

PATRISTIC ARGUMENTS OF GOD`EXISTENCE IN IMMANUEL KANT` METAPHYSICS

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Abstract: *the author tries to find out similarities between the rational theology argumentation about God existence proof, in Immanuel Kant` Critique of Pure Reason and some reasonings of four Fathers of the Church on the same topic.*

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Critique of Pure Reason contains an inexhaustible distinction, namely between *noumenon* and *phaenomenon*. Trying to determine the attributes that can be known about the *noumenon*, Immanuel Kant reaches the discursive model of negative theology and such, it reaffirms the characteristics set forth by the Church Fathers about divine-Being-as-being, for example, *noumenon* is *Das-Ding-an-Sich* (“thing-in-itself”), which infinitely transcends the finite humans mind (Didymus the Blind). Noumenal Being for the knowing subject is a foundation and generator of all things, which, therefore, are inexhaustible in terms of knowledge (St. Basil the Great). Noumenal Being reveals Himself, in the subject of knowing, as a concept of a perfect being, characterized by its absence (St. Gregory of Nyssa), and as Noumenal Being, *Das-Ding-an-Sich* (“thing-in-itself”), is acting on the knowing subject through his energies (*Dynameis*) making adequate his nature to the sensitive subject experience (St. John Chrysostom). *Noumenon-phaenomenon* connection is similar - in Immanuel Kant - to the *intellectus archetypus-intellectus ectypus* relationship, as if (“als ...ob”) God had created the world.

By Kant, God was one of the traditional topics of metaphysics. Faced with this subject, Kant proves that human knowledge is not able to be extended to the inexperienced things, and therefore knowledge, about metaphysical or ultimate reality or a purely spiritual world, is not possible, all human knowledge is confined to the world *phenomena*, that is commonly called “nature”, which is only the appearance of unknown realities, and only in this phenomenal world true knowledge is objectively valid. Therefore, God can not be the subject of knowledge for human beings. Kant's argument of this thesis begins with the analysis of the proof for the existence of God, which is shown to be false. The three classical arguments about the existence of God are the ontological argument, cosmological, and teleological (or argument from design) ones.

Ontological argument was invented by Parmenide¹, then St. Augustine gave its Christian form made classical by Anselm of Canterbury, but rejected by St. Thomas Aquinas, and finally, the ontological argument was revived by René Descartes in the seventeenth century and was used by Spinoza. Essentially, the ontological argument inferred the existence of God from the definition of God as perfect being, which should have all the attributes of perfection, and therefore not dispensable of the existence attribute, because otherwise it would not be perfect. Kant rejects this argument showing that there is hardly a predicate, and therefore cannot be attributed to a perfect being,

¹ B. Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, Sixth Edition, United Kingdom, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957, Book One, Part 1, v. Parmenides, p. 67.

even if such a perfect being would be effective². Simplified form of the ontological argument is as follows³:

- (I) if there is a perfect being (God), then it has as attribute existence;
- (II) but there is a perfect being (God);
- (III) and therefore God exists.

And even if the reasoning is very similar to the expression of the *Old Testament* (*Exodus*, 3: 14: “*I am who I am*”), the ontological argument is false, because its form of vicious circle. According to Kant, cosmological and teleological arguments seem only to be based on facts of experience and formal logic, but they are nothing but disguised forms of the ontological argument. Thus, the *first cause* and the *necessary being* are equivalent to God, if and only if, they are equivalent to the *perfect being*, which has existence as an attribute. This argument - Kant argues⁴ - even if the oldest, clearer and consistent with common sense, driving the study of nature and giving it purpose and preference trends, it is still false. The *first cause* (God) can be thought of as lacking the attribute of existence, even more of a perfect existence, because he does not need anything to exist, because it is not bring itself into existence, but brings into existence on any other creature. Regarding logical failure of the teleological argument, it is easy to see that the argument by design is a special case of the argument from effect (nature) to cause (God). And because the cosmological argument is founded on the ontological argument, applying the principle of transitivity, it necessary follows that the teleological argument is also wrong.

However, it is impossible to resist the belief - Kant points out⁵ - that all parts (elements) of nature are interconnected by law as if (“als ..ob”) a Divine Intelligence would have actually placed the connection in nature, because under its guidance, the subject knowing acquires new knowledge about nature. Thus, the irresistible power of conviction generates faith in the Supreme Author⁶. Kant believes that the three arguments are the only possible in terms of pure reason. And because they are not theoretically valid, no one else can be stated in order to prove the existence of God.

Kant does not deny, however - not in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, or elsewhere - the existence of God, but only that God could be known. And he concluded: “I found it necessary to limit knowledge in order to make room for faith”⁷. While remaining in the field of pure reason, one could say that human thinking - that is not the same as human knowledge, in Kant’s opinion⁸ - destroys the objective ontological unity of the world, replacing it with another one required by the knowing subject, namely *noumenon-phaenomenon* unit. But this does not mean that the divine (“to Theion”) disappeared, but only to hide. The divine (“to Theion”) was not out of hiding, but he has the power to draw in its hide that which is called *noumenon*.

The conclusion of rational theology (Kant) is actually identical with the negative theology conclusion. Going beyond the canons of transcendental method, pure reason

² Imm. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (KrV), in: Immanuel Kant's *Sämtliche Werke*, dritter Band, Leipzig, Leopold Voss, 1867, *Elementarlehre*. II. Th. II. ABTH. II. Buch. 3. Hauptst. 4. Abschn. Unmöglichkeit eines ontologischen Beweises, p. 405 ff.

³ L. W. Beck, *Kant*, in: *Six Secular Philosophers*, by Lewis White Beck, New York, The Free Press, London, Collier-Macmillan Limited, 1966, p. 64-66.

⁴ Imm. Kant, *KrV*, *ibid.*, *Elementarlehre*. II. Th. II. ABTH. II. Buch. 3. Hauptst. 7. Abschn. Kritik aller spekulativen Theologie, p. 428 ff.

⁵ Imm. Kant, *ibid.*, *Elementarlehre*. II. Th. II. ABTH. II. Buch. 3. Hauptst. Anhang transscendentalen Dialektik. Von der Endabsicht natürlichen Dialektik der menschlichen Vernunft, p. 450 ff.

⁶ A.J. Ayer, *Les grands domaines de la philosophie*, Paris, Editions Seghers, 1976, trans. Martine Goutallier, p. 256.

⁷ Imm. Kant, *op. cit.*, *Vorrede zur zweiten Ausgabe*, p. 25.

⁸ Imm. Kant, *ibid.*, *Elementarlehre*. II. Th. I ABTH. I. Buch. 2. Hauptst. 2. Abschn. Transsc. *Deduktion der reinen Verstandesbegriffe*. § 22., p. 123.

finds that its efforts, to reach God through *a priori* concepts or the study of nature, are sterile and weak and this weakness stems from a fundamental break between the inside and the outside of its *ego*. The human mind cannot either infer from the concept of a necessary being to the actual existence of God, or the actual existence of natural order from a necessary being (God). For either God is understood as an extension of *phaenomena*, and in this case God would be conditioned and material subject, therefore, cannot be God; or God is thought to be outside *phaenomena*, in which case we cannot lay down any costs about the existence of God, and therefore, God remains for an ideal of pure human reason. But what is really proved in the *Transcendental Dialectics* is that it is not possible to prove either the non-existence of God - and this is also a negative logical conclusion, but theologically it is a very positive one.

It is clear that Kant's rational theology is religiously inspired, however, it is to be elucidated which traditional roots are involved from the in the Kantian theological vision. The methodological point of departure is that, in the 2nd edition (1787) of the first *Critique* received criticism, but also in the later *Prolegomena*, Kant seeks to determine the fairness conditions of human knowledge, in order to think *Das-Ding-an-Sich* ("thing-in-itself") outside the sensitive experience. *Das-Ding-an-Sich* ("thing-in-itself") is called by Kant *noumenon* and its (dynamic, energetic) action on human senses is called *phaenomenon*.

Any Latin dictionary defines as *noumenon*, "God", "deity", "divinity", and "the will of the gods who made themselves known to mortals". The term has a Greek origin, being composed of *ἰ νο×V* ("mind") and *μηνῶν* ("to reveal, to bring into existence, to produce knowledge"), leading to the complex meaning of "affirmative revelation of the spirit that makes himself human knowledge"⁹ Why Kant chose this word to hide in the classic subject of traditional metaphysics, *i.e.* God? – this is a question.

My answer to this question is the thesis, supported by several analyses and texts drawn from Cappadocian school, that Immanuel Kant has focused in the term *noumenon* an entire Orthodox tradition about the relationship between God and the knowing subject, and I will restrict the discussion to some arguments from four Fathers of the Church, namely: Didymus the Blind, St. Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. John Chrysostom.

Thus: to Didymus the Blind (313-393), which claims to be descended from Origen, the impossibility of God cognition applies to the divine being as such, called *ὁ Ὄσια* (*he ousia*-being) of God. The writer uses explicit terms in order to express ignorance of the divine being (*he ousia*), located beyond the human level of knowledge, namely in the superhuman reason (*ratio angelica*). Didymus describes *he ousia* as follows: the invisible and incomprehensible even to the eyes of Seraphim (*aoratos kai seraphikois ophthalmois aperileptos*); it cannot be contained either in thought or in space (*logo kai topo achoretos*), but without detachment from the work (*dynamei ameres*); it is non-corporeal (*anaphes*), without size or depth (*amegethes, abathes*) without breadth, and without form (*aplates, aneideos*), beating by far, the brightness of any celestial light, far more sublime than all what is above, beating also infinitely any soul by its spiritual essence¹⁰. Beyond the metaphorical language of negative theology, a characteristic of the great mystics of the Eastern Church, it states that *he ousia* (being) of God infinitely exceeds any spirit (*mind-nous*), and is equivalent to Kant's unknowable *noumenon*.

St. Basil the Great (329-379), which synthesized the cosmological and scientific knowledge of his time, has paid particular attention to the cognition of God by man, in a series of sermons admired by St. Augustine. In line with the theological disputes of his

⁹ *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. of G.W.H. Lamps, DD, Oxford At the Clarendon Press, ninth edition, 1989, for *ἰ νο×V*, sp 923-927; for *μηνῶν* and its family of words, sp 868.

¹⁰ *De Trinitate*, I, 16; in: *P.G.* 39, col. 332 c.

time, St. Basil fought on Eunomius starting with gnoseology¹¹. He pointed out that what seems simple and robust at first glance, is found in reflection progressive in scope, color, density, shape and many other properties. This allows the genesis of concepts for a complexity of objects, giving them names that express their attributes and their relations with other objects, but concepts do not exhaust the entire content of an object. Will always remain an otherwise unknown, an existential primer, which is beyond any intellectual analysis. This means that there is no one object that can be known in its essence. The reason for the limitations of human knowledge is that objects have their basis outside their own, and this topic has received different names outside trying to grasp the concepts, the basic content of a transcendent reality, *i.e.* God. The names applied to certain works of God reveals the divine. But none of these divine names express what God is in His being. Negative name says what God is, prohibiting the use of concepts unfit for God. Other shows that perspective must be chosen, when God is thought. But both these classes of names are subsequent divine reality, they follow God and commits only the human activity of knowing. As Immanuel Kant, when thinking about the relationship *noumenon-phaenomenon*, St. Basil analyzes and reduces the evidence of the existence of God in the ontological argument, proved to be false. God is manifest in the world through his work or energy. Saying that we know God – St. Basil says¹² - we all hope not to touch the very being of God. While His energies have descended to us, His being remains untouched. Orthodox dogmatics theology is based on the St. Basil` authority, where lays the difference between *he ousia* or the untouched God's being, and *energeiai* or external manifestations, which are nothing else than His simply work of the show in the world. This distinction is strikingly similar as pattern of action to the *noumenon-phaenomenon* structure in Kant's view, where does the *noumenon* act through its energy (*energeia*) on humans generating in the *phaenomena*.

St. Gregory of Nyssa (335-394) says, as his brother St. Basil, that we cannot get to know the essentials in created things. Our intellect discovers in the objects only the properties needed to our life. If we could know the ground of the things, we should be blinded by the creative power that brought them into existence. Our intellect is always in motion, discovering by reflection properties still unknown, but things in themselves remain inexhaustible for discursive knowledge. Words and names found by thinking things are essential for determining concepts in mind, and to communicate with other human persons. But the words lose all value when cognition ceases - St. Gregory says in his commentary on the *Song of Songs*¹³.

It is notable accuracy when St. Gregory of Nyssa describes the operation of the human intellect and the human sequence in a sensitive experience with words (concepts), which finds the properties of things only as necessary to our life. Is there foreshadowing a committed Copernican revolution of Kant, who put the legislator subject in the center of the universe of objects. Creative power of objects is still inaccessible to human knowledge. The celestial period of the soul - a common topic for all Platonists - is internalized by St. Gregory, in order to restore the primitive state. But God, the creator of things, remains unknown in Himself imperceptible in terms of His being. Therefore the soul, after traveling through the whole hypercosmical kingdom by the help of his mind, and unrecognizing that he wish among the intelligible or non-corporeal, confess that what he seeks, not discern as God. In the *Dialectic of Pure Reason*, Kant reached a similar conclusion regarding God as regulatory ideal.

St. John Chrysostom (349-407), as interpreter, he attended the Antioch School and was the most important exponent of the historical-grammatical method. In the

¹¹ *Adv. Eun.*, I, 6; in: *P.G.* 29, col. 521-524, II, 4; *P.G.* 29, col. 577-580, II, 32, col. 648.

¹² *Epistle* 234, in: *P.G.* 32, col. 869.

¹³ *Commentary on Song of Songs*, XII, in: *PG* 44, col. 1028.

conception of St. John Chrysostom can be found the beginning of the true theology about God's work in relation with the dynamics of human nature. St. John deals in twelve homilies about the incomprehensible nature of God, which explains the statement, "Nobody has ever seen God" (I *John*, 4: 12), although there is evidence of the *Old Testament* prophets. St. John argues that God has revealed but never His being in Himself, He still made a descent (*synkatabasis*), taking into account the incapability to those who contemplate Him¹⁴. What is however the descent (*synkatabasis*)? It is a manifestation of God, when He let Himself to be seen not as He is in Himself, but as seen for who is able to see Him, adapting to the sight of the helpless in regards. This Descent (*synkatabasis*) - in the divine economy (*Ephesians*, 3: 9; cf *I Corinthians* 3: 7-8) - of the unknown God in His being, corresponds in the conception of St. John Chrysostom, to the descending works or energies that let down to man, analogously to the theology of St. Basil and St. Gregory of Nyssa. The origin of this descent are in the merciful will of God that descended to the lower condition of created beings. And this is the real reason for Immanuel Kant to use in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the term *noumenon* - which means deity or god will, in Greco-Roman philosophy and in the Christian tradition means God's merciful will. To summarize the thinking of St. John Chrysostom, we can say that God, the unseen and the unknown in terms of His being, was made known by Himself to the human being, coming out of His own being and descending to the created beings, and the Descent (*synkatabasis*) is the work of God's will that has adequate His energy in order to work within the limits of human being.

Patronage relationship between God and humans is a consequence of human childbirth in God's image. According to Kant, the knowing subject as *intellectus ectypus* ("intellect-copy", "intellect-image"), even when he put God in brackets, in order to achieve objective knowledge, finally reach to see the universe *as if* (in accordance with the reasoning "mechanics" of the sort "als... ob") it was created and put in order by a divine intellect, *intellectus arhetypus*. And this is the end of the architectonics of Pure Reason.

¹⁴ *De incomprehensibilitate Dei*, III, 3; in: *P.G.* 48, col. 722; cf *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*,..., p.1267-1268.