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Proofs of God against Kant*

Ph.D. Frederic Guillaud

(Philosopher, France)

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Demonstrating the existence of God?

Impossible! — so we were taught in college.

But why an explanation is supposed to be impossible was never explained in detail. Rather, this impossibility has been presented to us peremptorily as a “solid acquisition of modern thought” and beyond any discussion. The mere mention of one great name was enough to impress us: Kant, it was asserted, has demonstrated definitively this

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impossibility.

Schopenhauer said: “It is the immortal merit of Kant to have eliminated theism from philosophy, because in philosophy, understood as science and not as religious faith, there is only the empirical data or the results of certain demonstrations which can find place.”¹

Many Catholics acquiesce without question [...] and opt for full-blown fideism. But, because the Catholic doctrine is crystal-clear on this matter, they should not. In 1868, the First Vatican Council thus declared:

The Holy Church holds and teaches that by the natural light of human reason God can be known with certainty by means of created things.

Saint Pius X (in the *motu proprio Sacrorum Antistitum*, 1910) added:

God, principle and end of all things, can be known with certainty and even demonstrated by the natural light of reason, by means of the beings he has facts, that is to say by the visible works of creation as the cause is known and demonstrated by the effects.

And Pius XII, in the encyclical, *Humani Generis* (1950), specified the method:

To demonstrate with certainty the existence of a personal God, we

¹ *The World as Will and Representation* (1844), Critique of Kantian Philosophy.

must resort to the unshakeable principles of metaphysics, namely the principle sufficient reason, the principle of causality and the principle of finality.

In 1992, Saint John Paul II, eventually, specified in his *Catechism* (§31), that the proofs of the existence of God belonged to metaphysics, which allows us “to reach true certainties.”

Accordingly, as Catholic philosophers, our task is easy to define (if not so easy to complete!): we should try to show that it is possible to build good arguments for the existence of God, in spite of the well-known criticisms that Kant lodged against natural theology in general. In this essay, I will not engage in a refutation of the whole epistemological system of Kant (“transcendental idealism”) — a task which would need an entire book. Rather, I will discuss the texts where Kant directly deals with natural theology and argument that Reason is not able to draw conclusions in metaphysical matters. That is to say, I will deal principally with:

1) the objections that Kant directs against the main argument of natural theology, i.e. the cosmological argument, or *argumentum a contingentia mundi* (for space consideration, I let aside the teleological and ontological arguments).

2) the so-called “Antinomies of Pure Reason,” which are supposed to be the proof that Reason is inescapably driven to contradictions when it tries to speak about the Universe taken as a Totality (which is the starting point of any cosmological argument for the existence of God). Scrutinizing this masterpiece of Kantianism is all the more important because, to the mind of Kant himself, the antinomies of

Pure Reason were both the real Entrance of his System and the most powerful motive he had to convince that we must make a so-called “Copernican revolution.” Accordingly, if the antinomies appear to shatter under examination, the most powerful motive to embrace transcendental idealism would disappear.

Let’s begin by recalling the general look of the cosmological argument criticized by Kant:

1. All that is contingent has a cause.
2. Now, the whole of the physical world can be considered as a contingent being.
3. So, there is a non-physical cause of the entire physical world.

This argument is valid. If the premises are true, then the conclusion follows. To refute the argument, it is necessary to attack the premises which Kant attempts in two different ways.

First, he challenges the absolutely universal character of the first premise (which is a statement of the principle of causality). Following Kant, this principle applies only between spatiotemporal phenomena, and therefore cannot allow us to demonstrate the existence of a supra-phenomenal being. We have no right to use the principle of causality outside the series of spatiotemporal phenomena. Kant writes:

The principle of causality has no value or criterion of its use other than in the sensible world alone. Since God is not a sensible object, it is impossible to trace it by the principle of causality.²

² *Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781. On the impossibility of a cosmological proof of the existence of God.

The second Kantian objection deals with the second premise. He argues it is, in any case, impossible to affirm that the world considered in its Totality is a contingent reality — simply because it is not possible to know what the World is really, *in itself*. We can only apprehend the World as a phenomenon, relative to the categories of our understanding. This objection is obviously an implication of the Kantian epistemological doctrine, which states that we do not know things “in themselves,” but only things “as they appear to us.” We will not be able, in this article, to attack this entire system. But simple objections are still feasible.

1. Answer to the First Kantian Objection

To the first objection: I respond that the thesis, which posits God as out of reach of the principle of causality because He “is not a possible object of experience,” is either totally unjustified or begging of many questions. The expression “possible object of experience” is indeed susceptible of two interpretations. Perhaps, Kant means by “possible object of experience” all that can be perceived by our five senses, and his affirmation that God is not an object of experience is trivial. Moreover, in saying this, he condemns the most common exercise of science (which postulates and deduces from experience the existence of forces, fields, and particles totally imperceptible to our senses). Or, perhaps, he means by “possible object of experience” all that can be perceived *or inferred from the experience*. However, this interpretation begs the question about whether we can infer God from experience. If it is accepted that we can infer from experience the existence of forces, quarks, bosons, fermions, or other theoretical entities be-

yond the reach of experience, then why assume we can refuse *a priori*, without examination of arguments, any inference of the existence of a primary cause of the physical Universe?

Some may retort that quarks, even if they are unobservable, have observable effects, by means of very elaborate experiments. Granting the veracity of this retort actually sustains a hypothesis for God as well, whose observable effects effect would be the Universe itself — which, it must be admitted, constitutes an experimental datum of good size! It will be objected, then, that quarks and bosons, although unobservable and beyond imagination, are at least *material* — that is, at least located in space and time — and so homogeneous with the rest of the experience, unlike God who is supposed to be purely immaterial. We can concede this point, but how can we exclude *a priori* that the search for a cause leads us to conclude that the cause in question must be out of time and space? Insofar as there is no logical contradiction, we can hold for this possibility. To exclude *a priori*, it is necessarily to beg the question by determining before the research has begun the kind of realities that it will be allowed to discover. There is, therefore, no good reason to exclude *a priori* that the use of the principle of causality can lead us “out of the world,” except to presuppose by simple prejudice that the real is reduced to the physical Universe. In this case, the thesis of epistemological limitation (namely, the extent of our knowledge) presupposes in fact a *metaphysical thesis* adopted as a pure and simple postulate: materialism. But, that is exactly what is in question!

2. Answer to the Second Kantian Objection

Firstly, a general remark: it is quite strange to assert, as an original thesis, that we know things “only as they appear to us.” For, after all, this assertion seems to be the very definition of knowledge! However, we also need to ask what assertion makes an alternative claim? Namely, we might assert that we know things “as they are in themselves.” But this juxta positioning is both a false opposition and a false dilemma: there is no contradiction between knowing things “as they appear to us” and knowing them “as they are in themselves.” For what other way could there be to know something, than to trust the effect it makes us? Let us dig a little: if by “the thing in itself” one means “the thing in so far as it is not known,” it is obvious but not very instructive to tell us that it is unknowable (it is indeed contradictory to be known *as unknown*). Now, if by “the thing in itself” one means “the thing as it is,” it is gratuitous to affirm that it is unknowable: there is no obvious reason to affirm that the effect that we make one thing is incapable of teaching us anything about the nature of this thing, as it is. The way things affect us is not first of all an obstacle to our knowledge of them, but our only way to them: the effect that things do to us is not *what* we know, but *that by which* we know the things themselves. The tactile impressions that I have by exerting a slight pressure on a stone are not the object of my knowledge; they are the medium through which the resistance of the stone, which alone is the proper object of my knowledge, is revealed to me and reveals to me a property of the thing itself. Let us be clear: we do not deny that our constitution can have an effect on the image that things imprint on us; the composition and structure of our sensory receptors predetermine the extent of our sensory spectrum and the effect that certain substances will have on us

is related to the physiology of our organs. It is obvious that a bat does not have the same sensory landscape as a human being. But will we say that the bat does not perceive the world as it is, but only as it appears to it? This opposition does not make sense. Being a “conscientious sonar” surely has a funny effect, unimaginable for us, but it is not an argument against the fact that it is surely very informative to be a sonar. Subjective conditioning does not allow us to conclude that we are ignorant of the reality of things, or that the effect of things does not teach us anything about things in themselves. We can only conclude that the perception is always *from a certain perspective*. But that does not mean that it keeps us in the dark about what things are. There exists a significant gap between the recognition of this kind of conditioning and the Kantian affirmation that we do not know things in themselves, but only phenomena. One might add that the Kantian thesis about knowledge is blatantly self-refuting: for it maintains *at the same time* that the category of causality cannot be applied outside phenomena and that the things-in-itself are [...] the causes of the phenomena!

Having discarded, in broad terms, the two Kantian objections, we could pause and take stock. It appears that the two premises of the cosmological argument are more probably true than false, and thus the conclusion follows: there exists, more probably than not, a non-physical cause of the entire Universe. However, it seems to me important to dig a little deeper into the question by trying to understand why Kant came to think that these objections were legitimate. In other words: why Kant thought that we had to give up metaphysics. And for that, we must turn our attention to the so-called “antinomies of Pure Reason.”

3. The Antinomies of Pure Reason

According to Kant, when human Reason attempts to draw conclusions about the Totality of the Universe and its cause, it encounters insoluble contradictions. As soon as a thesis seems to be demonstrated, we realize that it is also possible to demonstrate the antithesis. These alleged contradictions led Kant to consider that metaphysics (defined as the knowledge of totalities) was impossible and that the only solution to solve them was to accomplish a “Copernican Revolution.” That is to say, we must recognize that Time and Space do not exist in things in themselves, but are simple forms, *a priori*, of knowledge — which prevents us, therefore, from knowing things as they are in themselves.

Kant has thus drawn up a list of the theses and antitheses which philosophy, according to him, demonstrates in turn, and in the most rigorous way, without being able to decide. In the Prolegomena, Kant writes:

This antinomy, which is founded in the nature of human reason, and which, therefore, is inevitable and never ends, has the following four theses with their antitheses:

Thesis:

The world has a temporal and spatial beginning or limit.

Antithesis:

The world does not have a temporal and spatial beginning or limit.

Thesis:

Everything in the world consists of something that is simple.

Antithesis:

Everything in the world does not consist of something that is simple.

Thesis:

There are causes in the world that are, themselves,
free and uncaused.

Antithesis:

There are no causes in the world that are, themselves,
free and uncaused.

Thesis:

In the series of causes in the world, there is a necessary,
uncaused being.

Antithesis:

In the series of causes in the world, there is not a necessary,
uncaused being.³

Kant says: “Thesis and antithesis can both be established by equally luminous and irresistible evidence—for I warrant the accuracy of all this evidences.” In other words, contradictory theses seem to be true simultaneously, which is logically impossible. Kant sees in this series of contradictions the sign and the proof that reason is unable to arrive at solid results when it comes to deciding on the origin of the cosmos, the ultimate constitution of matter, the existence of a primary cause.

Human reason — writes Kant — has this singular destiny of being overwhelmed by questions which it cannot avoid, because they are imposed upon it by its very nature, but which it cannot answer because they are totally beyond its power.⁴

³ *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able to Present Itself as a Science* [1783], §52.

⁴ *Critique of Pure Reason*, Preface, 1st edition.

Kant asserts, in fact, that the contradictions in which philosophers indulge when they treat these subjects are not due to avoidable errors, but that they are really inevitable: Reason breaks down when it seeks to rise to the level of the “absolute,” the “Totality,” and the “unconditioned.” In these metaphysical areas, Kant’s navigational instruments panic, like those of an airplane in the Bermuda Triangle. The conclusion is very simple: Reason should not venture into these perilous lands. It must learn the mapping of areas where its principles are valid and have the humility to recognize areas where its principles are no longer valuable.

Without further ado, let us get to the heart of the matter by examining the two antinomies which most obviously relate to our subject: namely, the first and the fourth. Here is the first, which deals with the beginning of the world, with its two theses and demonstrations:

Thesis

**The world has a beginning
in time**

For the world to have no beginning in time, it would take a real infinity of moments to have passed before the world reached the present moment. Now, it is impossible to cross the infinite, so if the world had no beginning in time, it could never have reached the present moment. But here we are. So the world had a beginning.

Antithesis

**The world has no beginning
in time**

If the world began, it was preceded by an empty time, during which it arose. But for it to arise in the course of time, it would have been necessary for there to have been in that time something that could be the cause of it. Without this, in an empty time, there would have been no reason for the world to arise at one time rather than at another. Therefore, it may be said that one or more worlds may have begun in time, but the whole Universe could have had no beginning. There has always been something, otherwise there would never have been anything.

And here is the fourth antinomy, which deals with the existence of a necessary being:

Thesis**There is a necessary being**

When a conditioned being is given, the Totality of its conditions is also given, otherwise this being would not exist. But there is at least one conditioned being. So the absolute Totality of the conditions is also given. This Totality of conditions is a being who does not have to be conditioned himself, in which case he would be part of the series of beings who claim a condition. So there is at least one absolutely unconditioned being, without cause, in other words: absolutely necessary.

Antithesis**There is no necessary being**

Since the Universe is an indefinite series of conditioned beings, the total sum of these conditioned beings cannot be unconditioned. But if we posit that the necessary being is outside the world, it must nevertheless begin the series of conditioned beings, so that it is in time, and that it is thus homogeneous to the other terms of the series. So it will not be out of the world. But nothing in the world can be removed from conditioning by the antecedent causes. So there is no unconditioned being, neither in the world nor out of the world.

Let us repeat: according to Kant, the demonstrations are rigorous and convincing on both sides. How, then, can Reason get out of this predicament? Indeed, it is not tolerable that reason can thus demonstrate a thing and its opposite without a solution being brought.

4. The Kantian Solution to the First Antinomy

Let us turn to the antinomy regarding the beginning of the world. The idea of time, applied to things, leads to an *aporia*: on the one hand, it seems necessary to place a beginning; on the other, necessary to pose the absence of a beginning. On the one hand, the world could not have reached the present moment without a beginning. That is, the world would have gone through a really infinite number of successive events, which is impossible because the Universe would have to cross a really infinite number of stages before reaching any moment but would never have reached the present moment. But, on the other hand, if we admit that the Universe — and therefore time — has a beginning, we seem to deny the very concept of time, since by definition, the beginning is defined as being preceded by a time during which one does not exist. So, things can start in time, but time itself cannot have a beginning. For Kant, this *aporia* — the impossibility of establishing the limited or unlimited nature of the world in time — is a sign that the question is ill-conceived. That does not imply that the idea of time is empty or incoherent, but rather that its relation to things is misunderstood.

It is at this point that Kant introduces his famous “Copernican Revolution.” This revolution posits that theoretical problem does not come from things in themselves but from the knowing subjects, unaware of their influence on the situation being observed. Indeed, the subject neglects his active role in the process of knowledge and takes as features of things what is only the distorting prism of his subjectivity. A bit like someone who finds it very strange that everything is blue, would finally realize that it is because they are wearing glasses with blue lenses. According to Kant, this distortion is exactly what is

happening here. In antinomy, we consider time as an intrinsic determination of reality, and thus we are immediately pushed into contradictions: e.g. it would be necessary at the same time that the Universe has and has not a beginning. As Kant says: "Let us see if we would be more successful in changing our point of view." Let us start from the opposite hypothesis and admit that time is only a "subjective appearance," a form imposed on experience by the knowing subject. It should therefore be considered that time applies only to the phenomena given in experience, but not to things as they are in themselves.

In reversing the perspective, Kant believes that everything is resolved: certainly, the thesis and the antithesis are opposed but they are *both false*. For the world, as a thing in itself, is in fact neither limited nor unlimited in time, but simply undetermined in this aspect (since it is not really in time). As for time itself, considered independently of things, it appears as unlimited, not in the manner of a truly unlimited thing, but in the manner of an empty form, applicable indefinitely. The contradiction is thus lifted by the development of a solution which consists in asserting that time is not in things, but only in us. Therefore, the metaphysical question of whether the world has begun or not simply does not arise; it does not make sense.

5. The Kantian Solution to the Second Antinomy

According to Kant, the requirement of a complete explanation leads us to two contradictory conclusions. On the one hand, we pose the existence of a necessary being, the ultimate cause of all things; on the other hand, we pursue indefinitely the search for causes. As these two requirements seem to have as equal right, Kant reconciles them by

resorting again to his Copernican Revolution. Thus, he posits that the requirement of indefinite research applies only to the phenomena, which are subject to the law of temporal sequence, while the requirement of unconditioned Totality is applied to the Universe considered in itself, which is not in time. The temporal conditioning of things is only a determination of “appearance” and not of “being”: in the order of appearance, the unconditioned is by definition an interminable task, which goes back indefinitely from effects to causes, *ad infinitum*; but in the order of being, the unconditioned is possible. Simply, one cannot carry over the same reasoning about phenomenal conditioning to the unconditioned noumenal. The phenomenal conditioning is given to us in experience, but without the possibility of going back to a Totality that would itself be given; it is an infinite task. As for the noumenal unconditioned, which is like a fundamental need of our mind, an ineradicable requirement of Reason, it is not given to us; we can only think it and conceive its possibility. The resolution of antinomy gives the following result: the thesis and the antithesis are *both true*, but from different points of view. The antithesis is true for phenomena, the study of which goes back indefinitely from the cause in question; the thesis is possibly true for things in themselves; possibly, because one can only conceive this unconditioned cause, but not demonstrate its existence, since it is possible to think things in oneself, but not to know them. The contradiction is lifted by returning the Unconditioned to the thing in itself.

Kant’s idea is, therefore, that metaphysics, and especially rational theology, proceed from a lack of humility of reason which, emboldened with pride or enthusiasm, imagines itself to be able to go beyond its narrow canton, out of its legitimate domain, to rise to the heights of the suprasensible, in the manner of a dove which, imagining it could

fly even better without the resistance of the air, threw itself into a vacuum. The fundamental principles of reason on which philosophy has always relied to search for the causes and the first principle of reality — the principle of identity, the principle of sufficient reason, the principle of causality — have no application outside the spatiotemporal physical phenomena (which do not tell us anything about things in themselves). Beyond that, these principles just serve thinking but are unable to prove the existence of anything. They cannot in any case allow us to go beyond this sphere, as classical metaphysics does, which requires a suprasensible cause of all material things. Since every phenomenon has a cause, it cannot be concluded that the Totality of phenomena has a cause. That there are causes *in the world*, does not allow us to conclude that there is a cause *of the world*. Our intelligence, however, constitutionally doomed to seek the antecedent causes of the events of the world, constantly dreams of a first cause of all events, which satisfies, once and for all, our demand for an explanation. The idea of this first cause — the undesired cause, the unconditioned condition — is what Kant calls the “Ideal of Reason.” This Ideal arises from the constitutive requirements of the human mind and it is the dream object of its research. In this sense, the Ideal is not an arbitrary idea, but a necessary illusion. It is an illusion because our compulsion to conceive its existence is not enough to prove its true existence.

The Ideal remains the home for the unification of all our intellectual pursuits. This tension towards the absolute is deeply rooted in the nature of the human mind from which it cannot be extirpated. But, the Ideal cannot provide the basis for a theoretical affirmation of the existence of God. It is only on the level of morality that the Ideal must, according to Kant, lead us to pose an act of belief, since without the

existence of God, we would have no hope of seeing, in the other world, the punishment of the wicked or the happiness of the righteous. Our moral conscience, according to Kant cannot tolerate the lack of such a vision. God, according to Kant, is, as Nietzsche said, “*the old sun at bottom, but obscured by fog and doubt; the idea became sublime, pale, Nordic, Königsbergian.*”⁵

We can emphasize right now the interest of the resolution of the fourth antinomy for our research: Kant asserts that the infinite regression in the order of causes and effects within nature is not exclusive of the position of a primary cause, which is not situated on the same plane (one could, metaphorically, distinguish the horizontal plane of the physical phenomena and the vertical plane of the radical origin). On this point we will agree with Kant: that the world has existed for an eternity and that we cannot therefore stop at a first term of the infinite series of physical events does not exclude that the series as a whole, even if composed of an infinite number of members, is eternally dependent on an original, fundamental cause, out of time. Our difference with Kant is that we intend to develop arguments to prove that such a radical cause does exist, and not simply to admit its possibility.

Kant forbids this approach for a simple reason. In his view, the principle of causality does not allow us to cross the barrier which separates phenomena from things in themselves. Nonetheless, it is this very distinction which we dispute. Our first reason for doing this is that, in our opinion, the Kantian antinomy of the existence of a necessary being (like the preceding one) can be solved without bringing into play the distinction between the thing in itself and the phenom-

⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* [1888], ch. VI, §3.

enon — but in a more economically philosophical way. The second reason is that this distinction, considered in itself, and not as a simple way of solving antinomies, seems to us unintelligible.

6. Re-examination of the Antinomies

In what follows we will try to show that it is possible to solve the so-called antinomies without adopting a Kantian solution. Let us return first to the antinomy of the beginning.

According to Kant, the thesis and the antithesis are of strictly equal force, each being established by the refutation of the other. This thinking is called an “apagogic” or indirect proof: each thesis is demonstrated by refuting its contradictory, but without establishing itself; the result, if each demonstration is solid, is that we have demonstrated the simultaneous impossibility of the two theses. If the demonstrations were not conclusive, Kant would have simply failed to establish their impossibility, which may amount to a presumption of possibility.

Let us see this more closely: the thesis establishes the existence of a beginning in time, demonstrating the impossibility of the adverse hypothesis, namely that the Universe has existed for an infinite time. For this, Kant resorts to the arguments of medieval thinkers including, Philoponus, Al-Ghazali, and Saint Bonaventure. Namely, if the past were infinite, the present would never have happened; the Universe would always be going through the infinite number of stages that precede the present. For, just as it is impossible to join infinity by successive addition starting from zero, it is impossible to join zero starting from minus infinity. It is even worse than that: it is impossible to “leave the infinite past” since this race does not even have a starting

point. To come from the infinite is like trying to jump out of a bottomless pit. Because of its very structure ($-\infty + 1 = -\infty$), leaving the infinite is an impossible task. It would indeed be necessary for the Universe to have “ever already” gone through an infinite number of stages, which would make, in fact, each stage inexplicable and literally incomprehensible. By way of illustration, let us pause for a moment and imagine finding an angel counting: “-4, -3, -2, -1, 0.” In response to the question, “What were you doing?” the angel answers, “I have just enumerated all the negative integers.” However, this is an impossible task which begs the question, “Why did you not finish yesterday?” To wit, and because the logic is contrary to the principle of sufficient reason, there is obviously no answer! Examination of the causal situation confirms the impossibility: in such a model, any event should have an infinite number of causal antecedents; this would imply an infinite transmission of the causal influx, without any emission of the flow in question. It should be affirmed, at the same time, that the effect is certain and that in the last instance, no cause has produced it (since any cause would be only a transmitter).

This argumentation neither presupposes nor begs the question that time is finite. That is, we do not affirm that the crossing of $-\infty$ to 0 is impossible because we presuppose that time is finite. Rather, it is because an infinite time past is impossible within a causal series having this structure (time being only the number of the movement). Hence, we necessarily draw the conclusion that the past is finite, which also means that the time has begun. This argument, we must admit, is strong. Moreover, its consequences are enormous and demanding of further comment.

Does the antithesis provide us with a convincing response? I suggest that this is where the Kantian construction of an antithesis seems

to crack, if not crumble, in its weakness. It seems that the antithesis comprehensively fails to prove the impossibility of the thesis (whereas the proof of the thesis seems very strong against the antithesis).

Kant's antithesis unfolds in the following manner. If the world had begun, it would be necessary to suppose an empty time that preceded the beginning. But in this empty time, it would have been necessary for something to happen at a time to make the world happen. Therefore, affirming that the world has begun is to affirm that this world had a cause that preceded it in time. For this reason, according to Kant, a world (among many) could have begun, but not the whole world (the multiverse). Even more radically, time cannot have begun because to start for an "x" means to be preceded by a time without "x." The presupposition, in other words, of the existence of time. However, wondering *when* time began is absurd — it is like wondering where the space is!

Nonetheless, these arguments are not convincing. For if the world began radically a finite number of years ago (for example 13.7 billion years), *it is perfectly conceivable that time has begun with it*, and therefore no time, empty or otherwise, preceded the world. Moreover, the idea of an "empty time," which would exist when nothing exists, is absurd, because time is not a thing but the measure of the change of things. In other words, no thing means no time. The "empty time" of which Kant speaks is only the imaginary time that we abstractly place on a fictional situation.⁶

Moreover, the objection, very striking at first glance, that time

⁶ Aquinas captures this idea succinctly: "God is prior to the world by priority of duration. But the word 'prior' signifies priority not of time, but of eternity. Or we may say that it signifies the eternity of imaginary time, and not of time really existing." *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q.46, a. 1 ad 8.

could not begin since the idea of beginning implies that of time, does not hold either. To realize this, it suffices to consider a more radical sense of the verb “to begin,” which is not a temporal sense, but ontological, and which may very well concern, therefore, time itself. In order to do this, it is necessary to redefine the beginning in the following way: we will no longer say that to begin for an “x” is to be preceded by a moment during which “x” does not exist, but that to begin for an “x” is to exist at a moment “t” so that there is no previous moment “t_i” during which “x” exists. Thus, the world may have begun without being preceded by any time. And time itself will have begun to exist with the world itself, without any mention of a time that precedes itself, which is indeed absurd. The result of this rapid examination seems clear: the contradiction is not robust and the antithesis does not hold.

As the thesis seems much stronger than the antithesis, the result would be the following: the thesis would be proved, by rebuttal of its contradictory. Metaphysics, contrary to Kant, would not be powerless but able to decide on this matter.

Another situation, more balanced, is also conceivable. Imagine that the refutation of the antithesis does not hold more than that of the thesis, because a serious objection would make us give up the impossibility of an eternal world (we would be convinced for example that it is possible to cross an actually infinite number of events). Then, the thesis and the antithesis would both be possible, since it would be impossible to prove the falsity of their contradictory arguments (one could not prove the impossibility of a beginning, nor prove the impossibility of a beginningless Universe). All we should conclude from the antinomy is that the question of whether or not the world has begun in time is a matter of empirical investigation — or of divine revelation

— and not of an *a priori* demonstration. This logic would also set us far from the radical conclusions that Kant draws from this opposition. While Kant concludes that there is a twofold impossibility, and therefore the joint falseness of the two theses, which forces him to deny that time is a determination of things in itself, we need only recognize a double possibility, which in no way compels us to deny that time exists in things.

Let us move on to the fourth antinomy which concerns the existence (or not) of a necessary being. Even if we can find an interest in the resolution that Kant gives (as we noted above), it seems to us that this antinomy is also flawed, since the proof of the thesis seems conclusive to us, but the demonstration of the antithesis badly deficient. Therefore, there is no more antinomy and no more reason to apply the Kantian solution, which underpins the distinction phenomenon/thing in itself. As we have said, the thesis stands (“There is a being necessary”). The argument works.

Let us, in order to check the strength of the thesis, elaborate a little Kant’s argument. It is simply a matter of showing that there is necessarily an unconditioned being (that is to say in everyday language a being who has no cause, self-existent). This existence is easily proven. Everything in the *collective sense* (=the Totality) cannot have a cause; it is obvious, since apart from everything, there is nothing. Therefore, the Totality is necessarily uncaused. But this syllogism does not yet prove that there is a particular being that is uncaused. After all, Totality might have no external cause, while being integrally composed of beings having an internal cause. It then remains to prove that everything, in the *distributive sense* (=each single thing) cannot have a cause — in other words, that there is at least one uncaused being.

In order to achieve more clarity, let us start with a *reductio* drawn

from the opposite hypothesis. We are then led to two possibilities: either there is an infinite linear chain of cause in question, or there is a circular causality. These two hypotheses lead to an absurdity, namely that there is a cause-of-itself. For circular causality, it is obvious: if A causes B, B causes C [...] N cause A. Then A cause A. This conclusion is impossible, because a being cannot bring itself into existence. If this were the case, it would be simultaneously necessary that the same being exists (to be able to cause itself) and does not exist (so that there is something to be caused). This analysis is contrary to the principle of non-contradiction. Therefore, completely impossible.

Let us now turn to the second leg of the alternative: that is, infinite causal regression in the order of existence. This regression, whether temporal or in the present, horizontal or vertical plane, poses a problem: all that exists would exist because of the existence of something else, without anything keeping existence from itself. This situation, universalized to an infinite number of entities, leads to the following situation: let us admit an infinite number of entities; each causing the next (whether in temporal order or in hierarchical order); we can number the entities from minus infinity to plus infinity; then take the even entities (EE). We can say that every even entity has an odd cause (OE). Similarly, every odd cause has an even cause. Therefore, it can be said that the Totality of the odd entities causes the Totality of the even entities. But we can also say that the Totality of the even entities causes the Totality of the odd entities, which brings us back to circular causality: OE causes EE causes OE, so OE causes OE. Therefore, the Totality is the cause of itself. Which is impossible! The conclusion of all these *reductiones* to the absurd is that it is impossible for everything, distributively understood, to be caused. There is necessarily at least one uncaused or unconditioned being. The thesis is true.

Now, let us focus on the antithesis (“There is no being necessary”). In antithesis, we begin by demonstrating that the necessary being cannot be the world, nor a part of the world. Here is Kant’s first argument:

Suppose that the world is itself a necessary being, or that there is a necessary being in it: either there would be in the series of its changes a beginning which would be absolutely necessary, that is to say without cause, which is contrary to the dynamic law of the determination of all phenomena in time.

The argument is sound and for a simple reason. Namely, a physical phenomenon that has had a beginning cannot be necessary because the necessary being cannot have begun, since everything that begins has a cause.

Kant’s second argument is as follows:

Either the series itself would be without any beginning and, although contingent and conditioned in all its parts, it would be, however, absolutely necessary and unconditioned; but this is contradictory in itself, since the existence of a multitude cannot be necessary if none of its parts has a necessary existence in itself. ⁷

This argument is not completely convincing. In an eternal Universe, one can estimate that each determined state of the Universe depends on the previous state, and that in this sense everything is conditioned. The series being infinite means there is no state of the Universe that does not have an antecedent cause. So far, so good. But let

⁷ *Critique of Pure Reason* [1781], antinomies of Pure Reason, 4th Conflict of Transcendental Ideas.

us see what follows: If every state of the world is conditioned, the Totality of the states of the world (the infinite series of its states) must also be conditioned. This reasoning is valid; and if indeed each member of the series is fully conditioned, not only in its form but also in its subject, the conclusion is good. It seems to us, however, that Kant neglects a possibility which is well illustrated by classical materialist theory. Specifically, it is possible that each state of the Universe is conditioned, as a particular configuration, but that its constitutive matter, which exists necessarily, is not. Each state of the Universe is indeed described by a definite configuration of the Totality of the particles which constitute it, but the Totality of the particles considered in themselves, independently of their contingent arrangements, could exist unconditionally. This hypothesis is at least conceivable, which Kant seems to forget. Considered from the point of view of material causality (or constitutive causality), the Universe could be necessary and unconditioned, even though the emerging forms would all be contingent and conditioned. Kant's argument is therefore not unconditional. This argument does not prove, of course, that the subject is necessary (this point merits examination, and we would conclude that matter-energy is not unconditioned); but Kant's argument to prove that the Universe cannot be necessary is in any case insufficient.

Finally, here is Kant's third argument which is directed against the existence of a necessary being outside of the world.

Suppose, on the contrary, that there is outside the world an absolutely necessary cause of the world, this cause being the first member in the series of causes of the change of the world, would first begin the existence of these causes and their series. But then it would be necessary to begin to act, and its causality would be part

of time, and thereby become part of the set of phenomena, that is to say, in the world, and consequently the cause itself would not be not out of the world, which contradicts the hypothesis. There is, therefore, neither in the world nor outside the world (but in causal connection with it), no absolutely necessary being.

This argument is frankly unsound. Contrary to what Kant presupposes (because it suits him), if the Universe had a primary cause outside of it, it is quite obvious that it could not be temporal. If the entire Universe had a cause, it could not, by definition, be subject to the conditions of time and space, since it would be supposed to be the origin of it! Therefore, the cause would not have to act in time, but rather to act out of time. It would, therefore, be well and truly independent of the conditioning of the world, and Kant could not conclude that a being necessary outside the world is impossible.

The results of this quick review are quite clear: Kant has not proved that one can argue convincingly against the existence of a being necessary, neither in the world nor out of the world. These two cases are possible. As, moreover, the thesis gave a good argument in favor of such an existence, the fourth antinomy is totally deprived of its strength [...] and metaphysics comes out in good shape!

Accordingly, the road is now re-open: we are authorized, *pace* Kant, to go for natural theology! We are empowered to ask: Where does the Universe come from? Why is the Universe there? Has anyone thought all these questions? Obviously, the Universe has been around for a long time. Some may be tempted to say to themselves, carried away by an oceanic feeling of the divine, that God is the Universe. However, such pantheism does not hold. The Universe bears within itself “traces” which prove that it is not the first cause The Universe,

in other words, is not enough for itself and depends on something other than itself. In short, that it is an effect. We can identify three. Let us classify them in the order they appeared to human consciousness.

7. First Trace: The Universe Is Intelligible

Mathematics applies beautifully to nature. Mathematical theories, which have been developed freely and independently of the physical sciences, and according to purely formal aesthetic requirements, not only allow for the expression of the physical laws of the Universe's functioning but also, often decades later, provide both the proofs and necessary tools to describe the world. Examples, amongst the many, include complex numbers, Hilbert spaces, and group theory. And yet there is no physico-mathematical explanation of this adequation. Eugene Wigner, Nobel Prize in Physics, spoke of the "unreasonable efficiency of mathematics." This statement points to the existence of an intelligent Cause, the "ordinator" of the Universe. For it is one of two things: either mathematics are coherent fictions forged by men and women, and so they should not apply to the physical reality; or mathematics describes an abstract world, immaterial but perfectly objective and necessary, but then one wonders why the contingent physical world should correspond to this abstract world (because the immaterial world of mathematical idealities does not have causal power over matter). [...] There is only one solution: the physical world was organized according to the structures and laws of this abstract world, which was therefore in the spirit of an ordering cause. There is therefore an organizing spirit behind the structures of space-time.

8. Second Trace: The Universe Is Contingent

Now consider the Universe as a whole. What strikes (and sometimes upsets) us is its apparent gratuitousness, i.e. its *contingency*. The Universe exists but it does not bear within itself the explanation of its existence. One has, while contemplating it, the very lively feeling that it could have been different, or not exist at all. It is very different from the feeling one experiences in contemplating mathematical truths, of which, on the contrary, we have the very strong intuition that they are absolutely necessary and that they carry in themselves their own justification. In all possible Universes, the mathematical truths would be the same. On the contrary, the laws of physics or the initial conditions of the Universe could have been different. The total amount of matter-energy constitutive of our Universe could very well not be “M,” but “M+e” or “M-e.” Where does this simple remark take us? Very far, because it is a basic principle of rationality that everything that exists has an explanation of its existence, either in itself (like the mathematical realities) or in something else, i.e. in a cause (like the physical realities). If I say “A=A,” you will not ask me for an explanation: it is necessary that it be so, that is to say inconceivable that it is otherwise. On the other hand, if I say to you “I was born in Seoul,” it is perfectly conceivable that it could have been otherwise; therefore, an external explanation is required. Why in Seoul and why not elsewhere? And this explanation necessarily exists, even if I do not know it. For the Universe, it is the same thing. The Universe’s existence and its particular characteristics necessarily have an external explanation.

Here, one must be careful either not to avoid the question in all its radicality or confusing the question with something else. Some will say the following: “the Universe, at every moment of its existence, has

its reason for being in its previous state: t-1, and so on in t-2, t-3, [...] t-n. And if the past is infinite, there is always an antecedent explanation, and the Universe will be explained [...] by itself!” This argument is fallacious because what we are trying to explain is not the transformations of the Universe (the job of physical science) but its very existence in its Totality. The horizontal regression to infinity in no way explains the existence of the series itself, since *it presupposes it*. It is therefore absolutely clear that any explanation of the Universe by a contingent cause only shifts the problem one step further, without solving the issue. An immense chain of contingent beings which explain each other is nothing else but an immense contingent aggregate [...] which needs an explanation! In short, even if the Universe were eternal, it would remain nonetheless totally contingent. It is a little bit like if, seeing light reflected on a mirror, you asked a friend “where does the light come from.” If he told you that the light came from another mirror on which it was reflected, you would then ask again, with a little annoyance, the same question about the second mirror. And if your friend said to you, “Oh, that’s simple, it comes from a third mirror [...] and so on to infinity, because there is an infinity of mirrors!,” you could rightly conclude that he did not really understand the question. The light to be transmitted must first be emitted. And even if, by hypothesis, the light was reflected on an infinite number of mirrors, it would require a source of light that is *luminous by itself*, and not in a derivative way. In short, we need a source of light that has in itself, and not in another, the reason for its luminous character. Well, it is exactly the same with the existence of contingent things (of which the Universe, even if it is eternal, is anything but an enormous aggregate). The Universe does not stand alone and needs an ultimate explanation, which can only be given by a being which itself does not

need an external explanation. A being who has not received existence in a restrictive way (which requires an external explanation), but which is existence itself in all its infinite scope. Otherwise, nothing would be explained, and the principle of sufficient reason would be flouted. We hold therefore our conclusion: the existence of the total sum of contingent beings, supposes the existence of an absolutely necessary being, which is, at every instant, the cause which keeps them in existence and makes them so and so, and not otherwise. If the Universe is thus and not otherwise, it is simply because it depends on the action of a necessary first cause.

We need to add a note of caution. The action of this cause cannot be necessary (otherwise its effect would be necessary); it must be contingent, that is, free. This cause is obviously devoid of all that makes the contingent need an external explanation. The cause does not depend on anything, it has its reason in itself, it has no cause, it does not have parts, it is not finite (because at any given size, one can ask “and why not another?”). The cause is therefore unextended. Positively said: the cause is absolutely simple, immaterial, it is not *this* or *that*, but absolute being, without restriction, in all its fullness. The necessary Being is to contingent things what a source of white light is to its multiple reflections and to its colored diffractions.

9. Third Trace: The Universe Has Begun

We have just admitted that even if the Universe had existed for an infinite time, it would be in a permanent situation of existential dependence on the primary cause. But are we sure that the Universe could have existed for an eternity? This question still needs to be ask-

ed. And it turns out that this is not possible. Simply because the past cannot be infinite. If the past were infinite, the present would never have happened; the Universe would always be going through the infinite number of stages that precede the present. For, just as it is impossible to join infinity by successive addition starting from zero, it is impossible to join zero starting from minus infinity. It is even worse than that: it is impossible to “leave the infinite past” since this race does not even have a starting point! Coming from the infinite is like trying to jump out of a bottomless pit ($-\infty+1=-\infty$), an impossible operation. The conclusion is that the past is finite and thus time must begin. This simple fact is vertiginous. For we are not speaking of the beginning of a thing *within time*, but of the beginning *of time* itself, that is, a radical beginning. Just as it is absurd to ask what is “north of the North Pole,” it is absurd to ask what is “before time.” There is *no* before. Time, in having a beginning, implies that any conceivable spatio-temporal physical reality (here, we can place any number of “multiverses”) necessarily has a radical beginning.

That is to say, a beginning is not preceded by any time, nor, therefore, of any spatio-temporal reality. Does this mean that all this has arisen without cause? Not at all! The principle of causation applies — namely, everything that begins to exist has a cause. To deny this principle would opt for magic. Therefore, the Universe has a cause. Simply, this cause is not trivial: it is out of time (since it is the cause of time), it is out of space (all that is extended moves and all that moves is in time), it is infinitely powerful (since it has produced the entire physical world without acting on a preexisting material). Finally, it did not act *before* the first moment of the Universe, but *at the very first moment* of the Universe. So not only is the Universe permanently kept out of nothingness by the necessary cause (what the Medievalists call-

ed the *creatio continuans*), but is indeed created from nothing (*creatio originans*).

Let us take stock. A little reflection on the Universe leads us to notice that it does not exist by itself, but that it is an effect. And that this effect necessarily has a cause of a very particular type, whose main properties are to be immaterial, timeless, uncaused, absolutely simple, necessary, intelligent, and free. This cause has not only produced the whole of finite reality from nothing (*ex nihilo*), but it has done it at the beginning of time (*ab initio*) and continues to sustain it in existence. It is not an exaggeration to call this cause, “God.”

You are not convinced? You are free to look for other proofs! Sacred Scripture itself pushes us with a certain vigor:

Anyone who does not know God is simply foolish. Such people look at the good things around them and still fail to see the living God. They have studied the things he made, but they have not recognized the one who made them (Wis 13:1).

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■ Abstract ■

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Kantian criticism of the classical proofs of the existence of God is the main obstacle to the rebirth of natural theology. Most philosophers believe, without having verified, that this criticism is devastating and definitive. It seems to us that this is not the case. We therefore try in this article to show that the Kantian criticism of the proofs of the existence of God (contained essentially in the Antinomies of Pure Reason) does not hold, and that it has not taken away from their strength the classical arguments of theistic metaphysics.

► Key Words: Kant, Antinomies, Cosmological Argument, Theism.

■ 국문 초록 ■

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칸트에 반하는 신 존재 증명

프레데릭 기요 박사

(프랑스 철학자)

신 존재의 고전적인 증명에 대한 칸트의 비평은 자연신학이 재탄생하는 데에 있어 주요한 장애물이다. 대부분의 철학자들은 어떠한 실증도 없이, 이 비평이 파괴적이고 최종적이라고 믿는다. 하지만 우리가 보기에는 그렇지 않다. 그러므로 우리는 이 논문을 통해 신 존재 증명(순수이성의 이율배반에 필수적으로 포함되는)에 대한 칸트의 비평이 성립되지 않으며, 유신론적 형이상학의 고전적 논쟁의 힘을 빼앗아가지 않는다는 것을 보여 주려 한다.

▶ 주제어: 칸트, 이율배반, 우주론적 논쟁, 유신론.