AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL QUARTERLY
Volume 8, Number 3, July 1971

VII. HAS IT BEEN PROVED THAT ALL REAL EXISTENCE IS CONTINGENT?

ROBERT MERRIHEW ADAMS

I

IT is believed by many philosophers (i) that no proposition asserting the existence of something —or at least no proposition asserting that something has the kind of real existence that God must be supposed to have, if He exists—can be logically necessary. And it is widely believed (ii) that belief (i) has been established so conclusively that arguments for the logically necessary existence of such a real thing can be rejected out of hand, without further examination, on the ground that such logically necessary existence is known to be impossible. The present essay is an attack on what I take to be the most important arguments for the second of these beliefs. Its aim is strictly limited, in at least two respects.

(A) I do not attempt to show here that any real thing does have logically necessary existence; I only argue that it has not been shown that none can have it. I am not even claiming that there are no good reasons for thinking that all real existence is indeed logically contingent. What I do maintain is that no such reasons are so conclusive as to constitute a refutation, in advance, of any argument purporting to show that the real existence of something is logically necessary.

(B) My own interest in the subject is rooted in an interest in the conception of God's existence as logically necessary. But this essay is not concerned with specifically theological problems about necessary existence, such as might arise from some of the attributes traditionally ascribed to God. Neither is it concerned with arguments against *God*'s necessary existence which might be based on such problems. It deals only with arguments for the general doctrine that all real existence must be logically contingent.

I would like to be able to prove conclusively that that doctrine cannot be proved true, that the most one can do to support the doctrine is to rebut arguments offered for necessary existence. It would follow that the doctrine cannot be used to refute arguments for logically necessary existence but requires for its own support the refutation of any such argument that may be offered. Unfortunately I seem to be in a position like that myself. For short of proving that the existence of some real thing is logically necessary (which I shall not attempt to do here), I see no way of demonstrating conclusively that my own thesis is correct. All I can do is to try to rebut the principal arguments offered in support of the claim that it has been proved that all real existence is logically contingent. It seems to me that there are three such principal arguments, or types of argument, which I shall discuss in Sections II, III, and IV.

II

In Part IX of Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, we find the classic instance of a type of argument which we may call the "But surely I can conceive" type of objection to logically necessary existence.

> Nothing, that is distinctly conceivable, implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no Being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction.[1]

The adverb "distinctly" must do quite a lot of work if the first premiss of this argument is to be plausible. It would normally be thought that one can have a fairly clear conception of something, and mistakenly believe it to be possible, even though it is in fact self-contradictory (for instance, the trisection of the angle by Euclidean methods, or a general decision procedure for the predicate calculus). It may be replied that such conceptions are not *distinct*. If we tried, for example, to conceive, step by step, a correct Euclidean construction for the trisection of the angle, we could not bring it

[1] P. 189 in the Library of Liberal Arts reprint of Norman Kemp Smith's edition of the *Dialogues*.

off. A distinct conception, then, will be one which does not imply a contradiction and which is so full that anyone who has it has conclusive grounds for believing that it does not imply a contradiction. There are such conceptions, of course. There are, for example, Euclidean constructions whose possibility can be established by conceiving them step by step.

Distinct conceptions in this sense can also be found outside the realm of logical and mathematical proof. I think there is reason to suppose that *imagination* is the type of conception which Hume had principally in mind in the quoted passage. And in some cases imagination provides conclusive grounds for believing that what is imagined is logically possible—although in other cases it does not. The extent to which imaginability does or does not establish possibility is important to our argument—enough so that I think it will be worthwhile to consider a range of cases.

(1) I can imagine a triangular red patch beside a square blue patch. This provides me with conclusive grounds for believing it logically possible that a triangular red patch and a square blue patch should appear to me side by side. For in this case virtually nothing is asserted in the proposition to be proved possible except a bare description of the images occurring in the imagination experience. What we have here is essentially an inference from the actuality of a certain experience to its possibility.

(2) I can imagine that there is a unicorn in my garden right now; and I think I can imagine it in such a way as to have very good reason to believe it logically possible for there to have been a unicorn there now. For I can live through, in my imagination, experiences which would surely have left no reasonable doubt that there was a unicorn in my garden right now. And these imagined experiences form, so to speak, a coherent story. Yet this case is different from that of the color patches, in that I am imagining something that is definitely not the case. There is therefore no straightforward argument from actuality to possibility here.

(3) I can imagine the nonexistence or extinction of lions, by imagining a safari to Africa during which we see no lions, and imagining that our guide explains that lions have become extinct. I don't doubt that it is logically possible for lions to become extinct, but imagining it in this way does not provide very good grounds for believing it possible. For I have not imagined any experience which would positively exclude the continued existence of lions. There could be stealthy lions lurking in some bushes that we did not explore carefully enough; and what a guide says (even an honest and generally knowledgeable guide) may be false.

(4) I can imagine myself discovering an effective general decision procedure for the predicate calculus. I can imagine this with a wealth of anecdotal detail, though I cannot imagine, step by step, a sound proof of such results. In this case what I imagine myself doing is logically impossible. Perhaps it will be objected that really I have only imagined myself *believing* I had discovered an effective general decision procedure. But I think it is quite in keeping with the meaning of the word "imagine" to say that I imagined myself really discovering it.

It is clear, then, that we can sometimes conceive of something in such a way as to leave no reasonable doubt of its possibility. This may be done in some cases by imagination; and in the case of logical and mathematical proofs and constructions, it may be done by conceiving them step by step in detail. These are important methods for establishing possibility. But just as clearly, not every conception establishes the possibility of that which is conceived in it.

We want to know whether it can be established, by what we may call "the method of distinct conception," that *everything* which can be conceived to exist can also (without logical impropriety) be conceived not to exist. This could not be established by distinctly conceiving the nonexistence of one thing after another. For there would always remain things whose nonexistence we had not yet conceived; and we would not have proved that their nonexistence is also logically possible.

I think probably the only way in which the method of distinct conception could yield a general proof that nonexistence is logically possible in *every* case would be by providing a proof that a state of affairs is logically possible in which nothing would exist at all. And it does not seem to me likely that such a state of affairs can be conceived in such a way as to exclude all rational doubt of its logical possibility. How could anything we might imagine prove anything about the possibility of a state of affairs in which nothing would exist either to be a subject of experience or to have imaginable properties? It would be absurd to suppose that we could live through, in imagination, experiences which would establish with certainty that nothing at all existed, since at least the experiences themselves,

and/or an experiencer, would have to exist. Perhaps it will be suggested that we can imagine experiences which would leave no reasonable doubt that at some time prior to the experiences nothing at all had existed. This at least is not patently absurd, but I think it is very doubtful. I suppose we might be able to imagine experiences which would justify us in being quite sure that before a certain time there had not existed any physical objects of any type with which we were familiar. But I do not see how such experiences could establish, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that previously there had not existed anything at all—not even God, angels, devils, Platonic Forms, numbers (if they are properly said to exist), time itself (if it is properly said to exist), or tiny physical particles of a type which we had not yet discovered.

So I think it unlikely that one could prove, by the method of distinct conception, that nonexistence is logically possible in *every* case. I also think it unlikely that the method will provide a proof in some of the particular cases which have most interested philosophers. For instance, how would one distinctly conceive the nonexistence of an omniscient being (or the existence of one, for that matter)? What imaginable experience would exclude all rational doubt that there is, or that there is not, a being that knows absolutely everything? That would probably have to be the experience of proving either that the existence of such a being is logically necessary or that its existence is logically impossible. But neither of those experiences can be *distinctly conceived* in the requisite sense unless there is a sound proof to be found for one of those conclusions.

It may be suggested that the existence of any conscious being can be more directly imagined by imagining thoughts and perceptions that it might have. Its nonexistence could hardly be conceived by imagining a total absence of thoughts and perceptions. What would it be to imagine that? But perhaps its ceasing to exist could be imagined by imagining the "fading out" of the thoughts and perceptions which one imagines as constituting its consciousness, and by not imagining after them any other thoughts and perceptions which one would ascribe to the same conscious being.

No doubt such an exercise in imagination is possible. But exactly what could one prove by it about the possible existence or nonexistence of an omniscient being? (a) One could prove to oneself that such thoughts as one has imagined (or at least very similar ones) are possible. For one has actually had very similar ones in imagining them, and what is actual is possible. (b) On the same grounds, one could prove to oneself that it is possible for such thoughts to "fade out." (c) That one can *regard* a set of such thoughts as constituting part of the consciousness of an omniscient being is also something that can be established on the ground that what is actual is possible. (d) Similarly, it can be established that one can *regard* the fading out of such thoughts as representing the ceasing to exist of an omniscient being. (e) And one can prove to oneself that a state of one's mind is possible which one *regards* as representing the nonexistence of an omniscient being because one is not imagining any thoughts which one ascribes to an omniscient being.

But such an exercise in imagination would not prove (c′) that it is logically possible for an omniscient being to exist or to have such thoughts as were imagined for it. Nor would it prove (d′) that it is logically possible for an omniscient being to cease to exist, or (e′) that the nonexistence of an omniscient being, or of any other conscious being, is logically possible. For from the fact that one can *regard* one's thoughts as representing such and such a state of affairs, it does not follow that that state of affairs is logically possible. The possibility claims (c′), (d′), and (e′) may indeed have considerable initial plausibility, but they have not been proved true by the method of distinct conception.

I conclude that the method of distinct conception will probably fail the opponent of logically necessary existence, in two ways. (1) It will not yield a general proof that real existence is never logically necessary. (2) Neither will it provide particular proofs of the logical possibility of nonexistence in all those cases in which some philosophers have asserted logical necessity of existence. For instance, it does not yield a proof that it is logically possible that there exists no omniscient being.

This does not show that belief in the contingency of all real existence cannot in any way be supported by conceptions of the non-existence of things. To many philosophers, for instance, it has seemed intuitively plausible that there is no logical impropriety in the conception of a state of affairs in which nothing would exist at all. I do not deny that any such plausibility counts in favor of the claim that no real existence is logically necessary—so long as no conclusive proof of the logically necessary existence of some real thing has been discovered. Even if an argument for the logically necessary existence of some real being is brought forward which is not conclusive but which has

some force, that force must naturally be weighed against any considerations, including intuitive plausibilities, which there may be on the other side. What I do deny is that such intuitive plausibility can rightly serve as a refutation, in advance, of any argument for logically necessary existence.

III

Another influential type of argument against the possibility of logically necessary existence can be introduced by the following simile. Imagine oneself a quality control officer in a shoe factory, inspecting the finished shoes as they come off the assembly line. If one has at least a rudimentary knowledge of what feet are like and how shoes are meant to fit them, one can tell some things, but not everything, about any foot that a given shoe will fit, just by examining the shoe. For instance, one can tell whether it is a left or right foot, but not whether or not the person it belongs to is married. If the shoe is very badly made, one may be able to tell, just by looking at it, that there is no foot that it will fit. But no matter how well made a shoe is, one cannot tell just by looking at the shoe that there *is* a foot that it fits. In order to know that, one must also examine feet, until one finds a foot that the shoe fits.

This is just a simile, of course, and will not bear pressing hard at all points. But I think we may say that it is very common for philosophers to think of concepts as related to things in much the same way that shoes are related to feet. Specifications, so to speak, are built into the concepts as well as into shoes. In order to "satisfy" the concept, a thing must have certain properties which are the "defining properties" of the concept. Knowing what the defining properties are is the largest part of understanding the concept. Simply by understanding and considering the concept, therefore, it is possible to know some things, though not everything, about anything that will satisfy the concept. Those things which consideration of concepts alone can tell us about whatever things may satisfy them are logically necessary truths. Those things which we cannot learn from concepts alone are held not to be logically necessary.

This picture of the matter suggests that existence cannot be logically necessary, although nonexistence can be. It is normally supposed that "There exists an F" is true if and only if the concept of F is satisfied. And a concept, like a shoe, can be "so badly made" that we can see, just by examining it, that nothing could possibly satisfy it. This is the case when a concept is self-contradictory, when it specifies incompatible defining properties for its instances. But there is no such thing as a concept being "so well made" that we can see, just by considering it, that it must be satisfied. For to say that a concept is satisfied is to say that a certain agreement obtains between it and something else. And in order to know that such an agreement obtains, we must examine not only the concept but also the something else. Therefore, it is claimed that it cannot be logically necessary that a certain concept is satisfied, or that there exists something of a certain sort, since logically necessary truths are truths which can be known by consideration of concepts alone.

I believe that this line of thinking underlies a very large proportion of the arguments commonly given for the contingency of all assertions of existence. Many of these arguments turn on the claim that existence is not a predicate, or not a property. If existence is not a property at all, it cannot be a defining property. It is concluded that since existence cannot be built into a concept as a defining property, assertions of existence cannot be logically necessary or analytic. Such an argument could hardly be expressed more clearly than it is by Paul Edwards, when he writes,

> To say that there is a necessary being is to say that it would be a self-contradiction to deny its existence. This would mean that at least one existential statement is a necessary truth; and this in turn presupposes that in at least one case existence is contained in a concept. But only a characteristic can be contained in a concept and it has seemed plain to most philosophers since Kant that existence is not a characteristic, that it can hence never be contained in a concept, and that hence no existential statement can ever be a necessary truth.[2]

The same sort of argument can be stated, however, without reliance on the doctrine that existence is not a predicate or property. Jerome Shaffer has argued that "exists" functions in some contexts as a predicate, and even as a defining predicate. For instance, "Historical persons have at some time

[2] Paul Edwards, "The Cosmological Argument," reprinted (from *The Rationalist Annual for the Year 1959*) in Donald R. Burrill (ed.), *The Cosmological Arguments: A Spectrum of Opinion* (New York, 1967), p. 116. Similar arguments can be found in John Hick, "A Critique of the 'Second Argument'," in John Hick and Arthur McGill (eds.), *The Many Faced Argument* (New York, 1967), p. 342; and in Terence Penelhum, "Divine Necessity," *Mind*, vol. 69 (1960), p. 180.

existed" (as opposed, say, to fictitious characters, who have never existed) is tautological.[3] But being tautological, Shaffer argues, it cannot tell us whether there have actually been any historical persons or not. An assertion that there is, or has been, something of a certain sort, Shaffer calls an "extensional assertion."

> Why is it that extensional assertions cannot be tautological? Because they do not merely tell us what the requirements are for being an *A* but, starting with these requirements, tell us whether anything meets these requirements.[4]

The crucial assumption in Shaffer's argument, as in Edwards', is that a tautological or logically necessary truth can tell us only what the requirements are for a thing to satisfy a certain concept.

This is a mistaken assumption. "If it is raining, it is raining" is a tautology, but does not tell us what the requirements are for anything to satisfy a certain concept. There are a number of ways in which a proposition may be logically necessary. Some universal affirmative propositions are logically necessary because the predicate term is a defining property of the subject term (e.g., "All husbands are married"). Some negative existential propositions are logically necessary because of the self-contradictoriness of the predicate which they say is unsatisfied (e.g., "There are no unmarried husbands"). All that Edwards' and Shaffer's arguments, and others like them, succeed in showing is that a proposition that there is something of a certain sort cannot be logically necessary in either of *these* ways. But it does not follow that there is *no* way in which the existence of a thing can be logically necessary, for we do not know that these are the only ways in which a proposition can be logically necessary. Indeed, as I have just pointed out, we know that they are not the only ways.

My objection to arguments like those of Edwards and Shaffer can perhaps be made clearer with the aid of a somewhat different application of the simile of shoe-fitting, an application suggested by the idea that a logically necessary truth is a proposition which is true about all logically possible worlds. It may be said that concepts (or predicate-concepts, at any rate) are made to fit things or objects. But we may equally well say that propositions are made to fit states of affairs, or possible worlds. If a proposition of the form "There is no *F*" is logically necessary, we may say it is necessary because the concept of *F* is "so badly made" that it could not fit, or correctly describe, any possible individual. Alternatively, we could say that the *proposition* "There is an *F*" is "so badly made" that it could not fit, or correctly describe, any possible state of affairs. Now suppose it is claimed that a proposition of the form "There is a *G*" is logically necessary. Obviously this claim could not be explained by saying that the concept of *G* is so badly made that it could not fit anything; for what is claimed is that there must be something that it fits. But why couldn't it be that "There is a *G*" is logically necessary because its contradictory, the *proposition* "There is no *G*," is so badly made that it could not fit any possible world?

As long as we think only in terms of the relation between things and concepts of things, it may seem as if there is no way of expressing what a logically necessary affirmative existential proposition would be. But in terms of the relation between possible worlds and propositions we can say that a logically necessary affirmative existential proposition (like any other logically necessary proposition) would be a proposition which is true about all possible worlds and whose contradictory fails to describe any possible kind of world. Thus we can say that "If it is raining, it is raining" is logically necessary because its contradictory, "It is not the case that if it is raining, it is raining," is logically defective and could not describe any possible world.

In fairness I must point out, of course, that a negative existential proposition could not be logically defective in the same way as "It is not the case that if it is raining, it is raining." For the latter proposition is truth-functionally self-contradictory. But negative existential propositions are not truth-functional tautologies. Neither can affirmative existential propositions be theorems of quantification logic—at least not in a system of quantification logic valid in empty domains, in which "$(\exists x)\,(Fx)$" does not follow from "$(\forall x)\,(Fx)$."

I anticipate that some one will object that the ways in which I have already admitted that an affirmative existential proposition could not be logically necessary are the only ways in which they can see that any proposition could be logically necessary. They can see how a proposition can be logically necessary by virtue of truth-functional propositional logic, by virtue of a quantificational

[3] Jerome Shaffer, "Existence, Predication, and the Ontological Argument," *Mind*, vol 1 (1962), p. 318.
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 323.

logic valid in empty domains, by virtue of the defining properties of a predicate-concept, or by virtue of self-contradictoriness of a predicate-concept; but they cannot see any other way. And therefore they do not see how the existence of anything could be logically necessary. Perhaps it would be fairest to interpret arguments such as those of Edwards and Shaffer as intended to form part of a larger argument of this sort.

Certainly, if one does not see *how* any proposition of a certain form or type could be logically necessary, that may be a good reason for believing that no such proposition is logically necessary. But it hardly constitutes a conclusive proof. For how are we to know that there is not some other, as yet unconsidered way in which a proposition of that form or type can be logically necessary? Surely it has not been proved that logical analysis must consist only in truth-functional and quantificational logic and the analysis of predicates.

Many arguments have been advanced by philosophers for the logically necessary existence of God, or of Platonic Forms, or of numbers, or other entities. Such an argument, if successful, might be expected to show us a way in which it can be logically necessary that there exists something of a certain sort. Perhaps it would establish, for instance, that such a conclusion followed from a theory of general scope in philosophy of mathematics, philosophy of logic, or metaphysics, and that the theory could be shown by some sort of logical analysis to be necessarily true. The claim that there is no way in which an affirmative existential proposition could be logically necessary might be to some extent confirmed by the refutation of arguments for the logically necessary existence of one entity or another. But it is by its nature a claim which is always liable to refutation by a new argument for logically necessary existence. It would therefore be question-begging to treat that claim as providing a refutation of any argument for logically necessary existence.

IV

It is often said that what is wrong with *a priori* arguments for the existence of God is that you can't legitimately get from mere concepts to reality in that way. As J. N. Findlay has said, "It is not thought possible to build bridges between mere abstractions and concrete existence."[5] I suspect that behind most such objections lies a fear that acceptance of the existence of any real thing as logically necessary would compromise the conviction that what reality is, is independent of human thought, choice, and activity. This fear makes sense if, like many modern philosophers, one holds that "necessity in propositions merely reflects our use of words, the arbitrary conventions of our language" (as Findlay again has put it).[6]

At first sight it might seem that a conventionalist view of logical necessity gives grounds to fear that the independence of reality from human linguistic activity will be compromised by the admission of any logically necessary truths at all. For it seems plausible to suppose that every truth is a partial determination of what reality is. What reality is, is determined by some negative existential truths as well as by affirmative existential truths—for instance, by the fact that there are no unicorns as well as by the fact that there are horses. Why, then, isn't the independence of reality from language compromised by the logical necessity of negative as well as affirmative existential truths?

It may be plausible, however, to assume a certain asymmetry between existence and nonexistence at this point, and to say that whereas reality is determined in part by the existence of *any* real thing, it is determined by negative existential truths only if they are contingent. That there are no unicorns is a determination of reality, because there might possibly have been unicorns; it depends on extralinguistic factors whether there are any or not. That there are no unicorns is a determination of reality, because there might possibly have been unicorns; it depends on extralinguistic factors whether there are any or not. That there are no unmarried husbands is not a determination of reality, because "unmarried husband" is just a linguistic monstrosity which has not been given any descriptive function. But the existence of a real being, such as God, must in any case be a partial determination of what reality is. For even if we suppose that His existence is logically necessary, and that "There is no God" is a linguistic monstrosity which has not been given any descriptive function, God Himself, as a real being, must be supposed to be a part of reality, and His existence would therefore have to be a constituent of what reality is. Perhaps we should say that "what reality is" means "which of all logically possible real things (or kinds of real thing) exist."

[5] J. N. Findlay, "Can God's Existence Be Disproved?" *Mind*, vol. 57 (1948), p. 176.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

This formulation seems to have the result we were looking for, that what reality is would be determined, in part, by the existence of a logically necessary real being, but not by the nonexistence of a logically impossible thing.

By speaking of "real things" here we leave open the possibility that some things, such as numbers, might be thought to have logically necessary existence without reality being determined thereby. For it might be held that such things are not real things, and that they exist, not in reality, but in some "purely conceptual realm." But something which (like God) is conceived of as acting causally on real human beings and physical objects must presumably exist as a real thing if it exists at all. What reality is would be determined, in part, by the necessary or contingent existence of any such thing.

I do not mean to endorse the position that I have just been sketching. I have simply been trying to develop, as plausibly as possible, what I take to be the thinking behind certain common objections to logically necessary existence. The argument suggested by this thinking can be formulated as follows.

(A) What reality is, is not (even in part) something that merely reflects our use of words.
(B) If it is a truth that there exists (or that there does not exist) a real thing of a certain logically possible kind, that is part of what reality is.
(C) Logically necessary truths merely reflect our use of words.
(D) Therefore, it is in no case a logically necessary truth that there exists a real thing of a certain kind.

This is the kind of argument on which one would have to rely to substantiate the claim (made by Findlay in the article quoted above) that if logically necessary truth "merely reflects our use of words," then the existence of a real being cannot be logically necessary.

"The correct reply" to this line of argument, as Norman Malcolm has written, "is that the view that logical necessity merely reflects the use of words cannot possibly have the implication that every existential proposition must be contingent. That view requires us to *look at* the use of words and not manufacture *a priori* theses about it."[7] What does seem to follow from the doctrine that logical necessity merely reflects our use of words is that the existence of God, or of some other real thing, could be logically necessary if such words as "God," "real," and "exists" were used in certain ways, and would not be logically necessary if the relevant words were used in other ways. Whether the relevant words are in fact used in such a way that the existence of a certain real thing is logically necessary is something that can be discovered only by investigating how the words are used. Arguments for the logically necessary existence of God, or of any other real thing, could presumably be construed as playing a part in that investigation, as attempts to show us that in fact words are used in such a way that it is logically necessary that a certain real thing exists. To insist that what reality is is not (even in part) something which merely reflects our use of words, and that therefore every argument for the logically necessary existence of a real thing must be counted as refuted in advance, would be to prejudge the results of the investigation, illegitimately. No doubt the thesis that reality is independent of our language, as stated in proposition (A), is intuitively very plausible. But such intuitive plausibility cannot justify a claim to have refuted in advance every argument which purports to show that words are used in such a way that some real existence is logically necessary.

If we assume that proposition (B) is correct, we can draw certain conclusions about the relations between propositions (A) and (C). (C) does not imply that (A) is false. For (C) leaves open the possibility that words may not in fact be used in such a way as to make any real existence logically necessary. But given (B), (C) does imply that whether (A) is true or false depends on how we use words. For the truth or falsity of (A) will depend on whether we do or do not use words in such a way that some real existence is logically necessary. This means that the type of conventionalism expressed in (C) implies, in conjunction with (B), that if what reality is is not (even in part) something that merely reflects our use of words, that fact is itself something that depends on our use of words.

This conclusion, that whether (A) is true or not depends on our use of words, will probably seem objectionable to any philosopher who is determined to adhere to (A) because of its intuitive plausibility. It seems to me that the conviction that reality is not dependent on our language gives to those who hold it less reason for rejecting the possibility of logically necessary real existence than it gives for rejecting the doctrine that logically necessary

[7] Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 69 (1960), p. 55.

truths merely reflect our use of words. Findlay has given the argument a somewhat different turn, in a work more recent than the article quoted above. He is now inclined to accept, and no longer to reject, arguments for the logically necessary existence of a real perfect being. But because he still holds strongly to some such principle as (A), he thinks that the acceptance of logically necessary real existence requires the rejection of the doctrine that logical necessity merely reflects our use of words.[8]

There is more than one way, then, in which the truth of the conjunction of (A), (B), and (C) may be called into question. The point that I would emphasize, however, is that as we have seen, the view of necessary truth expressed in (C) does not allow (A) to be so certain as to provide a conclusive refutation, in advance, of any argument for logically necessary real existence.

V

In this essay I have discussed three types of argument against the possibility of logically necessary existence. In each case my criticism followed the same pattern. I allowed that the objection to logically necessary existence rests on premisses which may have considerable plausibility so long as no cogent argument for the logically necessary existence of any real thing has been found. But I argued that the premisses of the objection are such that it would be question-begging to regard them as conclusively established in advance of detailed consideration of any argument that might be offered for the logically necessary existence of any real thing. In Sect. II I argued that this is true of objections based on a claim to be able to conceive distinctly the nonexistence of anything at all. In Sect. III I argued that it is true of objections based on the claim that there is *no way* in which an affirmative existential proposition could be logically necessary. And in Sect. IV I argued that it is true of objections based on the fear that the independence of reality from human language will be compromised if logically necessary real existence is admitted.

I do not claim that these are the only possible types of objection to logically necessary real existence. But I think they are the most interesting and influential types of objection that I have encountered. And none of them establishes conclusively that all real existence is logically contingent.[9]

The University of Michigan

Received October 1, 1970

[8] J. N. Findlay, *The Trancendence of the Cave* (London and New York, 1967), p. 88: "These ideas will, of course, forbid us to hold any merely empty, verbal doctrine of necessity, nor is there any reason, other than sheer epistemological dogma, why we should accept such a doctrine."

[9] I am indebted to many (particularly including Marilyn McCord Adams, Nelson Pike, and a reader for the *American Philosophical Quarterly*) for helpful discussion and criticism of earlier versions of this essay.