

An Analysis of Kant's Viewpoint on Necessity as a Logical and Non-Existential Condition

Hamidreza Ayatollahy

In his study of the so-called shortcomings of speculative reasoning in demonstrating the existence of God with reliance on ontological argument, Kant takes ontological argument as being inherently problematic. His most important objection is that ontological argument tends to prove the necessary existent, that is, a being for whom external existence is necessary while necessity is a logical condition related to analytical propositions whose position is human mind, whereas, using ontological argument, we want to prove the condition which is related to the world of mind about the external world and in a synthetic proposition. With such an expression of him, we can never accept any necessity in the external world and consequently, necessary existence cannot have consistent meaning. He, then, bases cosmological argument on ontological argument because the major endeavor in cosmological argument is to demonstrate necessary existent being (taken from granted in ontological argument) through the possibility of the world creatures or their causality. In order to explicate the existence of God, he uses the expression *ens realissimum*, "the most real being", in order not to get entrapped in this problem. This important Kant's criticism has been taken as one of the certainties of western philosophy for about two centuries and showed the path of knowing God through ontological and cosmological arguments to be dead-end. This continued to the extent that a person such as Findlay used Kant's criticism and posed an argument for rejecting the existence of God.

In this paper, there is an attempt to show Kant's mistake in this regard. Because he used to see necessity in logical analytical propositions, he imagined that the source of abstraction of the concept of necessity is logic, while there is a difference between the status of finding a referent and the status of abstracting primary notion. Kant believes that: Existential statements are not necessary. The conclusion of the cosmological and ontological arguments purports to be an existentially necessary statement. But necessity is a characteristic of thought, not of being. Only statements

are necessary, not things or beings. The only necessity that there is resides in the logical but not in the ontological realm. Necessity does not apply to existence but only to propositions. Necessity is a logical, not an ontological, qualifier. There are no existentially necessary propositions. Whatever is known by experience (which is the only way existential matters are knowable) could be otherwise.

In explanation of the origination of the meaning of necessity, he says in his *Critique of Pure Reason*:

[...] People have imagined that by a number of examples they had explained this concept, at first risked at haphazard, and afterwards become quite familiar, and that therefore all further inquiry regarding its intelligibility were unnecessary. It was said that *every proposition of geometry, such as, for instance, that a triangle has three angles, is absolutely necessary, and people began to talk of an object entirely outside the sphere of our understanding, as if they understood perfectly well what, by that concept, they wished to predicate of it.*¹

He continues that this necessity, which is about judgment, cannot be extended to existence:

But all these pretended examples are *taken without exception from judgments only*, not from things, and their existence. Now the unconditioned necessity of judgments is not the same thing as an absolute necessity of things. The absolute necessity of a judgment is only a conditioned necessity of the thing, or of the predicate in the judgment.²

As we see, Kant explains the origin of the meaning of necessity for people is absolute necessity of every proposition of geometry that they at first risked at haphazard then they abstracted from these kinds of propositions the meaning of necessity; and they generalize the meaning to the external things and beings. They constitute the notion of necessary existence in this generalization.

There are some statements in Kant's explanation:

- 1) We can find necessity in analytical propositions of geometry.
- 2) The propositions of geometry are logical propositions not ontological ones.
- 3) People abstract the meaning of necessity from logical propositions of analytical propositions of geometry.
- 4) We can find no proposition in empirical context that can be necessary (as well as Hume's belief).

1 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: 1958), p. 398 (KrV, A 593/B 621).

2 *Ibid.*, p. 399 (KrV, A 593 f./B 621 f).

- 5) We can not find necessity in the realm outside logical propositions.
- 6) Ontological statements are about external reality which we reach them through empirical facts.
- 7) It is forbidden to take a meaning related to logical state of mind and predicate it to the realm of existential propositions.
- 8) Necessary existence is a meaning is taken from that kind of forbidden generalization and there can not be any such meaning.

Some of the propositions above are correct, but some of them are disputable. I agree with the propositions 1, 2, 4 and 7. I believe that "We can find necessity in analytical propositions of geometry". And "The propositions of geometry are logical propositions not ontological ones". And "We can find no proposition in empirical context that can be necessary (as well as Hume's belief)". And "It is forbidden to take a meaning related to logical state of mind and predicate it to the realm of existential propositions". But I do not agree with the so called abstraction of the meaning necessity from logical propositions and extending it to the reality. It is disputable that the meaning of necessity only and only is related to logical realm. My reasons are:

Do people abstract the meaning of necessity from those logical judgments? It is possible that they know necessity as a familiar meaning then they discover that the relation between subject and predicate in those propositions is of that kind of meaning (namely necessity) that they have had it previously? If you contend for a child (before reaching the so-called abstraction) that the ball is not ball he laugh at you and will say it is not possible but if you say that one ball is not red he does not surprise and say that it is possible. He distinguishes between these two propositions and he shows that the meaning of possible and impossible (not its term) is familiar with him. It is not possible for us to regard a lot of propositions then we abstract the meaning of necessity from them. Because the legitimacy of every kind of abstraction can be disputable but we are aware of necessity as an evident fact. We do not abstract necessity from logical propositions but we discover necessity in logical propositions. Kant himself accounts, in other places, necessity as *a priori* condition of the mind.

If we discover necessity in logical propositions we can affirm that necessity can be in logical propositions. But there is no reason that there can not be necessity in other propositions or other realm. Kant says: "But all these pretended examples are taken without exception from judgments only". There is no reason for "without exception" and "only" in this sen-

tence. I think it is a false conversion fallacy. Therefore it is disputable that we can not find necessity in the realm outside logical propositions.

I believe like Kant that “we can find no proposition in empirical context that can be necessary (as well as Hume’s belief)”. But I do not agree that “ontological statements are about external reality which we reach them through empirical facts”. Ontological statements are not necessarily as equal to the statements of empirical context. Things in external world have existence but existence is not equal to things. It is very important to survey in the relation between thing or thing-ness and existence. If we can not scrutinize in the reality of existence some problems will arise like what is objected to Kant. Kant speaks of noumen as which we do not know anything about it only that exists. But in other places he accounts existence as *a priori* concept of understanding as a concept related to phenomenal realm not noumenal one. Causality has the same problem. According to Kant Noumen is the cause of phenomen but causality is *a priori* concept of understanding that belongs to phenomenal realm. All of these objections can be answered by more scrutiny survey in the meaning of existence, causality, necessity and etc.

Mulla Sadra (1572–1640) a distinguished Iranian philosopher (in four centuries ago) has analyzed this matters and In his famous principle of his philosophy namely “fundamental reality of existence” or “principality of existence” has studied all these philosophical notions in the light of his deep analysis of fundamental reality of existence. However, here it is not the position to introduce all his points of view. I try to propose his view in this matter. His philosophy has good solution for those problems that Kant has encountered.

Mulla Sadra argues³ that “necessity” in logic and philosophy (ontology) has the same meaning. This means that the meaning of necessity that is applied in logic, is, also, used in philosophy and is ascribed to existent beings and realities. Nay, necessity is an evident meaning that proves its reality and truthfulness, originally, by philosophy (he means ontology); logic uses the result of that philosophical investigation as a postulate. Necessity is considered first in philosophy, or is recognized in reality; then logic determines its referents in its own realm, namely mental concepts.

3 Mulla Sadra’s statements about origin of the meaning of necessity and possibility is scattered in his book *Asfar*. To explain his view I use his commentator, A. Javadi Amoli; see A. Javadi Amoli: *Proofs of Divine Existence*, Qum 1373. 1994, 158–159.

Logic does not utilize philosophy only in the application of necessity. It makes use of philosophy in some other affairs, like predication as follows: Being is divided ontologically into "one" and "many". In a logical statement when you speak of unity of subject and predicate which are multiple things, the unity which is necessary condition for possibility of that predication, you use ontology as necessary previous knowledge for logical judgment. Logic utilizes predication that is the result of above philosophical divisions as a postulate, and organizes its special matters accordingly. Otherwise, logic cannot prove the origin of predication.

Logic depends on philosophy not only in many of its postulates but also in the origin of its subject, that is knowledge and concept or presentation and judgment.

But, how can we understand that necessity is first an ontological condition and then logical one? As I said before in criticizing the so-called abstraction of the meaning of necessity from logical propositions in Kant's view, the meaning of necessity can not derive from this abstraction; and people have this meaning before they recognize it in logic. For answering the ontological source of the meaning of necessity, Mulla Sadra's followers point to *the ontologically necessary relation of "I" and "my will"*. There are other philosophical meanings that their ontological source is in this relation. We have the meaning of causality not by abstraction from special relation between external things (as Hume correctly objected this matter). This meaning is an ontological evident meaning that man recognizes it unconsciously in the ontological relation between "I" and "my will". It is a kind of knowledge by present that differs from the knowledge by acquisition. This kind of meanings like causality, existence, necessity, unity and individuality is named "secondary philosophical intelligible" by Mulla Sadra. These meanings can be compatible with *a priori* concepts of understanding but differs in their originality and their predication and their use in philosophy. Consequently, "necessity" is an evident meaning, and the judgment about its reality is a philosophical (ontological) matter; logic *applies* this philosophical meaning in the realm of relations and connection of propositions.

When "logical necessity" is limited to analytic propositions every demonstration that results in a necessary conclusion must be in the realm of concepts. Mulla Sadra argues against this supposition that "necessity" is not restricted in essential property in analytic propositions. But includes also some other essentials he calls "essentials of section of demonstration". Those essentials are more general than essentials in analytic

propositions that come from analyzing a thing and finding its essential properties.

The necessity of God as necessary being is not like necessity in analytic propositions, i. e., it is not like logical necessity (like essential or conditional necessity) that refers to quality of connection of a predicate to subject; rather it refers directly to the intensity of reality that has no truth other than external-ness or reality.

Since Kant holds that necessity is a merely logical concept in the realm of analytic propositions, he supposes that if God, as necessary Being, has the necessity of external existence, then the external existence must be taken in His meaning. Thus negation of its existence (i. e., negation of referent and external existence) requires a contradiction as a negation of the essence and essential character of a thing.

A. Javadi Amoli, one of the contemporary disciples of Mulla Sadra says:

[...] Existence and external reality does not come from essence and essential characters of the meaning of necessary existence that is a mental concept. The necessity that is considered in necessary existence is not a necessity that is in the relation between subjects and predicates, but it is a necessity that is equal to and just the external existence; and the meaning of necessary being that indicates its reality, has not this necessity. Although the concept of necessary existence is necessary existence by way of primary essential predication, but it is a mental affairs by way of common technical predication that comes into existence in the contain of perception and awareness of existence as a possible reality [...].⁴

Kant adds some more explanation for his claim by the argument that the proposition “the most real Being exists” is either an analytic propositions or a synthetic one. If it is analytic, there is no more knowledge about the most real Being, while we need a new knowledge about His existence; and if it is synthetic, there can not be any contradiction in rejecting it. Such a contradiction can happen only in an analytic proposition by admitting the subject and rejecting the predicate. He says:

I simply ask you, whether the proposition, that *this* or *that thing* (which, whatever it may be, I grant you as possible) *exists*, is an analytical or a synthetic proposition? If the former, then by its existence you add nothing to your thought of the thing; but in that case, either the thought within you would be the thing itself, or you have presupposed existence, as belonging to possibility, and have according to your own showing deduced existence from internal possibility, which is nothing but a miserable tautology. The

4 A. Javadi Amoli, *Proofs of Divine Existence*, Qum 1373. 1994, 163.

mere word reality, which in the concept of a thing sounds different from existence in the concept of the predicate, can make no difference. For if you call all accepting or positing (without determining what it is) reality, you have placed a thing, with all its predicates, within the concept of the subject, and accepted it as real, and you do nothing but repeat it in the predicate. If, on the contrary, you admit, as every sensible man must do, that every proposition involving existence does not admit of removal without contradiction, a distinguishing property which is peculiar to analytical propositions only, the very character of which depends on it?⁵

Mulla Sadra and his disciples do not agree with Kant's division of propositions into analytic and synthetic. They divide propositions into two kinds: "the predicate extracted from the subject" and the "predicate by way of adherence".⁶ The first is abstracted and extracted from the bottom and depth of the reality of the thing while the second one is a predicate whose abstraction from the subject means that one essence or external reality adheres to the essence and reality of subject.

The first one is more general than "analytic" in Kant's terminology, because it contains, beside essence and the essential character of subject, the meanings abstracted from the reality of the subject. Their main character is that they do not have any referent distinct from the subject, like the meaning of "oneness", "causality", "existence" and "individuality".

It is obvious that the meaning and concept of "oneness" is different from meaning and concept of the quiddity (thing-ness) that is predicated of it. But the quiddity does not need any referent and reality distinct from the referent and reality of "oneness" in order for the quiddity to be qualified by "oneness"; likewise "causality", "individuality" and "existence". Although the meaning of causality differs from that of the essence that is cause, it has no referent and reality other than the reality of the thing that is qualified by causality.

The predicate by way of adherence is opposite to the predicate extracted from the bottom of subject. It is a predicate whose ascription to the subject depends on the reality of another referent distinct from the subject. That referent is allocated to the predicate, and at the same time is unified with subject, like for example "white" (in referent to bodies) and "knowing" (in referent to souls), for they cannot be attributed to the subject as predicates except through the mediation of "whiteness" and "knowledge" which are external and additional to the reality of what is

5 *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 399 (KrV, B 625 f).

6 See Sabzavari: *Sharh al-Manzoomah*, 29, and Javadi Amoli: *Proofs of Divine Existence*, 203.

white and of the one who knows. These predicates must be predicates by way of adherence.

Hence, “predicate extracted from subject” that can explain the predication of existence, differs from “analytic” in Kant’s terminology.