

However exceptional God may be, God cannot be an exception to the ultimate rules of language and meaning governing what may and may not be said about God or anything else. And yet God, rightly understood, is by definition an infinite exception; and unless and until this is recognized, dialogue about God is impossible and about no one knows what.

Of course, if God simply violates rules, there can be no rational discussion of God at all. In fact, either "God" fulfills, rather than violates, the normal logical rules, or the idea of God is nonsense. The proper function of "God" is not to destroy meaning, but to fulfill it, to establish universal sense, not nonsense. Either, then, there must be a more ultimate rule that illuminates any that is less so, explaining why it not only admits an exception but demands it, or else the idea of God as an exception is against all logic.

But what is the rule, for example, by which existence generally is contingent, but in the exceptional case of God is necessary? The rule, one may suggest, is this: To exist contingently is to exist competitively, with only limited capacity to adjust to things, whereas, conversely, to exist noncompetitively, with strictly unlimited capacity to adjust to things, is to exist noncontingently or necessarily.

Another rule, as surely logical as any, is that the necessary can only be abstract, empty, entailed by everything concrete or actual but entailing nothing less abstract than itself. But does this mean, then, that, if God exists necessarily, God must be a mere abstraction?

A negative answer can be consistently defended, the while allowing that God's existence is indeed abstract, if, and only if, God's necessary existence can be distinguished from God's contingent actuality. But suppose that the ultimate rule here, applicable to all individuals, God included, is that existence is one thing, actuality, something else—that existence as such is abstract, even as actuality is concrete. To hold, then, that God's existence is to be distinguished from God's actuality is not to make God an exception to this rule but rather an

exemplification of it. On the other hand, where God is indeed exceptional is that God's existence is not only different from God's actuality, but *modally* different from it, in that God's existence, radically unlike any other, is necessary even though God's actuality, as much as any other, is contingent.

27 September 2004