



Kant's objections to the Ontological Argument

Worksheet 1

Source

Objection 1: Saying 'God doesn't exist' isn't self-contradictory.

If in an identical judgement I reject the predicate and retain the subject, there arises a contradiction, and hence I say that the former belongs to the latter necessarily. But if I reject the subject as well as the predicate, there is no contradiction, because there is nothing left that could be contradicted. To posit a triangle and yet to reject its three angles is contradictory; but there is no contradiction at all in rejecting the triangle along with its three angles. The same applies to the concept of an absolutely necessary being. Remove its existence, and you remove the thing itself, with all its predicates, so that a contradiction becomes impossible..

Critique of Pure Reason, Immanuel Kant, p. 501 – 502 (Penguin, 2007, first published 1781)

Objection 2: Existence isn't a predicate.

Being is evidently not a real predicate, that is, a concept of something that can be added to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing of a thing, and of certain determinations in themselves. Logically, it is merely the copula of a judgement. The proposition, God is omnipotent, contains two concepts, each having its object, namely, God and omnipotence. The small word is is not an additional predicate, but only serves to posit the predicate in relation to the subject. If, then, I take the subject (God) with all its predicates ... and say, God is, or, There is a God, I do not add a new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates...

ibid, p. 504

Analysis

1. Summarise Kant's first objection.

2. Summarise Kant's second objection.

The descriptive 'is' part of a sentence (e.g. in 'a dog is a canine' the 'is a canine' is a predicate).

The 'dog' part of the sentence – what the sentence is about.

For instance, saying 'A dog is not a canine' is contradictory. Thus, the predicate 'canine' belongs necessarily to the subject 'dog.'

Just deleting the sentence isn't contradictory.

Saying 'God doesn't exist' is no more self-contradictory than saying 'Triangles don't exist.'

Kant's definition of a predicate.

A connecting word like 'be' or 'is.'

The word 'is' isn't a predicate, but just links the subject and the predicate.

Saying 'God is' adds nothing to our concept of God, so can't be a predicate.