

UNPUBLISHED WORKING PAPER

Infinity in God's attributes

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Awarded a distinction.

Part A

A1 – Introduction of the topic

The dissertation topic is pertaining to the concept of infinity. I aim to probe the assumption of “infinity” that is always present in any argument featuring God. Infinity and God’s attributes seem to be inextricably tied, and since it would not be possible to fruitfully discuss God without mention of His attributes, it is important to investigate the linchpin that God’s attributes rest on: the concept of infinity in the philosophical realm.

The first layer of that is (1) Infinity is not a sufficiently defined concept, in fact, the only definition of it that achieves common consensus is that it is the “undefined”. It becomes problematic to use an undefined concept to build and make inferences from. I do affirm that God is infinite which is a claim I intend on justifying as a start. However, subsequent to that, I aim to show that the problem arises, not when the “infinity” assumption is attributed to God, but when that assumption is used to generate further claims about God’s attributes. If God is necessarily and solely infinite, then it follows that He is ineffable. If He is ineffable and beyond the reach of human cognition, the only reliable source of knowledge about Him is His own self-disclosure. Any other attempt at understanding the infinity through a finite being renders said attempt at explanation anthropomorphic and finite; and that just does not fit God’s description as commonly known; and if such explanation is accepted then, finitude becomes attributed to God. The result then, is straightforward: God cannot be understood or conceived by reasoning, since reasoning requires cognitive access and processability. If the concept under examination is ineffable, reasoning simply collapses. Therefore, whatever can be affirmed about God must come from what He has said about Himself.

The second layer of that is, (2) the highest magnitude of work that has been done on the concept of infinity is in mathematics (and that is to mathematicians’ dismay; infinity is always avoided, but it persists and is stigmatized as a villain in a superhero novel). In other words, in the quest of human knowledge, the field that has covered the most ground pertaining to the topic of infinity is within the realm of mathematics. Here, it could be argued that, the mathematical understanding of infinity establishes enough

analysis to begin using it as a foundation.

The first way I aim to tackle this is (2.1) by presenting that said understanding of infinity is half-formed and often leads to a lot of paradoxes. Which just shows to say that the understanding of it is underdeveloped since a cogent understanding of something, when applied, would never lead to a paradox, simply because a contradiction is an essential feature of a paradox, and by logical necessity, contradictions cannot exist. Which would reasonably mean that either, (i) the understanding of infinity is flawed, (ii) or infinity as a concept is above the comprehension of human intellect. Let it be called "the paradox argument".

The other way I aim to tackle this (2.2), is the category mistake of mathematical infinity being used unto God. I argue that mathematical infinity could not be applied unto God since they are different accounts of understanding and an argument that does so, would fail twice. Let it be called "double category error".

Category error 1 (broad): if (a) one appeals to the achievement of the mathematical enterprise to claim that infinity is sufficiently understood, understood enough to serve as a foundation within the philosophical enterprise, then that move constitutes a category mistake between the philosophical and the mathematical enterprise. Reduce the point to its basic logical structure: there are multiple ways to approach and understand X. Enterprise Y studies X through one epistemic method. Enterprise Z studies X and produces an analysis through a different epistemic method. Because the two enterprises are distinct, the analyses they produce rest on different epistemologies. My argument is that even if nothing is known about their specific internal rules or mechanisms, the mere fact that Y and Z are identified as separate domains is already enough to make it a matter of logical necessity that X as understood within Y cannot be carried over and used within Z.

Description

Studied Object

Method

Epistemic Limitation

Aim

Output

- Enterprise Z X MZ EZ AZ OZX Enterprise Y X MY EY AY OYX

Category error 2 (particular): if (b) it is somehow possible to import a mathematical understanding of infinity unto God (I do not see how that rabbit could be pulled out of the hat), then said import would still be a category error of “qualitative” vs “quantitative”. There is the “quantitative infinity” that is studied in mathematics and there is the “qualitative infinity” that is usually just inferred in the beginning of any paper featuring the classical understanding of God.

And by that, the ultimate conclusion that follows is that, before any inference is made about God, “qualitative infinity” must be either (i) sufficiently defined (ii) or, affirm the ineffability and noncomprehensibility of God. If neither (i) or (ii) could be done, then it is only reasonable to use a religious account of God that possesses a scripture claiming it is from God when speaking about Him.

A2 – Importance of the topic

Philosophical theology routinely presumes “divine infinity” through terms like “classical God” or “omnigod,” yet it rarely (if ever) justifies the assumption. A claim about God that relies on infinity loses argumentative force and rigor if infinity is merely taken for granted. Mathematics has spent centuries attempting to clarify the concept and has produced deep paradoxes, suggesting either that our understanding is mistaken or that the concept surpasses human comprehension. The difficulty of grasping infinity becomes clearer the more one investigates it; the mind resists the concept, and the adamancy to understand it exposes its non-comprehensibility. Emblematic of which is Georg Cantor, although he succeeded in formalizing mathematical infinity, he unfortunately spent the latter segment of his life in and out of psychiatric hospitals which could be an indication that infinity and non-comprehension are inextricably tied even after some sort of successful attempt to make sense of it. “Absolute Infinity” as conceived by Cantor was explicitly identified with God and believed to be the source of all infinities (Cantor 1883a) , however, his identification remains quantitative in nature and that reinforces the need for philosophical theology to analyse the concept

rather than assume it. By contrast, philosophical theology has done almost no work on the nature of infinity itself.

A3 – Table of contents

1 Abstract

2 Introduction: Infinity as a concept

2.1. History of it: Aim is to show that a persistent definition of it is “undefined”

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

2.2. Modern account of it: Show that the definition, even if not asserted, the result is still

| undefined because of circular definitions or failures in logic

2.3. Conclusion or the argument that I begin with is that: no common consensus on what

infinity is except that it is what is “undefined”

| Philosophical Infinity: God, infinity and ineffability

3.1. God is infinite and any understanding of infinity pertaining to God is qualitative

3.2. God is ineffable as a result

3.3. Ineffability blocks deduction

3.4. Revelation being the reasonable course of knowledge

Mathematical Infinity

4.1. The development of the concept in the realm of mathematics

4.2. Problems in mathematical infinity: paradoxes existence indicate incompleteness

4.3. The quantitative account of infinity

Qualitative- Quantitative divide

5.1. Classical account of God assumes qualitative infinity

5.2. Category error 1: Using mathematical understanding of infinity as a justification is

illegitimate because mathematics and philosophy are different branches

5.3. Category error 2: Importing quantitative infinity is a category error

Conclusive options available

6.1. (either) Define qualitative infinity

6.2. (or) Embrace non-comprehension which would mean reasoning is blocked; affirming

inability to fathom is mutually exclusive with further argumentation

6.3. (If none, then) Understanding of God must be grounded in revelation

Conclusion

Part B

B1 – Methodology

Firstly, I aim to give a historical run-down of how the concept of infinity was defined and made sense of, then I relate it with the modern understanding showing that the unfathomable nature of the concept persists. This understanding and introductory explanation is integral to follow the argumentation I set forth later.

Secondly, I must begin with justifying the infinitude of God, there are different routes I could take for that goal, however, I have not yet settled on one (or many). I aim to clarify what are the different kinds of infinity and if these theories of the concept could be used as an assumption in theistic arguments. I then aim to clarify and point out the philosophical understanding of infinity and here is where I make my first argument against the use of “infinity” as a qualitative precursor when speaking about God and the problems that arise from a move like this. Namely, one cannot, by intellectual limitation, or “medical impossibility” as Russel once said (Placek 1999, p. 119), expound on or sufficiently define a concept that has ached giants throughout the dawn of time; limitation in understanding could be an essential feature of infinity. Therefore, infinity, as I set forth earlier, is unfathomable.

I also am exploring the idea that: a prerequisite for understanding anything would require the studied object to have clear boundaries and definitiveness; a relevant discussion to this is Aristotle's "matter and form" (Ainsworth, 2024) that supports the unintelligibility of indeterminacy considering that knowledge is tied to essence and form. Aristotle introduces "prime matter" – that which is indeterminate and follows from it that knowledge of said thing cannot be achieved. It is undecided whether it could feature in one of the arguments or be a separate argument of its own. Thirdly, understanding mathematical infinity (quantitative). One may argue that infinity is welldefined in mathematics, so, that understanding is sufficient to understand or at least be used as an assumption. I argue here that the mathematical infinity is by no means well-defined or even sufficiently defined considering that, any understanding that gives rise to paradoxes would either mean (i) said understanding is wrong since contradictions cannot exist in reality, or (ii) the concept itself, as an essential feature surpasses the threshold of human intellect (which bleeds into the incomprehensibility thesis) which is why human reason cannot capture it.

Fourthly, here I aim to argue that using mathematical infinity in the philosophical realm fails twice. First fail is the category error of enterprises. Second fail is the category error of importing a quantitatively defined concept into a discussion that demands a qualitative understanding of said concept, and this argument works even if the sufficient status is granted to the mathematical infinity. Lastly, I reiterate that the ultimate conclusion of the paper leads to three exhaustible options that must necessarily be considered before positing any arguments about God, either (i) embrace the unfathomable nature of God which consequently, by logical necessity, blocks and completely breaks the possibility of deduction or reason, or (ii) sufficiently define qualitative infinity which is a project that is, arguably impossible, or (iii) resort to a revelation that claims it is from God to make inferences about said God.

B2 – 3 Major Contributions to the topic

The first major contribution to the main aim of my topic is "Divine Infinity in Gregory of Nyssa and Philo of Alexandria" (Geljon, 2005). Geljon's paper aids me in justifying the link between the concept of infinity unto God.

The second major contribution to the main aim of my topic is Kazimierz Trzęsicki's paper (Trzęsicki, 2015): "How are the concepts of infinity acquired?" Kazimierz paper is relevant and helpful to me covering (see table of contents):

- 2 – Introduction 3 – "Philosophical Infinity" 4 – Mathematical Infinity 5 – Qualitative - Quantitative divide
- The third major contribution to the main aim of my topic is Thomas Aquinas on the

incomprehensibility of God (Rahner, 1978). Rahner's paper allows me to cover (see table of contents):

3.1. God is infinite..

6.3. (If none, then)..

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