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Is There a God?——an Examination of Anselm’s Ontological Proof of God’s Existence with Kant’s Refutation

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Abstract : Kant refuted Anselm's ontological proof of God's existence by claiming that "being" is not a predicative word but only a link verb. Yet Alvin Plantinga wants to say that "being" is a predicative word, though a special one. Unlike other predicative word, this one cannot predicate by itself but always has to have another predicate going along with itself. This article would like to argue that even if "being" is a predicative word, just because it is that kind of "special" predicative word as Plantinga has pointed out, Anselm's ontological proof of God's existence cannot stand. Furthermore an attempted effort is made to provide a proof that this kind of “proof of God’ s existence” is impossible. Its ultimate mistake lies in its treating God in line with other objects that exist in this world.

Key words: God's existence, ontological proof, “being,” Anselm, Kant

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Is there a God? Every evangelist is first asked of this question when he or she tries to preach Christ toward a non-believer; any theology seems to have to start with this question. However not until more than one thousand years after Christ do we have the first ontological argument of God’ s existence by St. Anselm, who claims that God, “the being than which nothing greater can be conceived,” cannot be conceived not to exist. Though probably no Christian after Anselm is actually converted to his faith by this ontological proof, its witty argument attracted some of the most capable minds in the history of philosophy and theology to this pursuit of proving the existence of God through the effort of speculative reason—among them we find the names of St. Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz—until such attempt was refuted by Kant, who denied the possibility of any speculative proof for God’ s existence at all.

This paper will re-examine Anselm’ s ontological argument as well as Kant’ s refutation of it. Through this process we will see that no matter whether Anselm accepts Kant’ s refutation or not his proof of God’ s existence does not stand. However, this does not mean we should thus deny the existence of God, but that we have to understand the existence of God in a way different from Anselm’ s.

God, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot be conceived not to exist—Anselm’ s ontological proof

To read Anselm’ s proof of God’ s existence, we need first to know what does he mean by “God.” In his *Proslogion*, Anselm confesses to God, “we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater

can be conceived.”^[1] Believing so, Anselm claims that the being thus believed receives an existence in his mind, or understanding, in his own word: “... something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing *greater* can be conceived. For ... whatever is understood, exists in the understanding.”^[2] Taking that confession as an apophatic definition about God, Anselm forms a *reductio ad absurdum* argument for God’s existence:

“ And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.

“Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.”^[3]

If we apply Anselm’s own definition of God here and have “God” take the place of “that, than which nothing greater can be conceived,” we see the proving steps in the argument more clearly:

- 1) Suppose that God exists only in the understanding and not in reality,
- 2) then we can conceive a being, which has all the properties that “God” already has, while this new being exists not only in the understanding but also in reality,
- 3) then this later conceived being is conceived as being greater than God,
- 4) but our premise is, God is the one, than which nothing greater can be conceived,
- 5) 3) and 4) contradict each other, therefore our hypothesis is untenable,
- 6) so, God exists not only in the understanding but also in reality.

One may immediately feel like asking Anselm, “What does it mean to be conceived?” “What does it mean to be greater? To be conceived greater?” For the first question, I would like to draw on Alvin Plantinga’s comments here and define that “to conceive a being” is “to construct a concept with no logical mistake.”^[4] To understand what does Anselm mean by “greater,” we have to look into the following quotation:

“ ...you say that when you hear of a being than which a greater is inconceivable, you cannot conceive of it in terms of any real object known to you either specifically or generally, nor have it in your understanding.

“But obviously this is not true. For everything that is *less good*, in so far as it is good, is like the *greater good*. It is therefore evident to any rational mind, that by ascending from the *lesser good* to the *greater*, we can form a considerable notion of a being than which a *greater* is inconceivable.

“For instance, who (even if he does not believe that what he conceives of exists in reality) supposing that there is some good which has a beginning and an end, does not conceive that a good is much *better*,

[1] St. Anselm, “Proslogion,” in *The Ontological Argument: from St. Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (New York: Anchor, 1965), 4.

[2] St. Anselm, “Proslogion,” 4.

[3] St. Anselm, “Proslogion,” 4.

[4] Alvin Plantinga, “Kant’s Objection to the Ontological Argument,” *The Journal of Philosophy* LXIII (1966): 538, “to say that a state of affairs is conceivable is to say that there is no logical impossibility in the supposition that it obtains.”

which, if it begins, does not cease to be? And that as the second good is *better* than the first, so that good which has neither beginning nor end, though it is ever passing from the past through the present to the future, is better than the second? And that far *better* than this is a being—whether any being of such a nature exists or not—which in no wise requires change or motion, nor is compelled to undergo change or motion?”^[5]

Obviously here Anselm does not differentiate the meaning of “greater” in the sense of “greater amount” from the “greater” in the sense of “greater value,” or “better.” A big ball is greater than a small ball because the former has a larger volume, while a shorter man can be a better doctor than a taller one. In our judgment the former “greater” is objectively greater and absolutely greater, while the latter is subjectively greater and contingently greater. Because when we compare the value of different objects, we first have a goal in mind and judge the objects as means; ^[6]one is “better” than the other when one serves the goal better than the other; the value of the same object can change when our goal changes. A fresh apple is better than a rotting one because the fresh one is better for eating, but when one wants to use apples for fertilizer he will choose the latter. A lamp is better than a candle for illumination, but a candle may be better than a lamp if we want to create a romantic atmosphere.

In the above text Anselm repeatedly says, “one good is better than the other.” However, since he does not release to us anything about his interest, we cannot tell by which means “one good is better than the other.” To make his argument clearer we may want to make some revision of it. Say I did enjoy the party last night and one good thing about it is that it started and ended at the appropriate time. Wouldn’t it become boring if this party lasts forever? We even cannot imagine it to be without beginning. My suggestion is that in this text, we take “a good” as “a good nature” to prevent it from being understood as “a good object.” An originally good party starts to lose the nature of “goodness” when it exceeds the appropriate length of time and tires every participant. Now we see that Anselm’s “greater good” simply contains “a greater amount of good nature” than the “lesser good.”

Thus Anselm enlightens us to define “greater” in the sense of “greater value” through the “greater” in the sense of “greater amount.” Go back to our examples we discover that our better things contain some properties that serve the goals positively which the less good lack or possess to a smaller extent. The rotting apple does not have the freshness that the fresh apple has for eating. The light of a candle is not as bright as a lamp. Now we interpret that Anselm is measuring the greatness of a thing by the amount of positive properties it has. A lengthy party is not as great as a party which lasts for an appropriate length of time because the former lacks this advantage of the latter, though it may be of no difference from the latter in every other respect.

The more positive properties a being has, the greater it is. Now God is the being “than which nothing greater can be conceived.” Combining our interpretation of Anselm’s using of “conceiving” and “being greater,” we see that this God has such a characteristic that we cannot construct a concept that has more positive properties than He does without making logical mistakes. Therefore I suggest that logically this

[5] St. Anselm, “Proslogion,” 24-25.

[6] One reason that Christ urges us not to judge human beings because we are not allowed to take other human beings as means to serve our own interest. Therefore we can say one is a better doctor than the other, but we have no right to say one is a better person than the other.

God is a being that has the fullest amount of positive properties.

Being clear with these, let us return to Anselm's ontological proof. I suggest that at step 3) Anselm makes the most crucial movement in his argument. Here he claims that "a God that exists in the understanding and in reality" is greater than "a God that exists in the understanding alone." Obviously here "better" cannot work in the place of "greater." How can we definitely say that "existence in reality" is better than "absence from it"? We are even farther from deciding in the place of God that it is better for Him to show up in reality than to hide Himself from it. The claim in step 3) makes sense only if "greater" means "having more positive properties." In which sense "a God that exists in the understanding and in reality" is greater than "a God that exists in the understanding alone?" This is true only if we understand that it is because the former has the property of "existing in reality" while the latter does not. Therefore Anselm's ontological proof stands or falls, depends on whether "existence in reality" is a property or not. It seems that if we accept that "existence in reality" is a property which can be added to a being that already has got a certain amount of properties, then we have to accept Anselm's ontological proof of God's existence.

Being is not a predicate—Kant's refutation

"Being is obviously not a real predicate."^[7] Insisting this Kant claims to have undermined the legitimacy of any ontological proof of God's existence. For Kant, a predicate is "a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing."^[8] The more predicates I am able to attach to a subject, the more I know about it. I know more about God when I can say, "God is love and justice" than when I can only say "God is love." The new predicate "justice" enriches my earlier concept of God, which contains only "love." But "being," Kant says, is "merely the positing of a thing or of certain determinations in themselves. In the logical use it is merely the copula of a judgment."^[9] Here, Kant uses the example, "God is omnipotent." In this statement "God" is the subject and "omnipotent" is the predicate, while "is" "... only posits the predicate in relation to the subject."^[10] That is, "is," alone, does not say anything about the subject "God" but only introduces the predicate to it:

"...if I take the subject (God) together with all his predicates, and say God is, or there is a God, then I add no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates, and indeed posit the object in relation to my concept."^[11]

What is Kant's concern here? He explains, "Both [the object and my concept] must contain exactly the same, and hence when I think this object as given absolutely (through the expression, "it is"), nothing is thereby added to the concept, which expresses merely its possibility."^[12] The concept in my mind and the object in front of me have to match each other perfectly for me to name the object with that concept. So a given object realizes a concept of it and therefore expresses its possibility to be in reality but adds no

[7] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer, and Allen W. Wood. (New York: Cambridge, 1998), 567, A598/B626.

[8] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 567, A598/B626.

[9] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 567, A598/B626.

[10] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 567, A599/B627.

[11] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 567, A599/B627.

[12] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 567, A599/B627.

content to the concept itself. For example, when I point to an apple and say, “it is an apple,” the concept “apple” in my mind does not thus become richer at this announcement; my knowledge about apple does not thus grow. Say if I have never eaten an apple before and have only learned about its shape and color from books, at the moment when I recognize the thing in front of me to be an apple, I am only applying my earlier knowledge here, but my knowledge about an apple is not immediately enriched—what I do not know about an apple before, for example, its taste, I still do not know now. A blind man may judge this apple to be an apple by tasting it and feeling its shape, but his judgment tells him nothing about the color of it, neither does the concept of “apple” in his mind thus includes new properties about apples. One’s discovery of an external object to be an apple only tells him that it is possible for an individual that matches the speculative concept “apple” to exist in the experiential world, or world of appearances, in Kant’s words. Thus Kant arrives at a strange conclusion—“the actual contains nothing more than the merely possible.” Immediately Kant explains this puzzling statement as follows:

“A hundred actual dollars do not contain the least bit more than a hundred possible ones. For since the latter signifies the concept and the former its object and its positing in itself, then, in case the former contained more than the latter, my concept would not express the entire object and thus would not be the suitable concept of it.” ^[13]

Nobody would agree that a hundred actual dollars and the concept of one hundred dollars are the same; Kant himself admits that “in my financial condition there is more with a hundred actual dollars than with the mere concept of them (i.e., their possibility). ... yet the hundred dollars themselves that I am thinking of are not in the least increased through this being outside my concept.” ^[14] Now we understand that Kant does not mean that an actual object is no different from a possible concept but that they should contain the same amount of properties. If the amount of money in front of me is more than or less than one hundred dollars, I cannot apply my concept of “one hundred dollars” to it and say, “it is one hundred dollars.” Although it is the same apple in front that blind man and me, the “it” in his judgment, which contains taste and shape, is different from mine, which contains only shape and color; each is nothing more than what is already in each person’s concept about apple. Actually because neither one of us has a complete knowledge, that is, knows every single property of apples, neither judgment is absolutely correct; both of us can make mistakes.

Further Kant leads us to imagine an extreme situation in which we do know fully about the properties of an object, then, he thinks, it becomes even clearer that we should not take “existence” as a property:

“Thus when I think a thing, through whichever and however many predicates I like (even its thoroughgoing determination), not the least bit gets added to the thing when I posit in addition that this thing is. For otherwise what would exist would not be the same as what I had thought in my concept, but more than that, and I could not say that the very object of my concept exists.” ^[15]

Suppose that before I see this apple, I already have got a complete knowledge of all those properties of such an apple except that I do not know whether such a thing actually exists or not; now I see a thing, to which all predicates included in my concept “apple” can be attached, only that the very thing in front of me

[13] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 567, A599/B627.

[14] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 567, A599/B627.

[15] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 567-568, A600/B628.

has the property of “existence” but my conceptual “apple” does not, if one insists that the very existence of this apple is an extra property of it beyond all what I already know about “apple,” Kant says, just as that I cannot call one hundred and one actual dollars “one hundred dollars,” I am not allowed to call the thing in front of me “apple,” because my concept of “apple” does not contain that property of existence that this particular apple has.

If we agree with Kant that being cannot be a predicate, consequently we will deny the legitimacy of Anselm’s ontological proof of God’s existence. Because if existence cannot be the property of an object, a being that exists both in reality and in understanding is by no means greater than a being that exists in understanding alone—step 3) in Anselm’s proof does not stand; therefore the whole argument fails.

What if “being” can be a predicate?

However, doesn’t my knowledge about apples grow when I actually see an existing apple than when I do not know whether there actually is such a thing called “apple” or not. Isn’t it different merely to understand the concept of a “flying horse” than to know also that such a thing really exists, either through my firsthand experience or from somebody else’s information? Say I now have the concept of “flying horse,” but about its actuality I can offer no opinion—since I never see one, I would lie if I say that it does exist, but because my experience is always limited, I cannot thus assure you that there is no such a thing at all. What if one day I do see a horse flying? Shouldn’t I immediately adjust my present concept about “flying horse” and say that a flying horse can exist?

Let us reread Kant’s definition of “predicate” and reconsider about the possibility of taking “existence” as a property. Kant says, predicate is “a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing.” We notice that Kant is defining “predicate” through its relation with “concept” and with other “predicates.” I would like to interpret that this definition means, a predicate is an element of a concept, and a concept is a collection of predicates. To refine this statement, I would like to draw on Plantinga’s comments here and say, a concept is a collection of “a number of properties that are *severally necessary* and *jointly sufficient* for the concept’s applying to something.”^[16] It is not enough to say, “a predicate is a concept of something,” otherwise we could make a mistake by equalizing an element with a collection that contains only this one element: $100 \neq \{100\}$. That a predicate is “a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing,” means, for a concept C expressed by the collection $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n\}$ —suppose that $P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n$ are the properties jointly sufficient and severally necessary for a thing to fall under this concept—we can add P_{n+1} into it and get a new collection $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}\}$, that is, a new concept C1. That “Being is ‘merely the copula of a judgment’” can be understood as, in the equation $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n\} + \{P_{n+1}\} = \{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}\}$, being is that “=” which contributes nothing to the new collection but only connects what is before it and what is after. “Existence” simply cannot be that “ P_{n+1} ,” Kant says.

Fair enough, I would reply to Kant, but will your arithmetic still be correct, if you put “ $\neq$ ”, or “ $<$ ”, or “ $>$ ” in the place of “=”? If you say, when I say “there is a God” I “add no new predicate to the concept of God”, will you admit that, if I say “there is no God” I am saying something different about God from the former? If “ P_{n+1} ” is a false or empty element, then $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}\} = \{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots$

[16] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974), 95.

$P_n, \neg P_{n+1}\} = \{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n\}$ just like $1 + 0 = 1 - 0 = 1$. This obviously is not true for “existence.” “Existence” is different from “non-existence,” just like “red” is different from “non-red.”

But if “existence” can be that “ P_{n+1} ”, then $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}(\text{existence})\} \neq \{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n\}$, Kant would ask, then how can you name an actual object with your concept about it, when the latter has not included the property “existence” yet? I would say, we correctly name an object as long as the named object does not lack any properties that I list beforehand in the naming concept. Apparently we are not making any mistake to include a square under the concept of rectangle, though the former has an extra property of *having four equally long sidelines* beyond all that the latter already has. Immediately Kant may ask, are you going to call one hundred and one dollars “one hundred dollars” then? Of course not, one hundred and one actual dollars includes one hundred actual dollars and is one dollar more than the latter, but the concept of “one hundred and one dollars” and the concept of “one hundred dollars” are parallel concepts and one does not fall into the other. The collection of $\{101\}$ and the collection of $\{100, 1\}$ are different collections of numerical elements, although $100 + 1 = 101$.

Still, Kant can resist, O.K. you can take “existence” as a property, but how are you going to deal with “possibility”? Do you want to take it as a property also? One inference of my proposition that “Being is not a predicate” is that “the actual contains nothing more than the merely possible.” Obviously if you think an actual flying horse is different from a merely possible one, then “existence” should be a different property from “possibility.” I accept that you can let an object of $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}\}$ go under the concept $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n\}$, but can you have $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}\}$ under the name of $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}'\}$? If you insist that “existence” is a property, how can you name an object of $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}(\text{existence})\}$ with your concept $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}' (\text{possibility})\}$?

To answer this challenge we need to first differentiate two kinds of possibilities, namely, logical possibility and existential possibility. A concept is logically possible when its predicative elements do not contradict each other. This is true for every conceivable or logically legal concept; therefore any legal concept $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n\} = \{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}(\text{logical possibility})\}$, so we see that “logical possibility” cannot be added into a concept and make a new one; to apply Kant’s definition of “predicate” here, we conclude that “logical possibility” is not a true predicate. Moreover, with $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}(\text{existence})\}$ we can oppose $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, \neg P_{n+1}(\text{non-existence})\}$, but with $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}(\text{logical possibility})\}$ we cannot oppose $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, \neg P_{n+1}(\text{logical impossibility})\}$. There is no such thing as $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, \neg P_{n+1}(\text{logical impossibility})\}$; what is logically impossible simply does not show up.

Nevertheless, existential possibility is a different case. A concept is existentially possible, means, it is possible for an actual object to have all the properties included in this concept. Now Kant can still ask, how are you going to name $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}(\text{existence})\}$ with $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}' (\text{existential possibility})\}$? Obviously, $\{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, P_{n+1}(\text{existential possibility})\} \neq \{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n, \neg P_{n+1}(\text{existential impossibility})\} \neq \{P_1, P_2, P_3, \dots P_n\}$. However, I will ask Kant, are you ever able to claim the existential possibility of a concept before you actually find an object that matches this concept? Or are you going to jump to the conclusion that there can never be a real thing that matches this logically correct concept simply because you have not yet found one? Existential possibility can never be affirmed without actual existence; existential impossibility is never absolute simply because of contemporary absence; both “existential possibility” and “existential impossibility” are problematic before we encounter

actual existence. We have to agree that a problematic element cannot contribute to a collection, so we have neither a concept $\{P1, P2, P3, \dots Pn, Pn+1(\text{existential possibility})\}$ nor $\{P1, P2, P3, \dots Pn, Pn+1(\text{existential impossibility})\}$ before we actually meet an object of $\{P1, P2, P3, \dots Pn, Pn+1(\text{existence})\}$. Therefore it is a false question how can we name an object $\{P1, P2, P3, \dots Pn, Pn+1(\text{existence})\}$ with the concept $\{P1, P2, P3, \dots Pn, Pn+1' (\text{existential possibility})\}$.

Confidently I will go ahead to name the particular apple in front of me with the concept of apple in my mind, though the former has the property of actual existence while the latter does not. Moreover ever since I see a true apple for the first time, my concept about apple will include “existence” and I thus feel even more confident to name other actual apples with my “apple concept.”

However, here Plantinga would further defend Kant, if you take “existence” as a property, then for any concept $C = \{P1, P2, P3, \dots Pn\}$, you can add $Pn+1(\text{existence})$ into it and make a new concept $C1 = \{P1, P2, P3, \dots Pn, Pn+1(\text{existence})\}$ and say “C1 exists,” no matter how ridiculous a concept C is. For your imaginative concept “flying horse,” which contains the properties of “flying ability” and “being a horse,” you can simply add another predicative element “existence” and get a new concept “existing flying horse” and say “An existing flying horse exists.” Of course this is not true. On the contrary any other property is not threatened by this risk. Say I take the property “flying ability” and add it to the concept “horse,” then I get “flying horse” and I have no difficulty to say, “A flying horse flies.”^[17]

You can laugh at me, Plantinga, when I say, “An existing flying horse exists.” But there is nothing logically wrong in this sentence; I admit that this sentence has no realistic validity before we actually see a “flying horse” one day. However, can you claim anything more than logical validity with your sentence “A flying horse flies” before we actually see a horse fly? If you can only have your “horse” fly in your mind, why I am not allowed to have my “flying horse” simply exist in my mind. If you insist on teaching me *whether* I should take “existence” as a property or not, I can only thank you for telling me *when* I can add that property to a concept that lacks it. To avoid that embarrassing situation, in the future I will only add “existence” as a property to a concept after I do encounter a correspondent object of this concept in reality.

Moreover, Plantinga says, you can find an object to which the concept “rectangle” can apply while the concept “square” —which is “rectangle” plus “having four equally long sidelines” —cannot, but can you find an object to which you can apply “rectangle” but not the concept “existing rectangle” —which includes “rectangle” and “existence” —if you take “existence” as a new property? Every square is a rectangle, but not every rectangle is a square; however, every rectangle is an “existing rectangle,” while every “existing rectangle” is also a rectangle.^[18] “Existence,” unlike “having four equally long sidelines,” cannot be an independent property. “Being,” by itself, can never be a predicate.

I agree. In this sense I admit that Kant is right that we say nothing about God when we simply say “God is.” But I am not going to accept what he says immediately afterwards, that is, it is the same with the sentence “there is a God.”^[19]

Apparently “God is” is not a complete judgment, but “there is a God” is. Probably by “there is

[17] Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 96.

[18] Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 97.

[19] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 567, A599/B627, “... if I take the subject (God) together with all his predicate, and say God is, or there is a God, then I add no new predicate to the concept of God, ...”

a God,” Kant simply means “God exists.” However, I would like to break the idiom “there is” and reorganize the lingual elements into “A God is there (or, here).” Kant would not object—it is Kant himself who emphasizes that we are not allowed to claim positively that “there is a God” unless we already have sense experience about God here or there; we can say, “There is God,” only after we experience that “God is there (or here).” Now let us take the sentence “God is here.” Obviously this is a complete sentence made up of a subject “God” and a predicate “is here.” In his example “God is omnipotent,” Kant skips the small word “is” and says, “omnipotent,” by itself, is the predicate of the subject “God.” But in our sentence, can he still omit “is” and say, “here,” by itself, is the predicate of “God?” Here nobody would deny that “here” has to go after “is” to predicate “God.” There has to “be” something “here,” something has to “exist” “here” for “here” to be its predicate. Neither can “is” predicate “God” by itself. “Here” and “is” have to be joined together to predicate “God.” If one would say that “being here or there” cannot be an internal predicate of a concept, or spatial location cannot be an internal property of an object, I would say, shouldn’t a completely correct knowledge about the statue of the Goddess of liberty include that it stands in New York rather than in Boston? The same is true with temporal predicates—you will laugh at me, if I tell you that Socrates is a contemporary person.

Therefore we conclude, the fact that “being” cannot be a predicate by itself should not prevent it from being a predicate at all. “Existence,” though not an independent property, should still be taken as a property. Only that we have to be aware that this property is different from other properties. That is, it can never be a property by itself; it can never be separated from other properties. We can take “redness” alone and form a concept containing only this property and still be able to differentiate some objects from others, but if we have “existence” alone in a concept, every object in reality will fall under it.

Accepting “existence” as a property, we have to admit that “a God that exists both in understanding and in reality” is greater than “a God that exists in understanding alone.” Shall we thus comfortably accept Anselm’s ontological proof?

Not yet. Our analysis of the characteristic about the property “existence” betrays another weak point in Anselm’s ontological proof. We have just found out that “existence,” even if taken as a property, is different from other properties. This property can never be a property by itself; it always goes along with other properties. An inference here is that whenever we add the property “existence” into a concept we cannot add this property alone into it but always together with some other properties.

To explain this more clearly, I would like to introduce two principles here, that is, the principle of determinability for concepts and the principle of thoroughgoing determination for objects. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant states,

“Every concept, in regard to what is not determined in it, is indeterminate, and stands under the principle of determinability: that of every two contradictorily opposed predicates only one can apply to it ...

“Every thing, however, as to its possibilities, further stands under the principle of thoroughgoing determination; according to which, among all possible predicates of things, insofar as they are compared with their opposites, one must apply to it.” ^[20]

“Everything existing is thoroughly determined,” — “not only that of every given pair of opposed

[20] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 533, A571/B579-A572/B600.

predicates, but also of every pair of possible predicates, one must always apply to it.”^[21]

This means, a concept, which has not been applied to a particular object yet, is open for other properties, with which itself has no concern, to be attached to any object that it wants to include under its own title. Because of this, I am allowed to apply my concept “rectangle” to a square object, since the concept “rectangle,” which has no decision about “having four equally long sidelines” or not, is open for any “rectangular” object that either has four equally long sidelines or not. On the contrary, any realistic object is fully determined in every respect; it means, for any possible predicate P, either P or $\neg P$ is already decided in it, before I put it under whichever concept of mine. As a result, if I first bear a concept in mind, then seek its existence in reality, I cannot discover its actuality alone, but also some other properties that I have not yet thought of with this concept. Conversely if I try to form a common concept of any more than one objects, I have to throw away some properties each owns by itself—at least any two objects need to occupy two different spheres of space.

For my concept “rectangle” I cannot find in reality a pure “rectangle” that only has the properties included in that concept. I can only find rectangles in the shape of a rectangular window, a rectangular table, or a rectangular playground or at least a rectangle drawn on a paper, which has its own circumference and area. When I look for “one hundred dollars,” what I get is never merely “one hundred real dollars” but it is either a one-hundred-dollar bill, five twenty-dollar bills, a check of one hundred dollars, or one hundred dollars in any other forms. Even if for a perfectly designed sculpture, which is known completely by the sculptor, who knows its material, its size, its shape, and even where it will stand, once it is truly made and brought into existence, it takes some new properties that the sculptor may not expect; it thus has its own life and the artist cannot control what will happen to it and what else it may become. I can let you imagine a house and decide every detail about it—how tall it is, how many floors it has, how many rooms it has, what furniture is set in it, even what is planted around it, only that we do not know such a house actually exists or not. Say one day you really find a house exactly like this one, then you are able to say, that wonderful house really exists, but at this moment you do not only know about the actuality of the imagined house but also its location at least.

What if you claim to have such a thoroughly determined concept about a particular object, that nothing new about it can be told to you? Then I would say, at this time you are assured of the existence of an object before forming a concept about it. Not only so, it is the existence of this object that introduces all those knowledge about it to you, and you cannot know about the existence of this object without knowing any single property of it.

Then, what is wrong with Anselm? Anselm first constructs the concept of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived; to prove the actuality of such a concept, he first supposes that this being exists only in understanding and not in reality; next he conceives another being, which has everything what the earlier one already has, only that this new being has existence in reality. Now we discovers his fatal mistake, that is, he claims to introduce “existence” alone into a beforehand-conceived concept, as if “existence” could be thus dealt with as an independent property. Of course he have no sensible object by hand, from which he can draw out some other properties to accompany “existence,” when it is added into his concept about that being. The even more frustrating thing is that the concept about “that being, than

[21] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 534, A573/B601.

which nothing greater can be conceived,” is already so fed up that even if it allows you to introduce any other property to it at all, it would only accept “existence.” For anything else you want to bring to it? “This being” is going to refuse, telling you “I already have it.” Truly for any conceptual content to take existence in reality, it has to take a concrete form and allows itself to be limited by this form. Unfortunately Anselm’ s conceptual God is the kind of being that wants nothing but “existence” from reality. However, reality cannot simply offer “existence” to it.

But what if Anselm says, the concept about the being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, already includes the property “existence in reality?” Then the story changes, it means, Anselm has to encounter such an object in reality first, before he is able to form a complete concept about this being, than which nothing greater can be conceived. Obviously this never happens. On the contrary, he is going the other way around, that is, attempting to prove the realistic existence of a conceptual being by analyzing the concept itself.

Therefore we conclude, no matter whether “being” is a predicate or not, Anselm’ s ontological proof about God’ s existence does not work. Actually I would like to suggest a proof that the Anselmian ontological proof of God’ s existence is impossible. Let us presuppose that there is a valid proof “ $A \rightarrow B$ ”, in which “B” means “God exists.” For this “proof” to be valid we cannot have “ $B \rightarrow A$ ” at the same time, since if “ $A \leftrightarrow B$ ” then “ $A=B$ ”. Yet if “ $A \rightarrow B$ ” but “ $\neg (B \rightarrow A)$ ” then “A should be a sufficient but unnecessary condition for B,” that is “ $A \nrightarrow B$ ”, but if “God” is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, He should never be this “B”, which is “truly included in” “A”. Therefore the presupposition that there is a valid proof “ $A \rightarrow B$ ”, in which “B” means “God exists,” is not sustainable.

So, there is no God?

So, there is no God? If you mean, there is no God in reality, in this world of experience, I have to answer, “Yes.” This is not only because that we have never had any sense experience of “that being, than which nothing greater can be conceived,” but also that any attempt to bring this being in reality, in this world of sensible objects, is a limitation of it and may end up negating it.

God, is like the ground under our feet. Whenever we try to grasp the ground, what we get is nothing more than something on the ground, i.e. a stone, a brick, some earth, etc., but never the ground itself. What is in our hand is not even a smallest part or a most tiny ingredient of it; the ground is so rich that no matter how much whatever you take from it the ground itself is still sufficient. We know that this ground exists only when we walk on it with full trust and no suspicion.

Maybe when I point to the ground and instruct you about its reality, you will say, “I see grasses, I see dirt, I see sand, I see pebbles, but I see no ground.” But can you walk on grasses, on dirt, on sand, or on pebbles? I mean, those things taken by themselves and not already supported by the ground. Truly, unless you confess that you are walking on the ground, how can you understand that there is a ground? How are you justified to say that there is a ground? Truly, for those who believe in God, God is in their heart.

The fatal disease of the so-called “proof of God’ s existence” lies in the attempt to objectify a reality that should not be objectified and that is actually grounding one’ s own subjectivity. Such an exertion of one’ s subjectivity, that is, attempt to objectify the reality that grounds one’ s own subjectivity, is ultimately self-undermining and doomed to fail. Leaving aside my suggested disproof of “proof of God’ s existence”, even if someone with some whimsical imagination managed to give a “proof of God’ s

existence” , such a “God,” proved by him, would not be the true God at all, who, grounding our very existence and subjectivity, refutes our attempt to objectify Him.

中文题目：

存在一位神吗？——对安瑟伦神存在的本体论证明及康德的批驳的考察

成静

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提要：康德否定了安瑟伦关于神存在的本体论证明的有效性，因为他认为“是”不是一个谓词，只是一个系词。可是普兰汀格提出“是”是一个谓词，只是这个谓词比较特殊；它不能单独做谓词，而总是要和别的谓词一道被使用。本文要论证的是，即使“是”是一个谓词，由于它的特殊性，安瑟伦的本体论证明仍然不能成立。本文进一步提出一个尝试性的论证以说明此类关于神存在的本体论证明不可能。其谬误归根结底在于它把神当作了一个存在于世界之中的客体。

关键词：神的存在、本体论证明、“是”、安瑟伦、康德