KANT'S REFUTATION OF THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

In the first section of his paper 'Kant's "Refutation" of the Ontological Argument',[1] S. Morris Engel says that it has been usual to divide Kant's discussion[2] into four main stages. Theodore Greene, for one, had suggested in his *Kants Selections* that Kant has four distinct criticisms of the ontological argument.[3] Engel remarks that 'the groups of four criticisms so obtained admit of a still further division into a set of three criticisms of a polemical and negative character and one of a more direct and positive character, separated by a highly significant transitional paragraph'. On the Engel-Greene interpretation, Kant's discussion is to be analysed as follows :—

(1) Introduction (Paragraph 1);
(2) First Criticism : 'That it is far from clear how it is possible to think the concept of an unconditionally necessary being, let alone prove its objective validity' (Paragraph 2);
(3) Second Criticism : 'That to think of the unconditionally necessary being in terms of examples is both misleading and fruitless' (Paragraphs 3, 4, 5,);
(4) Third Criticism : 'That there is no subject which cannot be thought away, regardless of its predicates' (Paragraphs 6, 7, 8);
(5) Transitional passage (Paragraph 9);
(6) Fourth Criticism : 'That the cause of all this confusion is the mistaken belief that existence is a real predicate when it is nothing of the kind' (Paragraphs 10 11, 12)
(7) Conclusion (Paragraphs 13, 14).[4]

I believe that this analysis is unsatisfactory, especially in its artificial division of the first half of Kant's discussion into three independent criticisms. In my view, Kant's entire discussion is cumulative, and divides naturally into three main stages. The first stage of the discussion goes up to the end of paragraph six. This stage contains the 'general considerations', relating to our understanding of the concept of an absolutely necessary being, that Kant refers to at the start of paragraph seven. Kant's language

('Notwithstanding all these general considarations..') marks a definite break between paragraphs six and seven. The next stage consists of paragraphs seven and eight: Kant states the argument involving the concept of the *ens realissimum* in paragraph seven, and gives an answer in paragraph eight. The final stage, which includes the famous discussion of the doctrine that existence is not a real predicate, begins at paragraph nine. In paragraph nine, Kant says that he would have liked to put an end to the matter directly 'by an accurate determination of the concept of existence', but that he is first obliged to deal with an intractable illusion 'which is caused by the confusion of a logical with a real predicate'. Although Engel notes that Kant makes a significant transition in paragraph nine, he mistakenly takes Kant to be apologising here for 'the polemical nature of the preceding discussion which, he fears, may appear unnecessarily severe and prolonged'.[5] It is surely the detour he is about to take, and not the preceding discussion, that Kant is explaining at this point.

Rather than contesting the Engel-Greene interpretation directly, I propose to develop an alternative account of the first half of Kant's discussion in the course of opposing the view that there is to be found there an argument for the conclusion that no existential propositions are necessary. This contention has been advanced by Alvin Plantinga in his books *God and other Minds* and *God, Freedom, and Evil*. The first criticism of Kant that Plantinga offers in those books amounts to a claim that a passage in Kant which is intended to argue for the conclusion that all existential propositions are contingent fails to support that conclusion. I shall attempt to show that Plantinga is mistaken in his interpretation of this passage.

The passage quoted by Plantinga is the following:

> If, in an identical proposition, I reject the predicate while retaining the subject, contradiction results; and I therefore say that the former belongs necessarily to the latter. But if we reject subject and predicate alike, there is no contradiction; for nothing is then left that can be contradicted. To posit a triangle, and yet to reject its three angles, is self-contradictory; but there is no contradiction in rejecting the triangle together with its three angles. The same holds true of the concept of an absolutely necessary being. If its existence is

> rejected, we reject the thing itself with all its predicates; and no question of contradiction can then arise. There is nothing outside it that would then be contradicted, since the necessity of the thing is not supposed to be derived from anything external; nor is there anything internal that would be contradicted, since in rejecting the thing itself we have at the same time rejected all its internal properties. " God is omnipotent " is a necessary judgment. The omnipotence cannot be rejected if we posit a Deity that is, an infinite being; for the two concepts are identical. But if we say " There is no God " neither the omnipotence nor any other of its predicates is given; they are one and all rejected together with the subject, and there is therefore not the least contradiction in such a judgment... For I cannot form the least concept of a thing which, should it be rejected with all its predicates, leaves behind a contradiction. (B 622–624).

The passage consists of the whole of paragraph five and the first half of the last sentence of paragraph six. (Paragraph five is also quoted in full by Norman Malcolm in ' Anselm's Ontological Arguments '[6] and Malcolm says that it is a part of Kant's criticism which he believes to be wrong. According to Malcolm, the reply to these remarks ' is that when the concept of God is correctly understood one sees that one cannot ' reject the subject ').[7] Plantinga's response is to suggest that Kant is arguing here that no existential propositions are necessary, and then to depreciate the passage on the ground that it provides no support for its conclusion. ' But when we inspect this argument closely ', he says, ' it looks like a lot of fancy persiflage; what appear to be its premises seems to have no bearing at all on it's conclusion '.[8] The passage turns out to be in Plantinga's view, ' really no more than an elabotrate and confused way of asserting that no existential propositions are necessary '.[9] When we look at this passage in its context, I think that it will become clear that Plantinga is mistaken in this contention.

To see what is really going on in paragraph five, I believe that it is necessary to consider it in the context of an argument which extends from paragraph two to paragraph six. In this section, Kant raises a doubt about our understanding of the concept of absolutely necessary being, and the main thrust of his argument

here is to refute an argument designed to establish the possibility of absolutely necessary being; the section constitutes a refutation rather than a proof. Kant shows that what has been assumed to confer intelligibility on the concept of absolutely necessary being fails to do so . Lacking other means to an understanding of this notion Kant takes the success of his refutation to call in question the assumption of absolutely necessary being. This is far from attempting to prove its impossibility by a demonstration of the contingency of all existential propositions.

The argument commences by raising the question how we could establish whether the concept of an aboslutely necessary being is intelligible, i.e., how do we ' determine whether or not, in resorting to this concept, we are thinking anything at all '. (B 621) Kant points out that it dosen't help to say that an absolutely necessary being is something the non-existence of which is impossible since this is a mere verbal definition which ' yields no insight into the conditions which make it necessary to regard the non-existence of a thing as absolutely unthinkable ' (B 621). Nor will it do to appeal to a notion of conditioned necessity, because removal of the conditions under which we regard something as necessary in this sense, by introduction of the word ' unconditioned ' may leave us with nothing at all rather than with the unconditionally necessary.

One way in which we could seek to establish the possibility of an absolutely necessary being would be to give examples of absolute necessity. Kant suggests that because it had been assumed that examples had already been given, it had not been thought necessary to enquire further into the intelligibility of the concept. The examples that had been given, however, were not examples of absolutely necessary beings, but examples of absolutely necessary judgments Kant does not confine himself to pointing this out.[10] He recognises that it has sometimes been assumed that there is a route from the absolute necessity of judgments to the absolute necessity of things, and, accordingly, he proceeds to argue that this assumption is mistaken.

Kant first states the basic principle connecting the necessity of judgments and the necessity of things. This is the principle that ' the unconditioned necessity of judgments is not the same as an absolute necessity of things. The absolute necessity of the judge-

ment is only a conditioned necessity of the things, or of the predicate in the judgment' (B 621). Then, in the second half of paragraph four, he deals with the application of this principle, firstly with regard to a gemoetrical example and secondly with regard to the concept of existence. Next, in paragraph five, after a further general remark related to conditioned necessity, Kant turns his attention to the disputed concept itself. Finally, in paragraph six, he draws the threads together, indicating that the attempt to establish the possibility of absolutely necessary being by way of absolute necessity of judgment has failed, and suggesting that the only way out would be a direct proof of the actual existence of an ' irremoveable subject '. The way is then open for the introduction of the argument involving the concept of the *ens realissimum* in paragraph seven.

In paragraph four, Kant suggests that the ' deluding influence' of logical necessity has even led to the idea that we can obtain an absolutely necessary being ' by the simple device of forming an *a priori* concept of a thing in such a manner as to include existence within the scope of its meaning ' (B 622). Kant's argument here appears to allow that, for any concept F and G, it is a necessary truth—indeed, an identical proposition—that anything which is F and G is F; and accordingly, that it is a necessary truth that all things which both exist and are G exist. That logical necessity yields, however, no existing or necessarily existing thing, but at best the triviality that, necessarily, there exist ' existent G's ' conditionally on there existing thing which are G. Indeed, if there are no G's then the proposition ' No things which exist and are G exist ' is also true in which case there are of course no ' existent G's . Whereas there is a contradiction in asserting the existence of non-existent G's, there can be no contradiction in denying the existence of existent G's, provided that one dose not ' reject the predicate while retaining the subject '. This argument is sufficient to dispose of the fanciful notion that by annexing existence to a concept which has application contingently, if at all, we can obtain a concept which necessarily applies. It should be noted that Kant does not suggest that exposure of this ' simple device ' for defining things into existence constitutes by itself a sufficient refutation of the ontological argument.

In paragraph five, Kant continues his discussion of conditioned necessity from paragraph four and he extends it to a discussion of the concept of absolutely necessary being itself. There is no reason whatever to think that Kant has completed his consideration of the alleged ground of the possibility of absolutely necessary being, and is—without comment—now prepared simply to drop the question and assume without more ado the ' whether ' if not the ' how ' of its possibility. Given this, he could not concede that there are absolutely necessary beings without begging the question in the context of his argument. Hence he cannot assume that there are ' irremoveable subjects '. So, setting that possibility aside, Kant asks whether there is some way in which the absolute necessity of judgments involving the concept of an absolutely necessary being could render that very concept intelligible. His answer is that there is not : Without the assumption that there are irremoveable subjects, the criterion of impossibility provided by the fact that contradiction results from rejecting the predicate while retaining the subject of what Kant here calls an ' identical proposition ', is no help to those who wish to use the concept of an absolutely necessary being. For how could there be a contradiction, if in denying the existence of an absolutely necessary being, we deny the thing itself with all its predicates ? " There is nothing outside it (" it " being the assumed object of the concept ' absolutely necessary being ') that could then be contradicted, since the necessity of the thing is not supposed to be derived from anything external; nor is there anything internal that would be contradicted, since in rejecting the thing itself we have at the same time rejected all its internal properties " (B 623).

Plantinga asks : " . . . . how, exactly, is this relevant ? What could Kant possibly mean when he says that there is nothing ' outside of God that could be contradicted by the denial of his existence ? Presumably, it is *propositions* that could contradict it; and there are plenty of them that do so, whether or not God exists. Does he perhaps mean that no *true* proposition would contradict the denial of God's existence ? But this would be to hold that God does not exist, which is certainly nothing Kant is prepared to affirm. Does he mean that no *necessarily true* proposition would contradict it ? But surely this would beg the whole question, for the claim that the proposition *God does not*

exist is not inconsistent with any necessary proposition, is logically equivalent to the claim that *God exists* is not necessarily true. We do not seem to have much of an argument here. . . . "[11]

We are now in a position to see that this banter has no bearing on Kant's argument. Kant's introduction of a distinction between internal and external properties is perfectly intelligible and the point he makes completes his refutation of the view that the possibility of an absolutely necessary being is derived from an absolute necessity of judgment. The point is that even if there are things standing in relation to an absolutely necessary being which are not rejected along with the thing, this is irrelevant because the necessity of this being is supposed to be derived from its internal properties or its essence; and since all the internal properties are rejected along with the thing, there can be no truths about its internal properties contradicting the denial of its existence.

The interpretation that I have given is supported by what Kant says in paragraph six about his own argument. Let me quote paragraph six in full, together with the first sentence of paragraph seven :

> We have thus seen that if the predicate of a judgment is rejected together with the subject no internal contradiction can result, and that this holds no matter what the predicate may be. The only way of evading this conclusion is to argue that there are subjects which cannot be removed, and must always remain. That, however, would only be another way of saying that there are absolutely necessary subjects; and that is the very assumption which I have called in question, and the possibility of which the above argument professes to establish. For I cannot form the least concept of a thing which, should it be rejected with all its predicates, leaves behind a contradiction; and in the absence of contradiction I have, through pure *a priori* concepts alone, no criterion of impossibility.
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> Notwithstanding all these general considerations, in which every one must concur, we may be challenged with a case which is brought forward as proof that in actual fact the contrary holds, namely, that there is one concept, and indeed only one, in reference to which the not-being or rejection of its object is in itself contradictory, namely, the concept of the *ens realissimum* (B 623–4).

Kant proceeds to consider this challenge, stating the argument from the concept of the *ens realissimum* in paragraph seven and replying to this argument in paragraph eight. This stage of Kant's discussion has been strangely neglected by commentators.[12] Plantinga, for instance, omits any mention of these paragraphs, moving directly from his criticism of the passage from paragraphs five and six, to criticism of a passage from paragraphs ten and eleven which deals with the claim that existence is not a real predicate.

In paragraph eight, Kant says that his answer to the argument stated in paragraph seven is that ' there is already a contradiction in introducing the concept of existence..into the concept of a thing which we profess to be thinking solely in reference to its possibility '. (This is the Kemp Smith translation. The German text more literally says ' ..the concept of *its* existence..'). What does Kant mean here by ' introducing the concept of its existence into the concept of a thing ' ? Does he mean that the concept has been formed *a priori* ' in such a manner as to include existence within the scope of its meaning ' ? If that is what the ontological argument does, then the objection to it has already been given at B622. But Kant does not repeat that criticism here; and at B622 he did not say that there was anything contradictory in forming a concept " existing G's ", nor that it would be contradictory to think it ' solely in reference to its possibility '. Indeed, if G's are possible, but don't exist, so too are ' existing G's '; and it would seem perfectly consistent to ' think them solely in reference to their possibility '. So, ' introducing the concept of its existence ' must mean something more than this. What it amounts to, as the subsequent discussion suggests, is making analytic, not the categorical proposition, ' All existent G's exists ', but making analytic the existential proposition, ' There exists a G' (or ' G 's exist ', or ' Some existing thing is a G', where these propositions are taken to be equivalent to ' There exists a G ').

In the second half of paragraph eight, Kant says that if it were indeed self-contradictory to deny that the *ens realissimum* exists, then the proposition that the *ens realissimum* exists would be analytic. But ' if it is analytic, the assertion of the existence of the thing adds nothing to the thought of the thing; but in that case either the thought, which is in us, is the thing itself, or we have

presupposed an existence as belonging to the realm of the possible, and have then, on that pretext, inferred its existence from its internal possibility—which is nothing but a miserable tautology ' (B625). The point that Kant is insisting on here is that if the analytic proposition is to preserve the ' otherness ' of thought and its object, then the assumed possibility must be more than the mere contingency that there is an existence which instantiates the thought, but must be the necessity of such an existence, that is, it must include ' an existence as belonging to the realm of the possible '. But, the attempt to prove the *ens realissimum* exists with necessity fails if it relies on the prior assumption of the possibility of absolutely necessary being.

In the first half of paragraph eight, Kant puts the point the other way round. On the assumption that our ground for accepting the possibility of the *ens realissimum* is that we take absence of contradiction in the proposition that the *ens realissimum* exists as leaving us ' a free choice of admitting such a proposition, and a purely optional admission of it into the understanding ' (Cf.B101), we contradict ourselves if we make the concept of the *ens realissimum* such that it *cannot* be thought ' solely in reference to its possibility '. In the next stage of his argument, Kant will proceed to argue that such a concept cannot be thought even with reference to its possibility, but at this point his objection apppears to be that even if we were to take our concept of the *ens realissimum* as yielding a premiss strong enough to make the ontological argument valid, this would simply throw us back to the problems of showing that we actually have knowledge of the possibility of such a being. Even if absence of contradiction in the concept were an adequate criterion of the possibility of a thing ' thinkable solely in reference to its possibility ' (which on Kant's view it is not), it would not follow that it is an adequate criterion of the possibility of a thing not so thinkable.

Support for Kant's argument in stage two, and a proof that absence of contradiction in the concept is not an adequate criterion of the possibility of its object, can be obtained by reflection on some notions introduced recently by Alvin Plantinga.[13] Plantinga has spoken of concepts such as ' maximal greatness ', ' near-maximality ', ' no-maximality '. By definition, a being is *maximally great* only if it has maximal excellence in every possible

world; and, again by definition, a being has maximal excellence in every possible world only if it has omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection in every possible world.[14] *Near-maximality* is 'the property..enjoyed by a being if and only if it does not exist in every possible world but has a degree of greatness not exceeded by that of any being in any world'; *no-maximality* is 'the property of being such that there is no maximally great being'.[15] Each of these concepts is free of contradiction, and therefore if absence of contradiction were a sufficient condition of the possibility of the object, each of them would be possibly exemplified. However, each of them has the peculiarity (which Plantinga notes) that if it is possibly exemplified then each of the others is not possibly exemplified. Hence, if absence of contradiction in the concept were an adequate criterion of the possibility of its object, then the instantiation of some concepts would be both possible and impossible.[16]

In a natural progression from the argument in stage two, Kant proceeds, in the next main stage of his discussion, to try to show that the supposition that a concept might foreclose the possibility of the non-existence of its object is based on confusion. Although Kant seeks to reject conceptual foreclosure of non-existence, he certainly accepted that a concept could foreclose the possibility of the existence of its object. The principle of contradiction, as Kant has said earlier (B190), is 'a universal, though merely negative, criterion of all truth'; and, as he says in the 'Amphiboly', 'the object of a concept which contradicts itself is nothing, because the concept is nothing, is the impossible (B348). Kant did indeed remark in paragraph eight that every reasonable person must admit that all existential propositions are synthetic, but the context of that remark suggests that he means merely to deny that there are any analytic existential propositions, and, in Kant's usage, only true propositions are analytic (Cf. B190). It would seem more appropriate to read Kant's discussion of the status of the existential proposition as subject to an implied condition of truth, than to accept Jerome Shaffer's contention that Kant intended to claim that the 'assertion that something exists (or does not exist) could never turn out to be self-contradictory'.[17] We can also agree with Richard Taylor[18] that 'critics of the ontological argument who have deemed it obvious that one can never

legitimately pass from the mere description of something to any conclusion concerning the existence in reality of the thing described' have simply failed to note ' that this is not only a legitimate inference but a very common one when it is the non-existence of something that is inferred '. However, I think we should reject the view that Kant should be numbered among such critics, along with Taylor's claim that it is ' now generally thought ' that no one ' can pass from the mere conception or idea of a thing to the conclusion that the thing thus conceived actually exists or that it does not exist '.

Kant's argument in stage three begins by discussing ' the illusion which is caused by the confusion of a logical and a real predicate ', and moves on to consider the question how, in the realm of pure ideas, we could even distinguish possibility and existence. As is well known, Kant says that the concept of existence is not a real predicate but that it is confused with real predicates because like any other concept it can be made to serve as a logical predicate. By a logical predicate Kant does not, I think, mean a grammatical predicate in the ordinary sense but rather what allows of insertion in the predicate position of a schema of formal logic. Logic, he believes ' abstracts from all content ', and when it sets out inference patterns for schemata such as ' all S are P ', formal logic itself is not concerned with what can be substituted for P. On Kant's account, then, little interest would attach to the fact that we can invent terms such as ' existent crows ' or ' non-existent crows ', or that we can write ' dagger ' backwards and say that the resulting word stands for non-existent daggers !

Kant speaks both of ' real predicates ' and of ' determining predicates ', and he appears to intend a distinction between them. A *determining* predicate he defines as ' a predicate which is added to the concept of the subject and enlarges it ' (B626). It is clear from this that the same predicate could be a determining predicate in one proposition, and not in another. For instance, ' unmarried ' is a determining predicate in ' All the men in the sports club are unmarried '. but not in ' All the bachellors in the sports club are unmarried '. Kant identifies a real predicate with ' a predicate which determines a thing '; and then when he says of the verb ' to be ' that it is not a real predicate, he explains this by saying that ' it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing ' (B626). Taken along with the fact that Kant

obviously believes that a real predicate can occur as the predicate of an analytic judgment, this suggests that Kant intends a real predicate to be a predicate that is sometimes a determining predicate.

In paragraph ten, Kant points out that in a proposition such as ' God is omnipotent ', the function of the word ' is ' is not to add a new predicate to the concepts of God and omnipotence, but that it serves ' to posit the predicate *in its relation* to the subject ' (B627). He then argues that if I now say ' God is ' or " There is a God " I still ' attach no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates, and indeed posit it as being an *object* that stands in relation to my *concept* ' (B627). Kant goes on to say that the ' content ' of my concept does not change ' by my thinking its object (through the expression ' it is ') as given absolutely ', and he illustrates the point with the famous example of the hundred thalers. In Kemp Smith's translation the passage reads : ' A hundered real thalers do not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers. For as the latter signify the concept, and the former the object and the positing of the object, should the former contain more than the latter, my concept would not, in that case, express the whole object, and would not therefore be an adequate concept of it ' (B627).

What Kant says here can be related to what he says in the *Logic* (**9–16) about higher and lower concepts. Concepts are said to be *higher* or alternatively *wider*, ' so far as they have other concepts under them which in relation to them are called *lower* concepts '. Lower or narrower concepts are said to originate ' by continued logical determination '. Of the relation of the lower to the higher concept, Kant writes : ' The *lower* concept is not contained *in* the higher, for it contains *more* in itself than the higher; but it is yet contained *under* the latter, because the higher contains the cognitive ground of the lower. *Further*, a concept is not wider than another because it contains *more* under it—for one cannot know that—but so far as it contains under it the *other concept* and *beside it still more* ' (*13).

In order to say that an object falls under a lower concept created by predicating some determining predicate of a subject concept, that subject concept itself will not be ' adequate ', and might be said not to ' express the whole object '. Suppose, I refer

to the coin in my pocket. Let us suppose I attach a determining predicate to it, say 'shiny'. Then although 'the coin in my pocket' and 'the shiny coin in my pocket' will refer to the same object, and in that sense would be adequate concepts to refer to that object, nevertheless I cannot convey that I have a shiny coin in my pocket simply by saying 'I have a coin in my pocket'. In this sense 'the coin in my pocket' is not adequate to 'express the whole object'. Predicates which satisfy this condition are determining predicates. However, 'I have a coin in my pocket' *does* convey that I have a real coin in my pocket, and hence 'real' cannot be a determining predicate.

Philosophers have varied in their response to Kant's argument about the hundred thalers. Hegel said that the illustration Kant had chosen explained the 'uniformly favourable reception and acceptance which attended Kant's criticism of the ontological proof';[19] and though he endorsed the point so far as it applied to finite things—indeed, took it as a criterion of the finite that 'its being in time and space is discrepant from its notion'—Hegel protested that 'when we speak of God,....we have an object of another kind than any hundred sovereigns'.

In Henry Sidgwick's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant*, we find a reaction that could never have come from Hegel. Sidgwick commented that 'Kant says that 100 real dollars do not contain a halfpenny more than 100 dollars not thought as existent : but the remark seems to me to be an unconsciously crafty suggestion to throw the readers' mind on a wrong track. Certainly the difference is nothing like a halfpenny : the question is whether it *may* not amount to 100 dollars'.[20] Some more recent commentators have echoed Sidgwick's sentiment. It turns out, however, that if this is a crafty suggestion, it is one that is due to some of Kant's English translators—the German text says nothing about halfpennies, pennies, cents, or any other coin, it simply says something to the effect that a hundred real thalers contain no more than a hundred possible.[21]

Two influential recent criticisms of Kant's argument for the doctrine that existence is not a real predicate are those by Alvin Plantinga[22] and Jerome Shaffer.[23] I shall consider first Plantinga's criticism. Plantinga offers a reconstruction of the argument in

paragraphs ten and eleven, and his conclusion is that the reconstructed argument has no particular bearing on Anselm's argument though it does show 'an interesting respect in which existence differs from other predicates or properties'.[24] What the argument is alleged to show is that 'one cannot, by adding existence to concept that has application contingently, if at all, get a concept that is necessarily exemplified .. for if it is a contingent truth that there are crows, it is also a contingent truth that there are existent crows'.[25] The fact that Kant has already established *this* conclusion in paragraphs four and five of his discussion might lead us to appraoch the reconstruction with caution.

Plantinga's reconstruction is based on a conjecture as to what Kant might have meant in paragraphs ten and eleven. Plantinga quotes the whole of paragraph ten and the first half of paragraph eleven, and comments as follows : 'The point of the passage seems to be that being or existence is not a real predicate; Kant apparently thinks this follows from (or is equivalent to) what he puts variously as " the real *contains* no more than the merely possible ", " the *content* of both (i.e., concept and object) must be one and the same ", " being is not the concept of something that could be *added to* the concept of a thing ", and so on. An adequate concept, Kant believes, must contain as much content as the thing of which it is the concept; the content of the concept of a thing remains the same whether the thing exists or not; and the existence of the object of a concept is not part of the content of that concept. But what *is* the content of a concept, or of an object ? In what way do objects and concepts have content ? Kant gives us very little help, in the passage under consideration, in understanding what it is to *add something* to a concept, what it means to say that a concept contains as much as an object, or what it is for a concept and its object both to have *content*—the same content.'[26]

I believe that Plantinga does not satisfactorily establish his interpretation before offering his suggestion as to what the content of a concept and the content of an object might be. Kant does not in fact say that it is the object that has the same content as the concept, but rather that 'thinking its object as given absolutely' has the same content as the concept. Although Plantinga puts quotation marks around 'the *content* of both (i.e., concept and object) must be one and the same ', the parenthetical insertion is an

addition of Plantinga's. In the sentence preceding the remark about ' the content of both . . ', Kant emphasises the words ' object ' and ' concept ', and this has perhaps contributed to the impression that the ' both ' refers back to these words, but the rest of the sentence makes it clear that it is not the object, but positing the subject ' as being an *object* that stands in relation to my *concept* ' that Kant is claiming must have the same content as the concept. I conclude that whether or not Kant's defence of the doctrine that existence is not a real predicate is defensible, Plantinga's criticism of it fails.

Jerome Shaffer has two objections to Kant.[27] The first is the ad hominem point that the doctrine that existence is not a real predicate conflicts with Kant's belief that existential propositions are always synthetic. This objection depends on assuming that Kant regards ' G 's exist ' as a subject-predicate proposition with subject ' G ' and predicate ' exists '. It is true that Kant does not always appear to allow for existential as opposed to categorical propositions (e.g., B95; B98). Nevertheless, I do not believe that Kant actually treats existential propositions as categoricals. Even if Kant did treat existentials as categoricals, he would presumably have identified ' G 's exist ', not with a universal affirmative categorical, which is the only type of proposition to which he actually applies the ' containment ' account of analyticalicity directly, but with ' Some existing things are G ' s ', which will be synthetic unless the concept ' existing thing ' *excludes* the concept G.

Shaffer's second objection is that the argument which shows that ' exists ' is not a real predicate also shows that nothing could be one. Kant's argument is taken to be that exists cannot be a real predicate, because to attach a real predicate to a subject is to revise the subject concept, and ' since we now have a new and different concept, we will have failed to assert existence of the original subject '.[28] If ' adding to ' the subject concept by attaching a real predicate renders us unable to say that ' the object as originally conceived ' has the property designated by that predicate, then there are no real predicates. Does Kant's argument commit him to the antecedent of this conditional ?[29]

Shaffer quotes from paragraph eleven, and his argument is based on a reading of that paragraph. He makes no comment on paragraph ten, and appears to assume that Kant has a single argument for his doctrine. However, it seems likely that the point Kant is making in paragraph eleven is distinct from the argument of paragraph ten, and that in paragraph eleven Kant intedns to bring his discussion to bear more specifically on the concept of a supreme being. The argument in paragraph ten dealt with concepts in general, but was illustrated with an example of an empirical concept. In paragraph eleven, Kant appears to move on to a different point, and applies it explicitly to the concept of a supreme being. It is almost as though Kant had anticipated Hegel's objection that when we speak of God, we are speaking of an object of another kind than any hundred thalers.

The crux of Kant's argument in paragraph eleven appears to be that, by however many predicates one may think a thing, it should make sense to say that there exists an object with exactly those properties. However, if saying this adds a further property, the remark would be self-defeating. Accordingly, ' If we think in a thing every feature of reality except one, the missing reality is not added by my saying that this defective thing exists. On the contrary, it exists with the same defect with which I have thought it, since otherwise what exists would be something different from what I thought.' (B628). This argument has a particular application to objects of pure thought, because such objects are not accessible to intuition and can therefore only be determined by the predicates through which we think them. Given that ' Reason, in its ideal,.. thinks for itself an object which it regards as being completely determinable in accordance with principles ' (B599), the point of Kant's argument at B628 must be that the question of existence is not settled even by Reason achieving its aim of ' complete determination in accordance with *a priori* rules '. (B599). ' When ', Kant concludes, ' I think a being as the supreme reality, without any defect, the question still remains whether it exists or not '. (B628).

Kant goes on to point out that when we are dealing with objects of the senses, we have no difficulty in distinguishing the existence of the object from its possibility, or from its concept. In asserting the existence of the object, we are asserting that 'knowledge of this

object is..possible *a posteriori* ' (B628); and, as Kant had argued at length in the ' Postulates of Empirical Thought ', ' the perception which supplies the content to the concept is the sole mark of actuality ' (B273). In dealing with objects of the senses, we are able to ' go outside' the concept and ascribe existence to the object because we can invoke a ' connection with some one of our perceptions, in accordance with empirical laws '. (B629) In dealing with objects of pure thought, however, we are obliged to ' think existence through the pure concept alone ', that is, without reference to possible experience. The consequence of this is that we are unable to specify a single mark distinguishing it (existence) from mere possibility ' (B629).

Kant does not believe that he has provided any reason for declaring the existence of an object of pure thought to be impossible. What he declares to be impossible is *knowledge* of the existence of such a being. In the case of the concept of a supreme being, ' just because it is a mere idea, it is altogether incapable, by itself alone, of enlarging our knowledge in regard to what exists ' (B629–30). Indeed, Kant adds, ' it is not even competent to enlighten us as to the *possibility* of any existence beyond that which is known in and through experience '. Though we cannot deny ' the principle that bare positives (realities) give rise to no contradiction ', this ' analytic criterion of possibility ' does not prove the real possibility of a supreme being. Hence, not only is an ontological proof of the existence of God impossible, but we cannot even achieve a ' comprehension *a priori* of the possibility of this sublime ideal being ' (B630)[30].

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NOTES

1. S. Morris Engel, ' Kant's " Refutation " of the Ontological Argument ' in R. P. Wolff (ed), *Kant* (London, Macmillan, 1968) p. 189. (Originally published in Vol. 24, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 1963–64).

2. Section four of ' The ideal of Pure Reason ' in *The Critique of Pure Reason* References to this work are by the letter ' B ' followed by a page number of the original second edition. Quotations are taken from Kemp Smith's translation (London, Macmillan, 1933).

3. See Theodore M. Greene (ed.) *Kant Selections* (Scribners, 1929), p. 244 n.

4. See Engel, *op cit.*, pp. 189–192.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 190.

6. Norman Malcolm, ' Anselm's Ontological Arguments' in A. Plantinga (ed.), *The Ontological Argument* (Doubleday, 1965), pp. 147–8. (Originally published in Vol. 69, *Philosophical Review*, 1960).

7. *Ibid.*, p. 148.

8. Alvin Plantinga, *God and other Minds* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), p. 31.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

10. Nor did he *insist* on examples of absolutely necessary being, as is suggested by Jonathan Barnes' remark, in his book *The Ontological Argument* (London, Macmillan, 1972, p. 34). that ' Kant complained that the proponents of necessary being never gave any clear *examples* of what they meant '.

11. Plantinga, *op cit.*, p. 31.

12. An exception is the remark about reasonable persons having to admit that all existential propositions are synthetic, which is commonly lifted out of its context in paragraph eight and taken to be a base from which Kant launches an attack upon the ontological argument. Consider, for example, this comment from Jonathan Bennett's *Kant's Dialectic* (p. 234) : ' Kant also attacks the ontological argument on the ground that " All existential propositions are synthetic ". That if true, condemns Malcolm's conclusion that it is analytically necessary that God exists. But Kant gives no clear reasons for this claim of his, and Malcolm refuses to defer to it '. In fact, it is reasonably clear from the form of the argument in paragraph eight that the remark about ' reasonable persons ' is an aside. Kant explicitly considers the two possibilities, that the existential proposition is analytic and that it is synthetic, and does not appear to rely on a premiss that all existential propositions are synthetic.

13. A. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974, Ch. 10; *God, Freedom, and Evil*, Harper and Row, 1974, p. 85 ff.

14. Cf. *God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 111; *The Nature of Necessity*, p. 214.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 218.

16. Plantinga thinks that maximal greatness is possibly exemplified, and he says that ' it is evident..that there is nothing *contrary to reason* or *irrational* in accepting this premiss '. (*God, Freedom, and Evil*, p. 112). It is not clear exactly how Plantinga would respond to the suggestion that his reasoning on these matters might naturally be taken to support Kant's conclusion that ' although we have to surrender the language of *knowledge*, we still have sufficient ground to employ, in the presence of the most exacting reason, the quite legitimate language of a firm *faith* ' (B773).

17. Jerome Shaffer, ' Existence, Predication and the Ontological Argument ', in Hick and McGill (eds.), *The Many-faced Argument*, (New York, The Macmillan Company, 1967), p. 226. (Originally published in Vol. 71, *Mind*, 1962).

18. Richard Taylor, Introduction to Alvin Plantinga (ed.), *The Ontological Argument* (Doubleday, 1965), pp. xiii, xv.

19. *The Logic of Hegel*, trans. W. Wallace, (Oxford Univ. Press, 1892), **51, pp. 107–8.

20. Henry Sidgwick, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Kant* (London, Macmillan, 1905), p. 193.

21. Meiklejohn (Dent, 1934) has the unembellished translation; also Gabriele Rabel, *Kant* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), p. 122.

22. Plantinga's criticism, appeared originally in ' Kant's Objection to the Ontological Argument', Vol. 63, *Journal of Philosophy*, 1966; and it has been restated in *God and Other Minds* and also in *God, Freedom, and Evil.* My discussion relates to the criticism as presented in *God and Other Minds*, pp. 32–38.

23. *op. cit.*, pp. 229–30.

24. Plantinga, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

25. ibid., p. 37.

26. Plantinga, *op. cit.*, pp. 33–34. Cf. N. Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant's ' Critique of Pure Reason '*, 2nd ed., London, Macmillan, 1923, p. 530.

27. Shaffer, *op. cit.*, pp. 228–230.

28. *Ibid.*, p.229.

29. In *Kant's Dialectic* (Cambridge Univ. Press, 1974), p. 230, Jonathan Bennett endorses Shaffer's criticism, and he adds that in paragraph eleven Kant wrongly implies that we might " completely determine " a thing. If Kant did imply this, he must have forgotten that in section two of ' The Ideal ', in considering the proposition, *everything which exists is completely determined*, he had written : ' What the proposition therefore asserts is this : that to know a thing completely, we must know every possible (predicate), and must determine it thereby, either affirmatively or negatively. The complete determination is thus a concept, which, in its totality, can never be exhibited *in concreto* ' (B601).

30. I am grateful to Dr. Marta Rado for helpful discussions on the German text. I have also benefitted from discussions with Lindsay Porter, and comments on an earlier draft by colleagues including Alec Hyslop, Frank Jackson and Robert Young.