



Book Review

Why There is Something Rather Than Nothing, by Bede Rundle

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Disputatio Vol. 1, No. 19

November 2005

DOI: 10.2478/disp-2005-0016

ISSN: 0873-626X

question the volume leaves for us to debate is whether Russell's legacy will only include his contributions in the area of metaphysics, logic, and epistemology.

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Why There is Something Rather Than Nothing, by Bede Rundle.
 Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004, 216 pp., £35.

Why is there anything at all? One familiar answer, offered by various theists, is that there is a particular being (God) who *must* exist. Although Rundle rejects the theist approach he thinks we can explain why there is something. Our explanation can appeal to an implication of the theist's principle, namely, there cannot be *nothing* — something *or other* must be. This no-nothing principle does not imply that any particular thing has a necessary existence. It is compatible with admitting, of each particular thing, that it might not have been (so long as something else was). However, we have an answer to our question: the reason why there is anything is that there has to be something or other.

Rundle offers several considerations in support of his principle. He says it has the status of a conceptual truth in that we cannot really conceive of there being nothing:

Our attempts at conceiving of total non-existence are irredeemably partial. We are always left with something, if only a setting from which we envisage everything having departed. (p. 110)

Furthermore, Rundle argues, when we deny the existence of something, we presuppose a domain of things and a space they occupy. 'There are no more apples' means roughly that nothing in my house (or some other place whose salience is evident in the context) is an apple, or that no where in my house is an apple. In denying that something exists, we are characterizing things and places whose existence we presuppose. Hence to say nothing exists is not really

coherent; it is like saying, of things somewhere, that they are not anything, or that they are nowhere. Rundle also supports his view by equating 'there is something' roughly with 'there is a reality to be described.' Hence 'there is nothing' is self-defeating; someone who says 'there is nothing' attempts to describe reality by saying there is no reality to be described (p. 114). (So how did we ever get the idea that there might have been nothing? By generalizing: observations like 'there is nothing up my sleeve,' and 'there is nothing in the hat,' lead up to the thought that there might be nothing at all.)

Rundle is not saying merely that all of our imaginings include a setting for the things conceived, so a setting there must be. Such a setting is an indispensable part of the world however it is viewed, but it is not the only part. Many of the elements of our worldview are conceptually inseparable, and we are confused if we think we can make sense of the one without the other. Perhaps the most basic thing we can conceive of is the setting to be occupied by anything else we might think of. But we cannot really conceive of a setting without at the same time introducing bodies in place. If there is anything at all, which Rundle takes himself to have established, then there must be matter. What form matter takes is not a matter of necessity — all sorts of ways of understanding it are coherent. What is necessary is that something be material. There must be matter that persists through whatever transformations it admits of (p. 147).

Can we not imagine the existence of abstract or mental entities? If such things might subsist on their own, unaccompanied by physical things, it seems false that material things must exist. Rundle's response is that we do not really arrive at anything coherent when we attempt to conceive of a universe populated solely by abstract or mental entities. Such entities can exist only derivatively, as modifications of, or predications of, matter. We can comprehend minds, decisions, intentions and so forth only in the setting of human bodies and their behavior in the physical realm. Rundle admits that, as Frege claimed, mathematicians appear to say things that are true of (or false of) abstract entities. But this is an illusion, which can be dissipated by construing phrases such as 'are fifteen in number' as true of collections or arrays of books and tables and other physical things (p. 137).

If we reject the possibility of nothing existing, we cannot say that at some future time there may no longer be anything, or that, although once there was nothing, later the universe existed or was caused to exist. Does it follow that the universe has existed and will

exist for an infinite period? Rundle says we cannot make sense of the idea of an infinite duration of time passing, only finite durations, however extensive. However, the impossibility of an infinite duration passing does not entail that there is ever a time when time ends (or begins). We cannot make sense of the universe coming into being or passing out of being. 'Beginnings and endings join causation in being concepts which ... resist extrapolation to the universe itself (p. 122).'

No doubt Rundle will encounter the charge that it is worrisome to move from observations about what we can conceive or say to conclusions as to what there must be. Perhaps we cannot make clear sense of 'there might have been nothing.' As Rundle knows (p. 190), it does not follow that there must be something. Nonetheless, if his argument succeeds, 'there is something or other' has one of the earmarks of necessity: it is true on any conception of reality. Let us add that Rundle will have put us in an awkward position if we insist on an explanation for why there is something: we cannot express or conceive of the possibility whose nonactuality we want explained.

Rundle's concise book makes helpful contributions to philosophy of religion, philosophy of language and metaphysics. Moreover, the early chapters set the stage for an idea, defended in the last chapter, that is of special interest, namely that there is no *need* for an answer to (what some call) philosophy's central question. In the tradition of Peirce and Wittgenstein, Rundle finds a way of thinking that generates an intractable philosophical problem and attempts to replace it with an alternative view on which the problem no longer arises. According to Peirce, Cartesian skepticism arises, roughly, when we think that all beliefs are problematic unless justified. On the Cartesian approach, the epistemic default is to believe nothing; we are to accept beliefs only with adequate support, and we are driven to seek something we cannot have: a justification for the whole of our worldview. Peirce's solution was epistemic conservatism, by which beliefs are unproblematic unless there is good reason to abandon them. On this approach, we justify one element of our worldview using another, and hence cannot justify the whole, but then there is no need to. On Rundle's diagnosis, the demand for an answer to philosophy's central question is generated largely by the belief that any and only departures from nothingness need explanation, as if an array of things in space is mysterious in a way which a complete absence of things would not be. For Rundle, what needs explanation is all and only departures from the status quo (where 'status quo' is understood to

embrace an established pattern of changes as well as changelessness). It follows that the (mere) existence of the physical realm needs no explanation; the need for and possibility of explanation arises only for things *in* the universe, and then only when they cease to be 'lazy' — when they depart from the status quo (p. 190).

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Kripke: Names, Necessity, and Identity, by Christopher Hughes.
Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004, 260 pp., £35.00.

Saul Kripke is one of the most important philosophers of the 20th century: he made the range of issues that characterize the last 50 years of analytic philosophy what they are. No discussion these days on the semantics of proper names and of natural kind terms, semantic paradoxes, belief ascription, the mind-body problem, the distinction between the a priori and the necessary, among a host of others, can fail to refer to Kripke's work. Christopher Hughes' recent discussion of important themes from Kripke's metaphysics and philosophy of language is one of a number of critical analyses that have finally begun to emerge on Kripke and the significance of his contributions to philosophy.

Although Kripke was not yet twenty when he made his first contribution to philosophy, the series of three lectures he gave at Princeton University in 1970, titled *Naming and Necessity*, is perhaps his best-known work. A prospective philosopher taking up *Naming and Necessity* would be assured of being introduced to a spectacularly comprehensive set of issues in philosophy of language, mind, metaphysics, and epistemology, along with a number of significant criticisms of the canonical positions, and some genuinely original contributions, in fewer than 200 pages. *Naming and Necessity* is required reading, and, indeed, for those philosophers who came into the field after 1970, it is difficult to imagine the state of play before Kripke. They really thought names were disguised descriptions? That necessary truths can only be known a priori? That mind-body identity is contingent? That this lectern could have been made of ice? Kripke changed the philoso-