such that X occurs at t. This mistake was nicely pointed out by Leibniz in his *New Essays on Human Understanding*, where the character of Theophilus notes Locke's inference that something has existed from eternity and comments:

I find an ambiguity there. It if means that *there has never been a time when nothing existed*, then I agree with it, and it really

does follow with entirely mathematical rigour from the preceding propositions. For if there had ever been nothing, there would always have been nothing, since a being cannot be produced by nothing; and in that case we ourselves would not have existed, which conflicts with the first truth of experience. But you go straight on in a way which shows that when you say that something has existed from all eternity you mean an eternal thing. But from what you have asserted so far it does not follow that if there has always been something then one certain thing has always been, i.e. that there is an eternal being.

So Locke's argument is a non-starter. But what about Aquinas's Third Way? This is what many people first think of when they hear the words 'Cosmological Argument'. And there is widespread agreement that this, too, is defective. But here I have my doubts.

One thing Aquinas seems to be saying is that if anything can pass out of existence, there is a time at which it ceases to exist. That move has been censured, but is it really misguided? I am uncertain. Aquinas is concerned with what is perishable, and he thinks that if something is naturally perishable, then it must cease to be unless something prevents this. Is that an obviously false conclusion? If my cat is kickable, it does not follow that it will ever be kicked. But if my cat is mortal, will it not die unless something prevents this? Can any natural tendency be supposed to exist for an infinite time without having some effect? And if things have a natural tendency to pass out of existence, can they continue to exist for ever? These are questions raised by the Third Way, and I do not know that they have been solved to the embarrassment of Aquinas.

Be that as it may, however, if Aquinas's argument is cogent then there is a time at which everything is not. And we need to ask whether this part of Aquinas's reasoning is acceptable. Is his Third Way valid or not?

It has been urged that it is not. If I say that since every nice girl loves a sailor it follows that there is some sailor whom every nice girl loves, I would be rightly taken to be arguing invalidly. And it has been said that in the Third Way Aquinas is arguing like this. The idea here is that the Third Way is invalid since it argues that since everything at some time is not, there is some one time at which everything is not.

But we need to be careful here. We can be sure that our argument is valid if we can show that it shares the same logical form as a clearly valid argument. But it is wrong to suppose that an argument is proved invalid just because it has a form shared by an in-

valid argument. The form 'Some S is P, therefore, any S is P' seems invalid and can be said to be found in patently invalid arguments like 'Some dog lives in Wales, therefore, any dog lives in Wales'. But consider the following (taken from Peter Geach's 'Why Logic Matters' (in H. D. Lewis, ed., *Contemporary British Philosophy*, London, 1976):

- 1) As regards some dog: there is another dog such that one of the pair is white and the other is not white.
Ergo:
- 2) As regards any dog: there is another dog such that one of the pair is white and the other is not white.

That is valid. And any two premise argument, valid or not, is an instance of the invalid form: P,Q, ergo, R. And a point worth noting is that there are arguments akin to that of the Third Way which would be accepted by some people. A physicist, for instance, would accept that if we assume the past to be infinite, we need to account for the fact that atoms of a given isotope exist since they cannot have always existed. And if we assume that everything is such that it will cease to be, it is not, I think, obvious that, given that past time is infinite, there would now be anything unless there were something non-corruptible. And this is what Aquinas is arguably saying.

But this is a controversial matter. So let me quickly pass on to another version of the Cosmological Argument, one which has recently been defended by William Lane Craig in his book *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (London, 1979). and one which can be found in the work of Muslim philosophers such as al-Ghāzālī.

Craig asks us to distinguish between a potential infinite and an actual infinite. A potential infinite is an infinite series of items which can, in principle, be added to. An actual infinite is a complete series, a series of actual things to be numbered, which is actually complete, though infinite.

Now Craig's point is that an actual infinite is impossible and that the universe cannot have existed from eternity since there would then have been an actual infinite (i.e. an actually infinite number of moments of the universe's existence). So the universe began to exist. But this, says Craig, requires causal explanation. For if anything begins to exist, there must be a cause of its existence.

Is this argument cogent? It can be made to seem plausible if one supposes that the universe has existed for an actually infinite number of moments and that these moments are added to as time goes on. For the suggestion that one can add to an actually infinite number of things has surprising consequences. Craig tries to illus-

trate the point using an example of the mathematician David Hilbert:

Let us imagine a hotel with a finite number of rooms, and let us imagine that all the rooms are occupied. When a new guest arrives and requests a room, the proprietor apologises, 'sorry – all the rooms are full'. Now let us imagine a hotel with an infinite number of rooms, and let us assume that again all the rooms are occupied. But this time, when a new guest arrives and asks for a room, the proprietor exclaims, 'But of course!' and shifts the person in room 1 to room 2, the person in room 2 to room 3, the person in room 3 to room 4, and so on . . . The new guest then moves into room 1, which has now become vacant as a result of these transpositions. But now let us suppose an *infinite* number of new guests arrive, asking for rooms. 'Certainly, certainly!' says the proprietor, and he proceeds to move the person in room 1 into room 2, the person in room 2, into room 4, and the person in room 3 into room 6, the person in room 4 into 8, and so on . . . In this way, all the odd-numbered rooms become free, and the infinity of new guests can easily be accommodated in them. (Craig, pp 84 f.)

The point here, of course, is that the owner of the hotel can act as he does because he forgets that he has an hotel with an actually infinite number of rooms, and that all the rooms are in fact occupied at the beginning of the shady operation on which he embarks. But if you have an actually infinite number of things, then you cannot add to them. Therefore the hotel owner cannot do what he thinks he can do.

On the other hand, however, it does seem coherent to suppose that for any past moment of time it might then have been true to say 'There was a previous moment'. Craig seems to suppose that this cannot be said, for he seems to think that anyone saying it must believe that one can add to the moments of the universe's past as the owner of the hotel thinks that he can add to his number of rooms, which is impossible. But such is not the case. For really to hold that the past time of the universe is infinite would be to hold that there was no first moment and hence no definite number of moments added to by the continued existence of the universe. So may I not hold that the universe never had a first moment (or that there was just no first moment) without also holding that there has now really elapsed an actually infinite number of moments of the universe's existence, or something like that? May I not coherently say that there never was a time when 'There was no universe before this moment' was true?

But even if the answer to these questions is 'Yes', there is surely something in the Craig line of thinking. Let us suppose that the universe did indeed have a beginning. Can we not now ask 'What brought this about'? You may reply that even if the universe had a beginning, there was no cause of this. But how do you know? If what you have here is really knowledge, if you really know that the universe can begin to exist uncaused, then it seems that you know that a thing can begin to exist without a cause. But can you know this? Following Hume, you may say that you actually know since you can imagine yourself pointing, say, to something, and saying 'That began to exist here, and nothing caused it to do so'. But how do you know you would be right to say this? May the thing you point to not have existed elsewhere and come by some means to exist where you now find it? And how can you know that it really came to exist without a cause? Because you can *imagine* it coming to exist in this way? But what does this prove? Hume seems to have thought that it proves that a beginning of existence can occur without a cause. As he puts it:

... as all distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the idea of cause and effect are evidently distinct, 'twill be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle. The separation, therefore, of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence, is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction or absurdity; and is therefore incapable of being refuted by any reasoning from mere ideas; without which 'tis impossible to demonstrate the necessity of a cause. (*Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford, 1965, pp 79 f.)

Yet this argument from imagination is not very convincing. Elizabeth Anscombe neatly indicates why in the following remarks:

If I say I can imagine a rabbit coming into being without a parent rabbit, well and good: I imagine a rabbit coming into being, and our observing that there is no parent rabbit about. But what am I to imagine if I imagine a rabbit coming into being without a cause? Well, I just imagine a rabbit coming into being. That this *is* the imagination of a rabbit coming into being without a cause is nothing but, as it were, the *title* of the picture. Indeed I can form an image and give my picture that title. But from my being able to do *that*, nothing whatever follows about what it is possible to suppose 'without contradiction or

absurdity' as holding in reality.

(' "Whatever Has a Beginning of Existence Must Have a Cause":
Hume's Argument Exposed', *Analysis*, 34, 1974, 150.)

Still, maybe we cannot demonstrate by virtue of philosophy that the universe has a beginning. But we can say that it is there now. And this brings me to a form of the Cosmological Argument which strikes me as cogent. For why should we suppose that the existence of anything is self-explanatory?

At this point, I think, it is worth drawing attention to what I take to be a notable feature of our intellectual lives. And this is our tendency to suppose that we may causally account for any given state of affairs. By this I mean that we take it for granted that states of affairs derive from or are explicable in terms of the action of individuals either temporally prior to them, or simultaneous with them, or both. Thus, for example, we discover that there is water in a kettle, and we suppose that this is to be accounted for in terms of someone having put it there. Or we discover a species of animal in a certain place, and we suppose that there are causal factors which account for the fact that this kind of creature is to be found there. We do not suppose that any particular state of affairs is simply self-caused. We suppose that something, or many things together, have brought it about that any particular state of affairs obtains. This applies even when what we are concerned with is a free human action, for, even if we accept, as some do, that a free action is somehow uncaused, we do not suppose that it could occur without the causal operation of what cannot be identified with it. Even the staunchest libertarian would agree that we can ask what conditions account for the fact that someone can act freely in a given situation. Even the staunchest libertarian would not, for example, say that if Fred freely goes to church, there is no question about what brought it about that Fred was there to go to church, or that Fred's freely going to church does not depend on such factors as the beating of his heart or the existence of the solar system with its various operations. And that, of course, is why we have been able to develop natural science. The scientist naturally assumes that if things are thus and so, then this will need to be accounted for. Or, to put it another way, the scientist typically supposes that, confronted by particular states of affairs within the universe, we may always seek to account for them in terms of what brings them about – though it may, of course, be that, in trying to account for given states of affairs, a point is reached beyond which explanation cannot proceed. At this point we may find ourselves appealing to so-called 'scientific laws' which are just held to hold, though no explanation is given as to why they hold.

My point, then, is that we naturally suppose that for any given

state of affairs within the universe, we may reasonably ask why it obtains. And it is important to see that in adopting this supposition we tacitly accept that nothing is what it is of logical necessity. I mean by this that, in asking what brings it about that such and such a state of affairs obtains, we implicitly concede that things could have been otherwise. For we could never sensibly ask why such and such is the case if, by virtue of some logical law, it could not but be the case. Thus, we ask why human beings came to exist on earth and how they can now survive. But we do not, in the same sense, ask why a circle is circular. We ask why polar bears are white, but we do not, in the same sense, ask why all white things are white.

So it seems that confronted by things in the world which might have been otherwise, or which might not have come about at all, we ask 'Why?' Yet once we start asking 'Why?' when confronted by what might have been otherwise, do we have to stick only to what we would normally call 'scientific' questions and answers? Suppose we consider not the fact that some particular state of affairs obtains in the world, but the fact that things exist, the fact that there is something rather than *nothing*. Ought we not to ask why this is so? The question is not a scientific one, for a scientist tries to account for things being as they are with reference to other things being as they are. And we are now concerned simply with the fact that things are. But ought we not to ask 'Why is there anything at all?' And ought we not to presume that there is an answer to our question?

But perhaps the question is unintelligible. And I can see at least one reason why someone might say that this is so. Sometimes it obviously makes sense to ask why this state of affairs obtains rather than some other. Let us suppose that a child is born blind. Since more children are born sighted than are born blind, we naturally ask 'Why?' But here we are asking why some *specifiable state of affairs* obtains (what has caused it) rather than another *specifiable state of affairs*. We are asking 'Why is the child *blind* rather than *sighted*?' Yet the question I am now putting before you is not like this. It does not ask why one state of affairs has come to pass rather than another. It asks why there is something rather than *nothing*. Someone might therefore say: 'I can see how causal questions arise when there is a genuine possibility of things going various ways, and it coming to pass that they go this way rather than that. But I cannot see that there is any causal question suggested by the fact that things have just gone some way or other'.

But does the discussion have to stop here? 'Nothing' is not the name of some alternative state of affairs. But given a world like ours, given the fact that there are things which satisfy certain des-

criptions, are we to say that no causal question arises about why this should be so?

Some would reply by rejecting the question. They would say that the universe is just there and that there is no need to ask why it is there. But why should we say that the universe is just there? It seems reasonable to say that there might have been nothing at all. We cannot say that squares might have been circular, and we cannot say that a square might not be square. But the notion of not existing does not seem incompatible with the notion of anything. I therefore suggest that confronted by something when there might have been nothing, we can indeed ask 'Why?' We have no particular reason to expect a universe and we are within our rights if we ask why things exist, why there is anything at all. Here I agree with some remarks of Fr Herbert McCabe:

Now of course it is always possible to stop the questioning at any point; a man may refuse to ask why there are dogs. He may say there just *are* dogs and perhaps it is impious to enquire how come – there were people who actually said that to Darwin. Similarly it is possible to ask this ultimate question (sc. 'How come everything?') to say as Russell once did: the universe is just there. This seems to me just as arbitrary as to say: dogs are just there. The difference is that we now know by hindsight that Darwin's critics were irrational because we have familiarised ourselves with an *answer* to the question, how come there are dogs? We have not familiarised ourselves with the answer to the question, how come the world instead of nothing? But that does not make it any less arbitrary to refuse to ask it. To ask it is to enter on an exploration which Russell was simply refusing to do ... ('God I: Creation', *New Blackfriars*, 61, 1980, 411.)

In reply it might be said that the question 'Why?' is not always appropriate. And this is true. It is not clear that it makes sense to ask why a given mathematical assertion is true. The question here is how one knows it to be true. Again, there is the question 'Why?' when asked of negative facts, of things that are not the case. These are sometimes silly, for it only makes sense to ask why something is not there when there is some reason to suppose that the thing should have been there. In this connection I cannot resist quoting a delightful passage from Peter Geach's *Reason and Argument* (Oxford, 1976):

Two Rabbinical scholars were reading the Law. They had not got very far – in fact not beyond *Genesis* 1: 1, which contains the word 'eretz' ('earth'). The initial question of the dialogue

which follows is just like asking in English: Why should there be a letter G in the word 'earth'? –*gimel* being the corresponding letter in Hebrew.

Why should there be a *gimel* in 'ereztz'?

But there isn't a *gimel* in 'ereztz'!

Then why isn't there a *gimel* in 'ereztz'?

Why should there be a *gimel* in 'ereztz'?

Well, that's what I just asked you!

Our expectations about Hebrew letters make nonsense of the first scholar's second question. But the point I am suggesting is that there are no expectations which make nonsense of the question 'Why is there anything at all?' Given that it is reasonable to ask causal questions about states of affairs which could have been otherwise, is it not perfectly reasonable to ask causal questions about the fact that something exists when there might have been nothing? I think it is reasonable, and that the existence of things raises causal questions, though please note that in saying this I am not subscribing to principles like 'Every event must have a cause' or 'There is a reason for absolutely everything'. These are controversial and difficult principles, and I am far from clear that they can usefully be appealed to in the context of an argument for God's existence. At any rate, I am not appealing to them. What I am saying is that it is reasonable to ask why there is anything at all.

But if we say this, we must also, I think, add that not just any answer will be acceptable. I am suggesting that we can reasonably ask 'Why is there anything at all?' But whatever answers this question cannot be some material thing, or some natural law obeyed by all material things. For it is the sheer existence of material things which is now partly in question, and that must come before their existence as this or that kind of thing, obeying this or that natural law (if there are such laws).

Nor can we say that the reason why there is anything at all is something which might not exist, something of which it makes sense to ask 'Why is it there when it might not have been?' In saying this, I am not to be thought of as committing myself to the view that something can exist of logical necessity. I am not surreptitiously appealing to the Ontological Argument. My point is that the existence of things cannot be brought about by anything whose existence derives from the causal activity of anything. Something that accounts for everything cannot itself be accounted for by anything. Indeed, it cannot be any-thing at all. That is, it cannot be an individual alongside others. For it is the very existence of such individuals that is causally puzzling – or so I am suggesting.

My argument, then, is that we may reasonably suppose that the existence of things is brought about over and against the possibility of there being nothing. And what brings it about that there are things cannot itself be something whose existence depends on the causal activity of anything, nor can it be an individual, a thing of some kind, a logically identifiable possessor of properties different from everything else and existing in addition to everything else. And if this suggestion makes any sense, then something else follows. For to say that everything is brought about over and against nothing at all cannot be to say that anything is somehow changed. The point here is that the 'bringing about' of which I think we may speak in saying that the existence of everything is brought about must be different from the bringing about to which we refer when we say, for example, 'Fred put the ash-tray there' or 'The washing-powder made the clothes clean'. All bringing about in the world of our experience involves some kind of change, whether of place, quality, or nature. It all takes place against a background of things. It takes place in the context of a world. But the bringing about that allows us to talk about a world in the first place, the bringing about that results in the fact that there is anything at all, cannot take place against any background at all. It must, indeed, be 'from nothing'. This is not to say that there is some shadowy realm called 'nothing' out of which everything comes. The point is that everything of which we can say that its existence is brought about, in the present sense of 'brought about' (where it is the existence of everything that is brought about), is brought about, but not from anything.

And all of that, is, of course, what some people have said when talking about God and Creation. The classic example here is Aquinas. According to him, what God brings about is existence, or, in Aquinas's terminology, *esse*. When we are dealing with any causal activity other than God's, we are, says Aquinas, dealing with some kind of change. But God can bring it about that something just is. And, in Aquinas's view, for God to do this is for God to create, which is different from bringing about a change. Creation, for Aquinas, does not involve any kind of change. On this account, change belongs within creation, and it is creation that God brings about. His characteristic effect is *esse*, or being, the fact that something exists over and against nothing.

Now when a thing makes its first appearance according to a particular system of reference you do not presume its presence there already; a man does not exist before he is begotten, but becomes a man out of what is not a man, like a thing becoming white from a being not white. So then if we consider the coming forth of the whole of all being from its first origins

we cannot presuppose to it any being. But no-being and nothing are synonymous. As therefore the begetting of a human being is out of that non-being which is non-human being, so creation, the introduction of being entirely, is out of the non-being which is nothing at all. (*Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 45,1)

So if I am right, we have reason to believe in creation in something like the sense accepted by Aquinas. For we may say that things are caused to be, but not by anything, and not by anything which is caused to be by something. And that, I think, means that the Cosmological Argument is viable. For, on some accounts at any rate, to believe in God is to believe that everything has been caused to be, but not by anything, and not by anything caused to be by something. You can find this view in Aquinas, and I am saying that I agree with it.

But all of this raises various questions. Is it possible, for example, to offer some account of God's nature in the light of the argument I have been advocating? And if this argument is acceptable, what are the implications for notions like those of providence and grace? Yet these are questions which need to be considered separately and at length. For the present, therefore, I shall conclude simply by raising and commenting on two possible lines of objection to the Cosmological Argument as I have defended it. This should help to make clearer what I mean by the argument itself, though my comments, alas, must be very brief.

The first line of objection concerns my suggestion that God is not an individual. This may seem an exceedingly odd suggestion, and, indeed, it has been explicitly rejected. Thus, for example, Robin Attfield writes:

Certainly God must be an individual if he can create, but to claim that there exists an individual of no sort whatever is to claim something unintelligible to speaker and hearers alike ... to be, as Aristotle held, entails being of a sort: and, conversely, to be of no sort is to be inconceivable. Further, to claim (or deny) the existence of something which is of no sort whatever is to make no claim (or no denial) whatever.

(*'How Not To Undermine Theology'*,
New Blackfriars, 61, 288)

Yet it seems to me that if Attfield, and those who agree with him, are right, then there is no God. For if God is some kind of thing, if he is a being with a nature, then there is nothing to stop us asking 'why does God exist?' For if we can ask 'Why is there anything at all?' as I think we can, then we can apply the question to God *qua* individual as much as to anything else. One may deny

this on the ground that God as an individual is a brute fact which stands at the beginning of all causal chains, or something like that. But that itself seems puzzling to me. Why should there be such a brute fact at all? Or, better, why suppose that there is any such brute fact? If one held that God is a logically necessary being one would have an answer to these questions which, if cogent, could eliminate the need to ask what brings it about that God qua individual, exists. But, as is well known, there are some formidable objections to the notion of a logically necessary being.

The second objection concerns the notion of existence. I am suggesting that the mere fact that there is anything is puzzling. But it might be replied that this is false since to think that 'Why is there anything?' is significant is to think that 'There is something' of 'Something exists' is significant, which it is not. Why not? Because existence, so the argument might run, is not a property of objects, of individuals. Because '— exists' is never a first level predicate.

To say that an object or individual has a property is to say that it has some characteristic which serves to distinguish it from other things, though not necessarily from all other things. Thus, to say that my apple is soft is to say that it has a certain distinguishing feature, in this case one that sets it apart from whatever is not soft. Let us put this by saying that in 'My apple is soft', 'is soft' is a first level predicate. By this we mean that 'is soft' in 'My apple is soft' gives us information about my apple. It tells us something about it.

Consider now a word like 'numerous'. And consider its use in a proposition like 'Atheists are numerous'. Clearly, 'are numerous' in 'atheists are numerous' does not give us information about atheists as 'is soft' in 'My apple is soft' gives us information about my apple. The expression functions quite differently from, say, 'are absent-minded' or 'are more intelligent than theists'. So what does it do? Apparently, it tells us something about the class of atheists. And what it tells us is that this class has members, and many members at that. We can put this by saying that 'are numerous' in 'Atheists are numerous' is a second level predicate.

Now what about '— exists'? Is it a first or a second level predicate? If it is a first level predicate it will by itself give us information about the subject of which it is predicated. But it does not. If I say that all one can affirm about something is that it exists, you would be puzzled. And it is, in fact, hard to see what you could do with my assertion unless you take me to be saying that properties are ascribable to something or other. And then you will want to know what the properties are.

For this reason I think it makes sense to say that '— exists' is not a first level predicate. And if that is true, then 'Something

exists' or 'There is something' seems pretty unintelligible. And that might lead one to reject the question 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' or 'Why is there anything at all?' One might say: 'I can recognize a genuine question when someone asks a question like 'Why is there a rusty car in my garden?' But there is no genuine question raised by asking "Why is there something rather than nothing?" or 'Why is there anything at all?'

Now the logical analysis of existence claims is not an easy matter, and it ought not to be dealt with in a cavalier way. One needs to proceed by means of a patient examination of examples, as, for instance, does C. J. F. Williams in his book *What is Existence?* (Oxford, 1981). But the points made above seem to me cogent, and I take it that this is the essence of the case developed by Williams, one which pays special attention to some insights of Frege account of existence is connected with his conclusions about number. Number statements, for Frege, ascribe properties to concepts. And Frege's view is that 'existence is analogous to number. Affirmation of existence is in fact nothing but denial of the number nought' (*Grundlagen*, 53). Existence, on this account, is a property of concepts.

But it is still clearly true that affirmations of existence can be made, and that some of them are affirmations to the effect that individuals exist, affirmations to the effect that a property or properties can be ascribed to things. And, however we analyse such propositions, it is true that they are sometimes true and sometimes false. 'There are no dodos' is, as far as we know, true. 'There are icebergs in the Mediterranean' is false. Let us suppose that some property or properties can be ascribed to something. Why should this be the case? Why can we advance analyses of true existential propositions in the first place? This is not a question about our own natural history, or the natural factors which account for the fact that we are able to sit here asking questions. It is a question about what we might boldly call 'the source of existence'. And this is what I have in mind in saying that we can ask 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' or 'Why is there anything at all?'

In other words, even if we agree that existential statements can be analysed so as to support the thesis 'Existence is not a property of objects' or 'Existence is a second level predicate', we can still make sense of the claim that there is something rather than nothing. And, though we may not understand how this comes about, how it comes about that there is anything at all, we can still, I suggest, ask why it comes about. Suppose 'Horses exist' tells us that the number of horses is not nought. Why is that the case? What brings it about that the number of horses is not nought? If you can see the point of that question, you ought to be able to see

that there is a point in asking why denial of the number nought can ever be made at all. And I express this by saying that we can reasonably ask 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' or 'Why is there anything at all?' I am not contesting analyses of existence like those offered by Williams (though some do). But I am asking why we are in a position to offer such analyses at all. It seems to me reasonable to do this, and that, in a nutshell, is why I think that there is still some life in the Cosmological Argument, even though some versions of the argument strike me as misguided or difficult to decide upon.

Wisdom as Touchstone in

The Merchant of Venice

Frank McCombie

In distinguishing between character and role in Shakespeare's plays, Peter Ure once wrote:

It is often because we are made aware of the gap, not the consonance, between the man and the office that the situation becomes profound and exciting, and permits rich inferences about what the hero's inward self is like.¹

Few critics spoke with greater conviction about the "inward self" of the Shakespearean protagonist, but it is with the outward selves of the protagonists of *The Merchant of Venice* that we shall be concerned in what follows. It is at least arguable that the somewhat confused state of debate about this play is owing to the resolute concentration of attention upon the "inward selves" of Portia, Antonio, and Shylock, and to the too-easy assumptions that are made about the nature and importance of their roles. To suggest that the fabric of meaning in *The Merchant of Venice* depends absolutely upon the identification of roles in the terms in which Shakespeare conceived them is not to underestimate the interest and importance of the ways in which character regularly pulls against role, for what Peter Ure said is perhaps more true of this