

The relevance of Kant's objection to Anselm's ontological argument

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Abstract: The most famous objection to the ontological argument is given in Kant's dictum that existence is not a real predicate. But it is not obvious how this slogan is supposed to relate to the ontological argument. Some, most notably Alvin Plantinga, have even judged Kant's dictum to be totally irrelevant to Anselm's version of the ontological argument. In this paper I argue, against Plantinga and others, that Kant's claim is indeed relevant to Anselm's argument, in the straightforward sense that if the claim is true, then Anselm's argument is unsound.

Very famously, St Anselm (1078/1903, 8) said:

... 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.

Kant said some equally famous things on the topic. Most celebrated is his remark that:

'Being' is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing. By whatever and however many predicates we may think a thing ... we do not make the least addition to the thing when we further declare that the thing *is*. (Kant (1781/1929), A598/B626–A600/B628.)

What does what Kant said have to do what Anselm said? Is it even relevant?

Several writers claim that it is not. They contend that Kant's claim that existence is not a real predicate [henceforth, Kant's dictum], the most famous objection to

the ontological argument, does not even bear on Anselm's version. Alvin Plantinga (1974a, 97) writes:

But is it [Kant's dictum] relevant to the ontological argument? Couldn't Anselm thank Kant for this interesting point and proceed merrily on his way? Where did he try to define God into being by adding existence to a list of properties that defined some concept? If this were Anselm's procedure – if he had simply added existence to a concept that has application contingently if at all – then indeed his argument would be subject to the Kantian criticism. But he didn't, and it isn't.¹

More recently, Gareth Matthews (2004, 90) writes that Kant's criticism

... does not exactly fit Anselm's statement of his argument. He [Anselm] does not speak of adding the *concept of existence* ... to the concept of God What he does instead is ask us to compare something existing merely in the understanding with something existing in reality as well.

Peter Millican (2004, 437–438) writes of 'the Kantian doctrine that "existence is not a predicate"' that:

... this most popular objection to the argument has not stood up entirely convincing under critical scrutiny, partly because it has never been fully satisfactorily elucidated and defended, but also partly because its implications for the argument are anyway rather obscure: suppose we accept that 'exists' is not 'logically' a predicate – how *exactly* does this undermine Anselm's reasoning: which particular step in it fails to go through ... ?

I believe that under at least one plausible elucidation of Kant's dictum, we can say exactly how it undermines Anselm's reasoning.

As further evidence of the popularity of the view that Kant's dictum is irrelevant to Anselm's argument, let me quote three more philosophers. E. J. Lowe (2007, 337) contends that 'nothing in ... the ontological argument implies that ... existence ... must be a divine *attribute* or *property*, in the way that omniscience or omnipotence are. [T]he Kantian objection ... is just a red herring with no real bearing on the soundness of the ontological argument.' James Harris (2002, 108) maintains that 'the claim that existence is not a predicate ... leaves[s] untouched Anselm's more interesting version of the argument'. And Brian Davies (2004, 171) writes,

... philosophers have often attacked the *Proslogion* while echoing Kant's assertion that 'Being is obviously not a real predicate.' And perhaps there is much to be said for this assertion In the *Proslogion*, however, Anselm does not seem to be arguing that '— exists' is or is not a first-level predicate.

The idea that Kant's dictum may be true, yet Anselm nowhere presupposes or commits himself to anything in opposition to it, is thus rather popular.

But I believe it is mistaken. In this paper, I explain the way in which Anselm's argument is committed to the falsity of Kant's dictum. It is interesting and relevant to note that, in claiming that existence is not a real predicate, Kant was not

in fact responding to Anselm's version of the ontological argument but to Descartes'. Kant was aware that Anselm had offered proofs for God's existence, but Kant did not write on them (Byrne (2007), 23). Jerome Sobel (2004, 68–69) suggests that Plantinga is thus unfair to Kant, for Plantinga is criticizing Kant's objection for being irrelevant to an argument to which the objection was not directed. This is a fair point. Nevertheless, many philosophers, such as all of those above, have naturally wondered whether Kant's objection applies to Anselm's version. Those who have answered in the negative, I hope to show, are mistaken.

Anselm's argument

I will understand Anselm's ontological argument as Plantinga and many others do: as a *reductio ad absurdum* of atheism that draws a comparison between two beings, one that exists merely in the understanding and another just like it that also exists in reality. It will be helpful to quote Plantinga's (1974a, 95) interpretation of Anselm at length:

Anselm's argument can be seen as an attempt to deduce an absurdity from the proposition that there is no God. If we use the term 'God' as an abbreviation for Anselm's phrase 'the being than which nothing greater can be conceived', then the argument seems to go approximately as follows: Suppose

- (1) God exists in the understanding but not in reality.
- (2) Existence in reality is greater than existence in the understanding alone. [premise]
- (3) God's existence in reality is conceivable. [premise]
- (4) If God did exist in reality, then He would be greater than He is. [from (1) and (2)]
- (5) It is conceivable that there is a being greater than God is. [(3) and (4)]
- (6) It is conceivable that there be a being greater than the being than which nothing greater can be conceived. [(5) by the definition of 'God']

But surely (6) is absurd and self-contradictory; how could we conceive of a being greater than the being than which none greater can be conceived? So we may conclude that:

- (7) It is false that God exists in the understanding but not in reality.

It follows that if God exists in the understanding, He also exists in reality; but clearly enough He does exist in the understanding, as even the fool will testify; therefore, He exists in reality as well.

Other philosophers offer essentially the same interpretation. Matthews, who, as noted earlier, denies that Kant's dictum presents a problem for Anselm's argument, agrees that 'the argument [Anselm] presents is, in form, a *reductio ad absurdum*', that 'ask[s] us to compare something existing merely in the understanding with something existing in reality as well' (Matthews (2004), 87, 90). Thus, in aiming to show, contrary to Matthews, that Kant's criticism *does* fit

Anselm's argument, I will thus be interpreting Anselm just as Matthews does. Graham Oppy (1995, 9) also interprets Anselm's argument as a *reductio* of the belief that 'A being than which no greater can be conceived does not exist in reality', and one that has us compare entities that exist in these two different ways.

Simplifying somewhat, we begin with an idea that Anselm's atheist opponent will admit: that God exists in the understanding but not in reality. We note that a being that exists in reality as well as in the understanding seems greater than an otherwise similar one that exists just in the understanding.² These two claims imply the contradictory thought that we can imagine a being greater than the greatest imaginable being. Thus, the original atheist supposition must be rejected.

Naturally, other philosophers interpret Anselm differently. Oppy (2009) contains helpful extractions of interpretations by Lewis (1970), Adams (1971), Barnes (1972), and Oppenheimer & Zalta (1991). Oppy goes on to criticize these as interpretations of Anselm. Since it is beyond my scope to argue that the interpretation of Plantinga *et al.* is the correct interpretation of Anselm, we can understand my thesis as the claim that Kant's criticism is relevant to at least one popular and defensible interpretation of Anselm's argument – and indeed one that some who deny the relevance of Kant's criticism accept.

Kant's dictum

What does it mean to say that existence is not a real predicate? I will also follow Plantinga's (1974a, 95–97) understanding of this idea, which is equivalent to a proposal offered by James Van Cleve (1999, 188). Plantinga takes as his lead, among other things, Kant's remarks that "'Being" is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing' (Kant (1781/1929), A598/B626), and that 'By whatever and however many predicates we may think a thing ... we do not make the least addition to the thing when we further declare that the thing *is*' (Kant (1781/1929), A600/B628).

Call property F and property G *equivalent* iff it is impossible for there to exist an object to which one of F or G, but not the other, applies (Plantinga (1974a), 97). Examples of equivalent properties (if they are indeed distinct properties – we can ignore this question here) are triangularity and trilaterality, and being the smallest even number and being the smallest prime number. Two properties – or concepts (I use the terms as mere stylistic variants in this context) – are *inequivalent* iff it is possible for something to have one of them without also having the other. Plantinga then explains what it is for a property to be real as follows: a property P is *real* just in case the result of adding P to some lists of properties defines a concept inequivalent to that defined by the original list.³

Thus, if we want to establish that some property P is real, we must first produce a certain list of properties. This list will define a concept, in the sense that it will

contain those properties that are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for something to instantiate the concept. Call that concept 'C'. Then we add P to the list. The resulting list also defines a concept, which we can call 'C+'. Then we ask, Are C and C+ equivalent? If they are, and if this would happen for any list to which we add P, then P is not real. If, on the other hand, it is possible for there to be an object to which C but not C+ applies, then the concepts are inequivalent, and P is real.⁴

To illustrate, consider this list of properties:

is round
is ripe

This list defines a concept – namely, the concept of being round and ripe. Suppose we want to know whether the property *is red* is real. We can see that *is red* is real because if we add it to the list above, the new list defines a concept inequivalent to the concept of being round and ripe. The old list applies to the green apple on my desk, but the new list,

is round
is ripe
is red

does not. Since by adding redness to some list we define an inequivalent concept, redness is real.

Now consider the property *either is a rhinoceros or is not a rhinoceros*. Adding *either is a rhinoceros or is not a rhinoceros* to the list above yields:

is round
is ripe
is red
either is a rhinoceros or is not a rhinoceros

It is impossible for there to be an object that has the first three members of the list but fails to have the fourth member. The second, four-membered list fails to define a concept inequivalent to that defined by the original three-membered list. This follows from the fact that *either is a rhinoceros or is not a rhinoceros* is a 'trivial' property: it is not possible for something to lack it (ignoring issues of vagueness).

Since, necessarily, everything either is or is not a rhinoceros, it should be clear that the result of adding *either is a rhinoceros or is not a rhinoceros* to *any* list of properties will likewise fail to define a new concept. It follows that *either is a rhinoceros or is not a rhinoceros* is not a real property. As Kant might say, by whatever and however many predicates we may think a thing, we do not make the least addition to the thing when we further declare that the thing either is a rhinoceros or is not a rhinoceros.

What about existence? For similar reasons, it is at least intuitively appealing that existence is not a real property either. Consider the result of adding existence to the earlier list:

is round
is ripe
is red
exists

It is not implausible to suppose that, necessarily, all those things that are round, ripe, and red are also round, ripe, red, and existent. How could something be round, ripe, and red without also existing? Since the point generalizes – no list is such that adding existence to it defines an inequivalent concept – existence, it seems, is not a real property.

This might be contested. Meinong famously held that some things lack existence while having all sorts of other properties. We won't settle this dispute here. My aim instead is to show how Anselm's ontological argument is, like Meinong, committed to the idea that existence is a real property, a property that some things might have and others might lack, a property that does 'make an addition' to a thing.

James Van Cleve's equivalent interpretation of Kant's dictum is derived from Kant's remark that 'a determining predicate is a predicate which is added to the concept of the subject and enlarges it' (Kant (1781/1929), A598/B626). (Kant uses 'determining predicate' and 'real predicate' interchangeably.) Van Cleve (1999, 188) offers the following definition of 'enlarges': a property P *enlarges* a concept C just in case it is possible for something to have C and lack P. Note that enlarging a concept by adding a property to it narrows its extension. Van Cleve then explains what it is for a property to be real as follows: a property P is *real* just in case P enlarges at least one concept. As before, redness is real because redness enlarges some concepts, such as the concept of being round and ripe. And as before, it is at least intuitively plausible that existence is not real, since it does not seem possible for something to have some features without also existing.

Naturally, other philosophers interpret Kant differently. One popular interpretation holds that Kant's dictum is the thesis, often associated with Frege, that existence is a second-order property of concepts: the property of having instances.⁵ Everitt (1995) offers another interesting interpretation.⁶ Since it is beyond my scope to argue that the interpretation of Plantinga and Van Cleve is the correct one, we can understand my thesis as the claim that at least one popular and defensible interpretation of Kant's dictum is relevant to at least one popular and defensible interpretation of Anselm's argument – and, furthermore, that at least one philosopher (Plantinga) who denies the relevance of Kant's criticism to Anselm's argument accepts both interpretations.

The relevance of Kant's dictum to Anselm's argument

Recall the first part of Anselm's argument, as Plantinga and we are interpreting it:

- (1) God exists in the understanding but not in reality. [assume for *reductio*]
- (2) Existence in reality is greater than existence in the understanding. [premise]
- (3) God's existence in reality is conceivable. [premise]

(2) and (3) are the argument's only premises, and thus seem to be the only parts of the argument to which one can object (assuming, as I will, that the subsequent inferences are valid). I certainly wouldn't want to contest (3); in any case, that cannot be the target of Kant's famous objection.

What about (2), Anselm's infamous great-making assumption? Some commentators believe that this is where Kant's dictum is relevant. The idea would be that (2) implies, contrary to the dictum, that existence is a real predicate. However, it is interesting to note, as Plantinga does, that there are interpretations of (2), which is a claim Anselm never elucidates, that can serve Anselm's purposes but do not imply that existence is a real predicate. A person could affirm (2) while denying that adding existence to a list ever defines an inequivalent concept. She could do this if she interprets (2) as,

- (2*) If something does not exist in some possible world, then it does not have maximal greatness at that world,

where *maximal greatness* is had by a thing just in case it is not possible for something to be greater than it.⁷ (The being than which none greater can be conceived, if it exists, has maximal greatness.)

(2*) is a rather weak understanding of what it means for existence to be a perfection, but it is strong enough to do the work it needs to do in the argument. And it is consistent with existence not being a real property. For it could be held that, if an object lacks existence at a world, the object has no other properties there as well – the object simply fails to exist there. So the object would have no greatness there either. Then (2) could be true without it being possible that an object has some properties (such as omniscience and omnipotence) while lacking existence.

I want instead to focus on (1), the assumption that God exists in the understanding but not in reality. Now, (1) is just Anselm's assumption for *reductio*. Are we therefore allowed to object to it? If we do object to it, aren't we then just *agreeing* with Anselm, since it is his whole point to show that (1) is false?

I think we can see Kant's dictum as an objection to (1), in a sense. More exactly, it is an objection to the idea that the fool must accept (1) if he is to deny God's existence. The fool, Kant might say, should never have admitted that when he

rejects God's existence, he thereby accepts (1). The fool is committed to accepting the following:

- (o) God does not exist.

It is Anselm who puts in the fool's mouth that therefore it must be that:

- (1) God exists in the understanding but not in reality.

I believe that assuming that (1) is what any atheist fool must affirm when he denies God's existence is what leads one to the mistaken conclusion that Kant's dictum is irrelevant to Anselm's argument. Kant's dictum is arguably irrelevant to Anselm's argument understood as Plantinga's (1)–(7). But it is precisely in the step that Plantinga and others take for granted – the step from (o) to (1) – that Kant's point is relevant. To see how, let's understand a possible motive for believing that (o) commits the fool to (1).

The problem of negative existentials

The fool says:

- (o) God does not exist.

This is a so-called negative existential. Negative existentials raise an interesting puzzle in the philosophy of language: How could any of them be both meaningful and true? It seems that for some negative existential to be meaningful, its subject must refer. If its subject refers, then the object referred to exists. But the statement itself says that that object doesn't exist. So, if the statement is meaningful, it must be false.

We might see Anselm's move from (o) to (1) as supported by a certain solution to the problem of negative existentials, which we can anachronistically call *Meinongianism*.⁸ Meinongianism is an ontological thesis, or set of theses:

- (i) There are two kinds of existence: existence in reality and existence in the understanding;
- (ii) Some things exist in the understanding without existing in reality; other things exist both in reality and in the understanding.⁹

A distinction between kinds of existence is intuitive enough. Santa Claus, the Fountain of Youth, and Vulcan have one kind of existence: they exist only in the understanding; they are imaginary. You, I, the Eiffel Tower, and the Milky Way have another kind of existence: we exist in reality; we are real.

Given the Meinongian ontology, we have available the following semantic thesis:

- The Meinongian solution to the problem of negative existentials:
A statement of the form 'x does not exist' is true iff x exists in the understanding but does not exist in reality.

Thus, 'Santa does not exist' is true just in case Santa exists in the understanding but not in reality. Given Meinongianism, this sentence's being meaningful does not preclude its being true. 'Santa' does refer, but it refers to something that exists only in the understanding. So when we say of that thing that it fails to exist, we speak truly, because our sentence picks the thing out and says of it that it fails to exist in reality, which indeed it fails to do.

Some students of the ontological argument may be inclined, at least tentatively, to give Anselm the Meinongian solution to the problem of negative existentials. We are doing theology, after all, and Meinongianism underwrites a solution to a problem in the philosophy of language. And it is one that is endorsed independently by ontologists and philosophers of language without the least interest in philosophical theology. Should philosophers of religion be prepared to give Anselm whatever philosophy of language he wants, at least if that philosophy of language is a going concern among philosophers of language?

The relevance of Kant's objection

Perhaps, but this is precisely where Kant's point bears on Anselm's argument. Kant's dictum says that existence is not a real property. Now that Meinongianism is on the table, we have to interpret Kant's dictum. Presumably Kant's dictum means that *existence in reality* is not a real property.¹⁰ How precisely is the dictum so interpreted relevant to the inference from (o) to (1)?

It is relevant as follows. The fool asserts

- (o) God does not exist.

In order for Anselm to deduce

- (1) God exists in the understanding but not in reality

from this, he assumes that there are two kinds of existence and that (o)'s being true requires its subject term to refer to something that has one of these kinds of existence (existence in the understanding) but not the other (existence in reality). That is, he assumes some theory like Meinongianism along with its solution to the problem of negative existentials. But if a theory like Meinongianism is true, then existence in reality is a real predicate, and Kant's dictum is contradicted. Existence in reality is a real predicate, given Meinongianism, because it does enlarge some concepts. There are some lists of properties that have the following feature: we can define a concept inequivalent to that defined by the list by adding *exists in reality* to the list. This can be done because, given Meinongianism, some things exist in the understanding without existing in reality. Existence in reality is not a trivial property.

Consider the following list:

is jolly
lives at the North Pole
delivers gifts on Christmas Eve
exists in the understanding

Call this list 'S'. Now consider the list S+ :

is jolly
lives at the North Pole
delivers gifts on Christmas Eve
exists in the understanding
exists in reality

Given Meinongianism, the concept defined by S is not equivalent to the concept defined by S+. It is possible for there to be an object that has all the members of S without having all the members of S+. Santa Claus, that imaginary person who exists only in the understanding, is just such an object. On the Meinongian picture, we can have an object that has all sorts of characteristics without having the additional characteristic of existing in reality. We do make an addition to a thing when we further declare that the thing *is*.

Here, then, is how I understand Kant's objection to Anselm's argument:

Kant's objection to Anselm's ontological argument:

- P1 If Anselm's ontological argument is sound, then Meinongianism (or some theory relevantly like it) is true.
- P2 If Meinongianism (or some theory relevantly like it) is true, then existence in reality is a real property.
- P3 But existence in reality is not a real property.
- C Therefore, Anselm's ontological argument is not sound.

P1 is justified by the fact that Anselm needs Meinongianism – or some theory relevantly like it – for the inference from (o) to (1) above to work.¹¹ The Santa example above and the preceding discussion illustrates why P2 is true. P3 is Kant's dictum. If I am right about P1 and P2, then Kant's dictum is at least *relevant* to Anselm's argument, interpreted as lines (o) through (7) above. If Kant's dictum is true, then Anselm's ontological argument is unsound.^{12,13}

Appendix: Two alternative interpretations of Kant's dictum

I said above that presumably Kant's dictum means that *existence in reality* is not a real property. I presume this because anti-Meinongians like Kant believe in only one kind of existence, and it corresponds, arguably, to Meinongian

existence in reality. But it is interesting to consider two alternative interpretations of Kant's dictum.

One says that *existence in the understanding* is not a real property. Does Meinongianism contradict this interpretation of Kant's dictum? At first blush, it seems there is a way for Anselm to say 'No' (and so to affirm the irrelevance of Kant's criticism, at least under this interpretation). Anselm the Meinongian could plausibly agree with Kant that existence in the understanding is not a real property if a case can be made that necessarily, everything that exists at all exists also in the understanding. Ironically, whether such a case can be made might depend on the very conclusion Anselm's argument is meant to establish. For everything that exists at all exists also in the understanding *if there is an all-knowing being* – a being like God! But of course Anselm cannot appeal to God to deflect the Kantian objection (so interpreted) as irrelevant. For this is what the argument itself is meant to establish.

Under a third interpretation, Kant's dictum maintains that *just-plain-existence* is not a real property. Just-plain-existence is what corresponds to the existential quantifier; what all the things there are (speaking unrestrictedly) have in common is that they just plain exist. (Given Meinongianism, of course, many – perhaps even all – of these things also exist in the understanding, and some – though certainly not all – exist in reality.) One advantage of interpreting Kant's dictum in this third way is that it is certainly true. Even a Meinongian should admit that the following is a contradiction: some things fail to just-plain-exist. It follows that, necessarily, everything just-plain-exists. Just-plain-existence therefore enlarges no concepts and is not a real property. But the disadvantage of interpreting Kant's dictum in this third way is that it is indeed irrelevant to Anselm's argument. That just-plain-existence is not a real property is compatible with Meinongianism.

How, then, to interpret Kant? Charitableness with respect to the likelihood of Kant's dictum being true suggests the third interpretation. But I think the first interpretation (the one discussed in the body of the paper) is best. The third interpretation does make the dictum true, but only trivially so; and it makes the dictum irrelevant to the argument. That is less charitable to Kant. The first interpretation makes the dictum clearly relevant to the argument and, furthermore, makes it a substantive and interesting thesis. It is a thesis for which Kant has arguments; its rival, Meinongianism, also enjoys argumentative support. This is where the debate should take us: to a contest between the substantive and contradictory theses of Kant's dictum and Meinongianism.

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Notes

1. Many of the relevant passages of Plantinga (1974a) echo Plantinga (1966). In what follows, I focus on the more recent work.
2. Or some similar principle. This one corresponds to principle (3a) in Oppy (1995), 9.
3. Kant uses (an equivalent of) the word 'predicate' in his famous dictum. I follow Plantinga and others in taking this to mean *property*. In discussing the view that existence is not a real predicate, Van Cleve (1999), 188 writes, 'As always, by a "predicate" [Kant] does not mean a linguistic item but a property or a constituent of a concept'.
4. If we call a property 'unreal' in this context, this does not imply that it isn't a property or that it doesn't exist – i.e. that it isn't 'real' in a more ordinary sense of the term. We just mean that it fails to be real in the technical sense defined here.
5. For recent examples of this interpretation, see Davies (2004), 171; Byrne (2007), 24–25; and Forgie (2008). This interpretation of Kant's Dictum enjoys support from Kant's discussion in 'The only possible ground of a demonstration of God's existence'; see Byrne (2007), 24–25, and Forgie (2008), 126–129.
6. Everitt suggests that Kant holds that it is *uses* of predicates that can be real, and that in a judgement of the form 'A is B', B is being used as a real predicate just in case (i) 'A is B' is synthetic, and (ii) 'There is an A' does not entail 'There is an A that is B'; Everitt (1995), 394.
7. This possible interpretation of the great-making principle is found in Plantinga (1974b), 211. He makes use of a similar idea in Plantinga (1974a), 100, but the formulation there – for any possible being *x* and world *W*, if *x* does not exist at *W*, then there is a world *W** such that *x* is greater in *W** than in *W* – might suggest it is possible for a being to have a level of greatness at a world (i.e. zero) without existing there. For obvious reasons, I want to avoid that implication in this context.
8. Matthews (2004), 86 speculates that Anselm was drawn to make his distinction between existence in the understanding and existence in reality by the problem of negative existentials. In claiming that Anselm

endorses Meinongianism so defined, I am not claiming that Anselm's ontological argument is a 'Meinongian ontological argument' on the classification of Oppy (1995, 2009). That is a different kind of ontological argument.

9. Can things exist in reality but not in the understanding? I address this question in the Appendix. Admittedly, 'Meinongianism' may not be a perfect label for this view, since Meinong himself might not have been happy having the term 'existing in the understanding' stand in for what he would describe as 'having being'. So I do not mean to suggest that Meinong was a Meinongian, in the sense defined above. But certainly Meinong held a view importantly similar to this. Lycan (2008), 11 also assimilates Meinong's views to Anselm's.
10. In the Appendix I consider two alternative interpretations of Kant's dictum.
11. By 'some theory relevantly like it', I mean one that posits the two kinds of existence that Anselm believes in and holds that when the fool says that God does not exist, the fool thereby commits himself to the view that God exists at least in the understanding.
12. If Kant would deny that:
 - (o) God does not exist,
means the same as:
 - (1) God exists in the understanding but not in reality,
then one might wonder what Kant thinks it does mean, and whether Anselm's argument could get off the ground under Kant's interpretation of (o). As an earlier footnote suggested, some commentators (e.g. Byrne (2007), 24, and Forgie (2008)) believe that Kant anticipated the Frege – Russell theory of negative existentials and would hold that (o) means simply that Godhood (the property of being God) is not instantiated. This theory would undermine Anselm's argument. This is because:
 - (4) If God did exist in reality, then He would be greater than He is,
would then no longer follow from:
 - (2) Existence in reality is greater than existence in the understanding,
together with the Kant-Frege-Russell interpretation of (o). For (4) to be true, the second occurrence of 'He' must refer to something. In Anselm's original version, it refers to God in the understanding. But given the Kant-Frege-Russell understanding of (o), it has not been established that God exists in any way, even in the understanding.
This, of course, is not to say that we don't understand (o). Kant's point would be that we do, but that doing so doesn't require God to have a kind of existence (existence in the understanding). It simply requires that *Godhood* exist and that we understand it.
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