

The Ontological Modal Collapse as a Collapse of the Square of Opposition

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Abstract. The *modal collapse* that afflicts Gödel’s modal ontological argument for God’s existence is discussed from the perspective of the modal square of opposition.

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1. Introduction

Attempts to prove the existence (or non-existence) of God by means of abstract, ontological arguments are an old tradition in western philosophy, with contributions by several prominent philosophers, including St. Anselm of Canterbury, Descartes and Leibniz. Kurt Gödel and Dana Scott studied and further improved this argument, bringing it to a mathematically more precise form, as a chain of axioms, lemmas and theorems in a second-order modal logic [18, 25], shown in Fig. 1.

Gödel defines God as a being who possesses all *positive* properties and states a few reasonable (but debatable) axioms that such properties should satisfy. The overall idea of Gödel’s proof is in the tradition of Anselm’s argument, who defined God as some entity of which nothing greater can be conceived. Anselm argued that existence in the actual world would make such an assumed being even greater (more perfect); hence, by definition, God must exist. However, for Anselm existence was treated as a predicate and the possibility of God’s existence was assumed as granted. These issues were criticized by Kant and Leibniz, respectively, and they were addressed in the work of Gödel.¹

¹C.: I deleted “successfully”, since I am still not totally convinced yet about the existence as predicate issue in Gödel’s work; I think we should not be conclusive at this point.

A1 Either a property or its negation is positive, but not both:

$$\forall\varphi[P(\neg\varphi) \leftrightarrow \neg P(\varphi)]$$

A2 A property necessarily implied by a positive property is positive:

$$\forall\varphi\forall\psi[(P(\varphi) \wedge \Box\forall x[\varphi(x) \rightarrow \psi(x)]) \rightarrow P(\psi)]$$

T1 Positive properties are possibly exemplified:

$$\forall\varphi[P(\varphi) \rightarrow \Diamond\exists x\varphi(x)]$$

D1 A *God-like* being possesses all positive properties:

$$G(x) \equiv \forall\varphi[P(\varphi) \rightarrow \varphi(x)]$$

A3 The property of being God-like is positive:

$$P(G)$$

C Possibly, a God-like being exists:

$$\Diamond\exists xG(x)$$

A4 Positive properties are necessarily positive:

$$\forall\varphi[P(\varphi) \rightarrow \Box P(\varphi)]$$

D2 An *essence* of an individual is a property possessed by it and necessarily implying any of its properties:

$$\varphi \text{ ess } x \equiv \varphi(x) \wedge \forall\psi(\psi(x) \rightarrow \Box\forall y(\varphi(y) \rightarrow \psi(y)))$$

T2 Being God-like is an essence of any God-like being:

$$\forall x[G(x) \rightarrow G \text{ ess } x]$$

D3 *Necessary existence* of an individual is the necessary exemplification of all its essences:

$$NE(x) \equiv \forall\varphi[\varphi \text{ ess } x \rightarrow \Box\exists y\varphi(y)]$$

A5 Necessary existence is a positive property:

$$P(NE)$$

L1 If a god-like being exists, then necessarily a god-like being exists:

$$\exists xG(x) \rightarrow \Box\exists yG(y)$$

L2 If possibly a god-like being exists, then necessarily a god-like being exists:

$$\Diamond\exists xG(x) \rightarrow \Box\exists yG(y)$$

T3 Necessarily, a God-like being exists:

$$\Box\exists xG(x)$$

FIGURE 1. Scott's version of Gödel's ontological argument [25].

Nevertheless, Gödel's work still leaves room for criticism. In particular, his axioms are so strong that they entail a *modal collapse* [26, 27]: everything that is the case is so necessarily. There has been an impressive body of recent and ongoing work (cf. [27, 16, 2, 1, 12, 17, 19, 20, 15] and the references

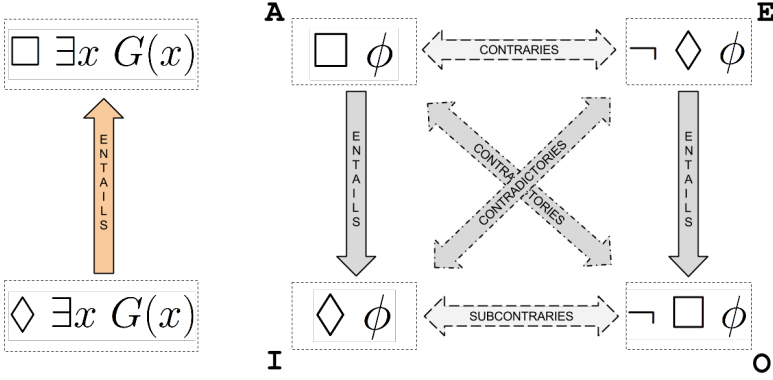


FIGURE 2. Modal Square of Opposition.

therein) proposing solutions for the modal collapse. The goal of this contribution is to discuss the modal collapse from the point of view of the modal square of opposition.

2. A Collapse of the Modal Square

A crucial step of most ontological arguments is the claim that if God's existence is possible, then it is necessary. This is Lemma **L2** in Gödel's proof. In the modal square of opposition (Fig. 2), this is an unusual situation in which the **I** corner must imply and entail the **A** corner, in the particular case when ϕ is $\exists x G(x)$. Gödel's proof shows that his axioms are indeed strong enough to invert the direction of entailment this choice of ϕ . This observation, however, immediately leads to the question whether the axioms are eventually even strong enough to enable the inverted entailment for arbitrary sentences ϕ . That is essentially the question asked by Sobel [26], and his proof of the modal collapse (**MC**, cf. Fig. 3) provides an affirmative answer. It is possible to show that this form of the modal collapse entails (in modal logic **K**) a collapse of the modal square (**MC'**), causing the subcontraries to entail (and even imply) their respective contraries. Normally, as shown in Fig. 2, in the modal square of opposition only the other direction of entailment holds: the contraries entail their subcontraries, assuming the *modal existential import* **ExImp** [?].²

Moreover, in any modal logic where the axiom **T** holds (i.e. where the accessibility relation is reflexive), even a total collapse of the modalities (**MC''**) is entailed by **MC**. Interestingly, under this stronger form of modal collapse, the contraries entail their subcontraries even without the existential import.

²C.: We need a reference here; I am still searching for good papers; this here is also interesting: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/01445340.2013.764962>

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|--------------|---|
| MC | Everything that is the case is so necessarily: $\forall\phi[\phi \rightarrow \Box\phi]$ |
| MC' | Everything that is possible is necessary: $\forall\phi[\Diamond\phi \rightarrow \Box\phi]$ |
| T | Everything that is necessary is the case: $\forall\phi[\Box\phi \rightarrow \phi]$ |
| ExImp | (Modal Existential Import): $\Diamond\top$ |
| AI | Everything that is necessary is possible: $\forall\phi[\Box\phi \rightarrow \Diamond\phi]$ |
| MC'' | Modalities collapse completely: $\forall\phi[(\phi \leftrightarrow \Box\phi) \wedge (\Diamond\phi \leftrightarrow \Box\phi)]$ |

FIGURE 3. Modal Collapse

Although Gödel's axioms lead to modal collapse, there are several variants (e.g. [2, 1, 12]) that are known to be immune to it. This means there must be at least one proposition ϕ such that the implication $\phi \rightarrow \Box\phi$ (from now on abbreviated as *collapse*(ϕ)) is not valid under the axioms and definitions used by the variant. But if the variant is sufficiently similar to Gödel's argument, following the path deriving³ Lemmas **L1** and **L2**, then *collapse*($\exists xG(x)$) must be valid. Therefore, one may wonder how strong is their immunity to the modal collapse: is there any other proposition ϕ for which *collapse*(ϕ) is also valid?

For Anderson's emendation [2], for example, a form of the modal collapse (**A:MC**), restricted to positive properties applied to god-like beings, can be derived. The proof, under the modal logic **K**, depends only on Anderson's alternative definition of god-like being (**A:D1**). This class of propositions for which the collapse occurs is tight: weaker restrictions (**A:MC1** and **A:MC2**), which could lead to larger classes, are counter-satisfiable. These results hold under both constant and varying domain quantification, with possibilist and actualist quantifiers.

Independently of the variant of the ontological argument under consideration, the following can be said about the class of collapsing propositions:

1. Valid propositions are collapsing: if ϕ is valid, then *collapse*(ϕ) is valid.
2. The class of collapsing propositions is closed under logical equivalence: if *collapse*(ϕ) is valid and $\phi \leftrightarrow \phi'$ is valid, then *collapse*(ϕ') is valid.
3. The class of collapsing propositions is not generally closed under equi-validity: even if *collapse*(ϕ) is valid and ϕ and ϕ' are equi-valid, *collapse*(ϕ') may not be valid.
4. The class of collapsing propositions is not generally closed under implication: even if *collapse*(ϕ) is valid and $\phi \rightarrow \phi'$ is valid, *collapse*(ϕ') may not be valid.

³C.: I don't know the phrase "path deriving", please check.

| | |
|--------------|--|
| A:DI | A <i>God-like</i> being necessarily possesses those and only those properties that are positive: |
| | $G_A(x) \equiv \forall \varphi [P(\varphi) \leftrightarrow \Box \varphi(x)]$ |
| A:MC | The modal collapse happens for any positive properties applied to any god-like being: |
| | $\forall \varphi \forall x [(P(\varphi) \wedge G_A(x)) \rightarrow \text{collapse}(\varphi(x))]$ |
| A:MC1 | The modal collapse does <i>not</i> happen for positive properties applied to arbitrary individuals (<i>counter-satisfiable</i>): |
| | $\forall \varphi \forall x [P(\varphi) \rightarrow \text{collapse}(\varphi(x))]$ |
| A:MC2 | The modal collapse does <i>not</i> happen for an arbitrary properties applied to a god-like being (<i>counter-satisfiable</i>): |
| | $\forall \varphi \forall x [G_A(x) \rightarrow \text{collapse}(\varphi(x))]$ |

FIGURE 4. Restricted Collapse for Anderson’s Emendation [2]

3. Final Remarks

All results announced in this note have been obtained experimentally using interactive and automated theorem provers and model finders [10, 14, 21, 11, 13]. The source codes of the experiments, as well as the resulting proofs and counter-models, are available in <https://github.com/FormalTheology/GoedelGod/tree/master/Formalizations/Isabelle>.⁴

The technique enabling these experiments is the embedding of quantified modal logics into higher-order logics [9, 8, 3], for which automated theorem provers exist. This technique has already been successfully employed in the verification and reconstruction of Gödel’s proof [5, 4, 6, 23], and a detailed mathematical description is available in [7].

The modal collapse is an interesting example of philosophical controversy and dispute, to which we can apply Leibniz’s idea of a *calculus ratiocinator* brought to reality in the form of contemporary automated theorem provers. A significant advantage provided by the use of computers is that all conditions (e.g. modal logic, domain conditions, semantics) under which the announced results hold must be explicitly specified in the source code. This reduces the need for interpretation and the danger of misunderstandings. Current technology is increasingly ready to be embraced by those willing to practice computer-assisted theoretical philosophy [22, 24].

Ongoing and future work includes the study of modal collapse in further variants of the ontological argument, e.g. [12, 17].

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We would like to thank Paul Weingartner, André Fuhrmann and Melvin Fitting for several discussions about Gödel’s ontological argument.

⁴C.: Here we should point to the exact files (and put them in a relatively stable subdirectory?). We also should also use corresponding names in these files, so that the reader easily finds the related parst. Right now this is still quite difficult.

ToDo: who else?

Note about authorship

Alphabetic order has been used for the authors' names. The extent and kind of contribution of each author cannot be inferred from the order.

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