Divine Ontological Necessity

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Abstract

There is an assumption in Western philosophy that necessity is a qualifier of analytical propositions that can be found in logic, and does not apply to existential propositions descriptive of reality. Mulla Sadra and his followers argue that necessity (like other secondary philosophical intelligibles) is an existential qualifier, so that logic applies to this meaning in its domain. They demonstrate that dividing propositions into analytic and synthetic is not true. Instead, they speak of "the predicate extracted from the subject" in a manner that is more general than analytic propositions. By this deep analysis the famous criticism of Kant that existential propositions cannot be necessary will be removed.

In Western philosophy it is often assumed that necessity derives from analyticity and hence pertains to meaning and the mental rather than to the external world so as to qualify existential propositions. In his study of the so-called shortcomings of speculative reasoning in demonstrating the existence of God through the ontological argument, Kant takes the ontological argument as being inherently problematic. His most important objection is that the ontological argument seeks to prove the necessary existent, that is, a being for whom existence in the external world is necessary, while necessity is a logical condition related to analytical propositions whose locus is in the human mind. The ontological argument purports to prove that a condition related to the world of the mind applies to the external world in a synthetic proposition. From Kant's perspective, then, it would seem that we can never accept any necessity in the external world and, consequently, necessary existence cannot have a consistent meaning. This is why Kant rejects the cosmological argument as presupposing the ontological one: the major endeavor in the cosmological argument is to demonstrate a necessary existent being (taken from the ontological argument) through the possibility of the world, creatures, and causality. In order to explicate the existence of God, he uses the expression *ens realissium* 'the most real being' so as not to get entrapped in this problem. This important criticism of Kant has been taken as one of the certainties of Western philosophy for about two centuries and is often taken to show that the path of knowing God through the ontological and cosmological arguments is a dead-end. This has continued to such an extent

that even a philosopher such as Findlay uses Kant's criticism to pose an argument for rejecting the existence of God.[1]

In this paper, an attempt is made to show what Kant's mistake in this regard is. Because he limits necessity to logical or analytical propositions, he imagines that the source of abstraction for the concept of necessity is logic, while there is a difference between the status of finding a referent and the status of abstracting a primary notion.

Kant believes that existential statements cannot be necessary. The conclusion of the cosmological and ontological arguments purports to be an existentially necessary statement. But necessity is a characteristic of the mind or thought, not of the external world or being. Only propositions can be necessary, not things or beings. The only necessity that there is resides in the logical rather than in the ontological realm. Necessity describes propositions when the meaning of the predicate is contained in that of the subject (as Leibniz taught), or when the proposition exhibits a certain form, e.g., as the principle of non-contradiction. It would be a category mistake to apply necessity to existence or to an object in the external world. Necessity is a logical, not an ontological, qualifier. There are no existentially necessary propositions.[2] 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.*[3]

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

[1]   Findlay 1963, 111-122.
[2]   Geisler 1974, 292.
[3]   Kant 1966, 398.

necessity of a judgment is only a conditioned necessity of the thing, or of the predicate in the judgment.[4]

As we see, Kant explains the origin of the meaning of necessity as the absolute necessity of the propositions of geometry that at first are risked haphazardly and then the meaning of necessity is abstracted from these kinds of propositions; subsequently, according to Kant, the abstracted meaning is illegitimately generalized and applied to external things and beings. The notion of necessary existence is constructed through this generalization. Some of the key statements in Kant's explanation are the following:

1- We can find necessity in the 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 and the analytical propositions of geometry.
4- We can find no empirical proposition that can be necessary (this was Hume's belief as well as Kant's).
5- We cannot find necessity in the realm outside logical and analytic propositions.
6- Ontological statements are about external reality, which we reach through empirical facts.
7- It is forbidden to take a meaning related to logic and the mind and predicate it to objects in the realm of existential propositions.
8- Necessary existence is a meaning taken from this kind of forbidden generalization and there cannot be any such meaning.

Some of above proposition are correct, but some of them are disputable. I agree with the propositions 1, 2, 4 and 7. I believe that there is necessity in the analytical propositions of geometry, that the propositions of geometry are logical propositions, not ontological ones, even that there are no empirical propositions that can be necessary, and that one must not 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 reality. It is disputable that the meaning of necessity only and only is related to the logical realm. My reasons are given below.

First, do people abstract the meaning of necessity from logical judgments? It is possible that they know necessity as a familiar meaning and then discover that the relation between subject and predicate in those propositions is of the same sort of meaning (namely necessity) with

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[4] Kant 1966, 399.

which they were already familiar by other means. If you contend for a child (before reaching the so-called abstraction) that the ball is not a ball he will laugh at you and will say it is not possible, but if you say that one ball is not red he is not surprised and says that it is possible. He distinguishes between these two propositions and he shows that the meaning of possible and impossible (if not the terminology) is familiar to him. It is not plausible that we consider a large number of propositions to abstract the meaning of necessity from them. Although the legitimacy of every kind of abstraction can be disputed, we are aware of necessity as an evident fact. We do not abstract necessity *from* logical propositions, we discover necessity *in* logical propositions. Kant himself holds, in other places, that necessity is an *a priori* condition of the mind.

Second, even if we discover necessity in logical propositions, and on that basis we affirm that logical propositions are necessary, this is no reason why there cannot be other kinds of necessary propositions or necessity in other realms. 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 sentence. I think it is a false conversion fallacy. Therefore it is disputable that we cannot find necessity in any realm outside logical propositions.

Third, I believe, like Kant, that we can find no empirical proposition that can be necessary, but I do not agree that ontological statements are about an external reality that we reach only through empirical facts. Ontological statements need not be considered exclusively empirical. Things in the external world have existence, but existence is not equivalent to the sum of such things. It is very important to survey the relation between thing or thing-ness and existence. If we fail to scrutinize the reality of existence some problems will arise like those that have led to objections against Kant. Kant speaks of noumena as what we do not know anything about except that it exists. But in other places he considers existence as an *a priori* concept of understanding, yet as a concept related to the phenomenal realm rather than the noumenal one. Causality has the same problem. According to Kant noumena are the cause of phenomena, but causality is an *a priori* concept of understanding that applies to the phenomenal realm. All of these objections can be answered by more scrutiny of the meaning of existence, causality, necessity and similar concepts.

Mulla Sadra (1572-1640), a distinguished Iranian philosopher of the Safavid period, has analyzed this matter and has articulated the results of his research in his famous principle of the *fundamental reality of existence,* or *the principality of existence (isalat al-wujud).*[5] However, here it is not the place to introduce all his points of view on this subject. I will try to explain his view on the matter as it pertains to the necessity of the existence of God. His

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[5]   Ayatollahy 2005, 159-162.

philosophy provides us with a good solution for the sorts of problems that Kant struggled with.

Mulla Sadra and his followers argue that "necessity" in logic and philosophy (ontology) has the same meaning.[6] 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 (ontology); logic uses the result of this 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.[7]

He argues that "necessity", "possibility" (meaning *contingency*) and "impossibility" have evident meanings and do not have an actual definition (in the Aristotelian sense). But the investigation of their reality and the division of things into necessary, possible and impossible, or into necessary and possible is a philosophical division because the subject of philosophy is existence or being, and the evaluation of every entity by two exclusive disjunctive propositions results in the division of all things into necessary, possible, and impossible (or the division of existence into necessary and possible by one disjunctive proposition results in two kinds of being).

The exclusive disjunctive proposition is nothing other than the law of non-contradiction, because the impossibility of having both or neither of contradictory predicates implies that everything, as regards existence, has either necessary existence or not. The first alternative is necessary being; if a thing does not have this necessity, then it will have either necessity of non-existence or not. The former is impossible and the latter is possible. (Likewise all existent being divides into necessary and possible.)

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Some of Muslim theologians like Qazi Azudi Iji suppose that the necessity in philosophical necessity differs from that in logical necessity.[8] If these two, they say, had the same meaning, then whenever the essential properties of a thing were ascribed to it, this would require that the thing be a necessary being; for example, since the number four is an even number necessarily, therefore it would have to be concluded that the number four is a necessary being. Mulla Sadra answers that the meaning of necessity is the same in both sort of cases, but the difference of meaning is with regard to the predicates used rather than with

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[6]   Amuli 1994, 158-159.
[7]   Amuli 1994, 160.
[8]   Jorjani 1992, vol. III, 121.

regard to the meaning of necessity that is the mode of the propositions.[9] Therefore, necessity requires that number four must be necessary in its *evenness*, not in its existence.

Logic does not only utilize philosophy in the application of necessity. It makes use of philosophy in some other affairs, like predication. For example, being is divided into unity and multiplicity, under the titles "one" and "many", each of which divides into some other divisions like specific, generic or accidental unities, and also pure unity and the unity that is ascribed to a multiple that shares the relationship of identity. This identity is a predication (that is, either "primary essential" or "common technical", as described in traditional logic). Logic utilizes predication that is the result of the above philosophical divisions as a postulate, and organizes its special matters accordingly. Otherwise, logic cannot prove the origin of predication. Hence, logic depends on philosophy, not only in many of its postulates, but also in the origin of its subject, that is knowledge and concepts or presentation and judgment. Consequently, "necessity" has 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 connections among propositions.

Despite the fact that "necessity" has an unequivocal meaning, it has various levels of orders as it is applied to different cases. The objection that necessity does not apply to entities in the external world has two sources. First, when "necessity" is considered merely in a logical sense, its philosophical application that refers to external realities is neglected. Second, when "logical necessity" is limited to analytic propositions, every demonstration that results in a necessary conclusion must be in the realm of concepts. Against this supposition Mulla Sadra argues that "necessity" is not essentially restricted to analytic propositions. Necessity also includes some other essential properties he calls "essentials of the sections of a demonstration". Those essentials are more general than the essentials in analytic propositions that come from analyzing a thing and finding its essential properties. "Possibility", for example, is a meaning that is not in the essence of any quiddity. It is abstracted only after comparing a quiddity with existence and non-existence, and then is predicated of that quiddity. The meaning of "possibility" does not include the essence or essential properties of any quiddity to which this meaning is ascribed. Another example is the "need" one thing may have for another being. This, too, is not a meaning that can be taken from an essence or essential properties of a possible being. Therefore, need as well as possibility are from the "essentials of the sections of a demonstration".

In Mulla Sadra's view, the cosmological argument (based on necessity and possibility) does not depend on a mental analysis of meanings and quiddities in thought, but on an intellectual analysis of realities that exist externally. In this argument, even the meaning of existence does not appear insofar as it is a mental meaning, but the meaning of existence is

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[9]   Mulla Sadra 1981, vol. I, 91.

attended to as regards its referent and reality. The real referent of existence is evident for anyone who is not a sophist.

A possible being that exists externally (i.e., an external referent of "possible being") needs another being in external reality to remove its need, and that being necessarily exists externally.

The external referent and reality of "necessary being" does not have any quiddity other than His reality and existence: His quiddity is just His reality and external existence. His necessity has no referent distinct and separate from His reality and it is not other than an intensity of existence. Consequently, the necessity of God as a necessary being is not like the 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 a reality that has no truth other than its external-ness or reality.

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 cannot derive from this abstraction; and people have this meaning before they recognize it in logic. In order to answer the question of the ontological source of the meaning of necessity, Mulla Sadra's followers point to the ontologically necessary relation between "I" and "my will" or "my imagination that I create".[10] There are other philosophical meanings that have their ontological source in this relation. We do not obtain the meaning of causality by abstraction from a special relation between external things (as Hume correctly objected with regard to this matter). This meaning is an ontological evident meaning that man recognizes unconsciously in the ontological relation between "I" and "my will". It is a kind of knowledge by presence that differs from knowledge by acquisition, or representational knowledge. This kind of meaning, like causality, existence, necessity, unity and individuality, is named "secondary philosophical intelligible" by Mulla Sadra.[11] These meanings are compatible with *a priori* concepts of understanding, but differ in their origins, 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 among propositions.

When "logical necessity" is limited to analytic propositions, every demonstration that results in a necessary conclusion must be in the realm of concepts. Against this supposition, Mulla Sadra argues that "necessity" is not restricted to essential properties in analytic

[10]   Misbah Yazdi 1990, vol. II, 38; Misbah Yazdi 1999, 275.

[11]   Mulla Sadra 1981, vol. I, 338.

propositions, but includes also some other essentials he calls "essentials of the sections of a demonstration". Those essentials are more general than the essentials in analytic propositions that come from analyzing a thing and finding its essential properties.

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 this external existence must be taken from His meaning. Thus the negation of His existence (i.e., negation of a referent and external existence) requires a contradiction, as a negation of the essence and essential character of a thing. To the contrary, Javadi Amuli, one of the contemporary disciples of Mulla Sadra says:

> Existence, or external reality, does not come from the essence and essential characters of the meaning of necessary existence, which 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 is precisely external existence; and the meaning of necessary being that indicates this reality does not have this necessity. Although the concept of necessary existence is necessary existence by way of primary essential predication, but it is a mental affair by way of common technical predication that comes into existence in the confines of perception and awareness of existence as a possible reality.[12]

Kant adds some further explanation for his claim by the argument that the proposition "the most real Being exists" is either an analytic proposition or a synthetic one. If it is analytic, there is no additional knowledge about the most real being, while we need a new knowledge about His existence; and if it is synthetic, there cannot be any contradiction in rejecting it. Such a contradiction can happen only in an analytic proposition by admitting the subject and rejecting the predicate. Kant 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 synthetical 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 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)

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[12]   Javadi Amuli 1994, 163.

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 is synthetic, then how would you assert that the predicate 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?[13]

Mulla Sadra and his disciples do not agree with Kant's division of propositions into analytic and synthetic. They divide true propositions into two kinds: those in which "the predicate is extracted from the subject" and those in which the "predicate is by way of adherence".[14] The first is abstracted and extracted from the 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 the subject. The first one is more general than "analytic" in Kant's terminology, because it contains, beside the essence and the essential properties of a 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 its 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 core of the 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 reference to bodies) and "knowing" (in reference 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 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.

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[13]   Kant 1966, 399.
[14]   Sabzavari 1947, 29.

I conclude that Kant's objections to there being a necessary existent fail because he does not consider how there may be a necessity that is not restricted to relationships between concepts. The necessity of God's existence is not the relationship between the concept of God and that of existence applied as a predicate. Rather, the necessity of God is the intensity and needlessness of His existence that is discovered when His being is made the focus of our philosophical reflections instead of our concepts of Him. In short, it is an ontological necessity rather than a merely logical one.

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