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An Equivocation in Anderson and Welty's "Argument for God from Logic"

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Anderson and Welty argue that the laws of logic imply the existence of God. There is, however, an equivocation in the argument revealed in a key lemma. Any univocal re-statement of the argument is likely to fail.

Anderson and Welty's summary of their argument, given in the conclusion to the paper is:

The laws of logic are necessary truths about truths; they are necessarily true propositions. Propositions are real entities, but cannot be physical entities; they are essentially thoughts. So the laws of logic are necessarily true thoughts. Since they are true in every possible world, they must exist in every possible world. But if there are necessarily existent thoughts, there must be a necessarily existent mind; and if there is a necessarily existent mind, there must be a necessarily existent person. A necessarily existent person must be spiritual in nature, because no physical entity exists necessarily. Thus, if there are laws of logic, there must also be a necessarily existent, personal, spiritual being. The laws of logic imply the existence of God.¹

The "key lemma" in question is:

Since [the laws of logic] are true in every possible world, they must exist in every possible world.

Now, how are we to take the two sub-clauses, "true in every possible world" and "exist in every possible world" as being logically connected?

If and only if (\leftrightarrow)

We might take what is, perhaps, the natural reading; that, for a law of logic, being true is equivalent to existing. This has the advantage of rendering the lemma true. It also has the disadvantage of, when combined

¹ James N. Anderson and Greg Welty, "The Lord of Non-Contradiction: An Argument for God from Logic", *Philosophia Christi* 13:2 (2011)

with the authors' insistence on the necessary truth of laws of logic, contradicting their conclusion.

"The laws of logic imply the existence of God" entails that if there were no God then the laws of logic would not exist. That the laws of logic are necessarily true entails that they are true whether or not God exists. That they are true if God does not exist and that they exist if true entails that the laws of logic would exist were there no God; directly contradicting the conclusion.²

If (\rightarrow)

So we must abandon the idea that a law of logic "exists" in a possible world if and only if it holds true in that particular world. Perhaps it is meant that if, (but not "only if"), a law of logic holds true in a world then it exists in a world? This does not remove the contradiction; it removes one part of the bi-conditional, but not the part that does the damage. The truth of a law of logic still entails its existence and, as the laws of logic are true whether or not God exists they exist whether or not God exists.

Only if (\leftarrow)

Anderson and Welty's *conclusion*, that the laws of logic imply the existence of God, is not contradicted if we assume that "only if" is meant: the laws of logic are true in every possible world only if they exist in every possible world. Indeed, on this reading, Anderson and Welty's conclusion would be supported. Given their characterisation of what it means for a law of logic to "exist", were God not to exist in a possible world the laws of logic would not exist in that possible world. If the non-existence of the laws of logic in a possible world entailed that they failed to hold in that world then an agreement that, say, the law of non-contradiction does hold entails the existence of God.

Whilst this may seem like an improvement, the "only if" reading either contradicts other vital premises in the argument or renders the lemma itself contradictory. The lemma claims that the laws of logic hold true in every possible world. Why are they true in every possible world? If it is because they exist in every possible world (maybe because God exists in

² It may be objected that God is, Himself, necessary and thus there is no possible world where He does not exist. The objection, however, obviously begs the question and does nothing to weaken the assertion. That the laws of logic are necessary independent of God entails that, for all worlds without God the laws of logic still hold ($\forall w [\neg Gw \rightarrow Lw]$). On the assumption of the necessity of God the antecedent of $\neg Gw \rightarrow Lw$ is false and so the expression, as a whole, true.

every possible world) then the laws of logic are not necessarily true; their truth is dependent upon their existence and where they do not exist they are not true. The first premise in Anderson and Welty's, summarised, argument is that the laws of logic *are* necessarily true: the argument contradicts itself.

So let us assume that the fact that the laws of logic hold true in every possible world is because they are necessarily true. This contradicts the assertion that they are true "only if" they exist: the lemma, itself, is contradictory.

Other logical connectives

Other logical connectives are not only more of a stretch in interpretation but also prevent the lemma operating as a lemma. "And" turns the lemma into two simple assertions, which would act as premises rather than a link from premises to further argument. "Or", excluding combinations of "or" and "not" that are equivalent to connectives discussed already, simply asserts the truth of one of the sub-clauses. Only in with the falsity of one premise in an "or" statement is the truth-value of the other established and the lemma holds both sub-clauses true.

There may be other logical connectives that haven't been considered or have not, even, been thought of yet. No logic, though, is able to correct the argument as it stands as the two sub-phrases of the lemma simply talk about different things.

Anderson and Welty must establish that laws of logic are capable of being contingent in order to argue that they are contingent upon God. Thus the laws of logic are characterised as thoughts. Thoughts require a mind and, thus, are contingent on minds. "Exist" in the second sub-phrase refers to *being thought of by a mind*. However being true and being thought are wholly independent properties of propositions. No logical connectives will bridge the gap. Differing logical connectives may save the argument from saying something contradictory, but at the expense of saying anything at all.

Could the argument be successfully re-stated with a univocal meaning of both "is true" and "exists"? Whilst it certainly could be restated univocally, it would likely still fail. The argument must establish contingency at the end. But forgoing necessity has its cost. Without admitting necessity the argument will not sway those who do take the laws of logic to be necessarily true. Without asserting necessity the argument cannot sway those happy with a contingent logic, but who consider that logic dependent on things much more mundane than God.

In short it appears that any argument for God from logic needs to assert both the contingency and the necessity of the laws of logic. To argue

that God is proven by the law of non-contradiction requires breaking the law of non-contradiction.

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