Class 28: May 5
Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*
Ontological Argument (AW 819-823)

I. The Ontological Argument

Hume's influence on Kant was profound.
His psychological reinterpretation of the concept of causation was a precedent for Kant's transcendental idealism.
Kant's claims about the limits of pure reason have Humean roots, too.
Kant's reason for rejecting the ontological argument is derived from Hume's claims about the nature of existence claims, as well as from Gassendi's claim that existence is not a perfection.
In the Objections and Replies to Descartes's *Meditations*, Gassendi complains that the ontological argument is invalid because existence is not the kind of property one can find by analyzing the concept of God.
Descartes disagreed, but the argument was left without a resolution.
Hume and Kant revive Gassendi's claim by adding a supporting argument.
Hume claims that the idea of existence, since it does not come from a distinct impression, adds nothing to the idea of an object.

> Though certain sensations may at one time be united, we quickly find they admit of a separation, and may be presented apart. And thus, though every impression and idea we remember be considered as existent, the idea of existence is not derived from any particular impression. The idea of existence, then, is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent. To reflect on any thing simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other. That idea, when conjoined with the idea of any object, makes no addition to it. Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent. Any idea we please to form is the idea of a being; and the idea of a being is any idea we please to form (Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* §I.II.VI).

Kant, following Hume, claims that whether we think of a thing as existing or not, as necessarily existing or not, we are thinking of the same thing.

> A hundred real thalers do not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers (A599/B627, AW 822a).

Kant distinguishes between real (or determining) predicates and logical predicates.
A logical predicate is just something that serves as a predicate in grammar.
So, in 'the Statue of Liberty exists', we are predicating (grammatically) existence of the statue.
But, we are not saying anything substantive about the statue.
In 'the Statue of Liberty is over 150 feet tall', we use a real predicate.
Any property can be predicated of any object, grammatically.
So, 'seventeen loves its mother' is a grammatical sentence, even if it is nonsensical.
'Loves one's mother' is a real predicate.
But, Kant's point is that one can not do metaphysics through grammar alone.
Existence is a grammatical predicate, but not a real predicate.

Kant's objection support's Gassendi's criticism of Descartes's version of the argument.
It also accounts for earlier objections from Gaunilo and Caterus.
Gaunilo, responding to Anselm's version of the ontological argument, wondered whether having the concept of the most perfect island entails its existence.
Caterus wondered if the concept of the necessarily existing lion entails the actual existence of a lion.
Kant says that in predicating existence of a concept, we are just restating the concept, and not saying anything about the object.
When we say that 'God exists', we are not making a real assertion, but just restating the concept of God.

> If you admit - as any reasonable person must - that any existential proposition is synthetic, then how can you assert that the predicate of existence cannot be annulled without contradiction? For this superiority belongs only to analytic propositions as their peculiarity, since their character rests precisely on this [necessity] (A598/B626, AW 821b)

Part of Kant's support for his assertion that existence is not a predicate is that existence is too thin.
We do not add anything to a concept by claiming that it exists.
Thus, Kant mentions the 100 thalers.
Kant says that the real and possible thalers must have the same number of thalers in order that the concept be the concept of that object.
If there are more thalers in the real thalers, then the concept and the object would not match.
So, we do not add thalers when we mention that the thalers exist.

II. Evaluating Kant's Solution

Kant says that we don't add any thalers when we shift from discussing possible thalers to discussing actual thalers.
But, do we add something?
When my daughter and I discuss the existence of the tooth fairy, we are debating something substantive.
If we are going to debate the existence of something, whether it be the tooth fairy or black holes, we seem to consider an object and wonder whether it has the property of existing.
We thus have to consider objects which may or may not exist.
There may be many such objects, e.g. James Brown and Tony Soprano.
Some philosophers attribute subsistence to dead folks and fictional objects.
So, one might say that James Brown has the property of subsisting, without having the property of existing.

In ordinary cases, Hume and Kant certainly are correct that logic, or reason, can not make existence claims.
The question is whether logic can make this one existence claim.
Kant's claim that existence is not a real predicate, while influential, may not solve the problem.

Many contemporary philosophers are swayed in Kant's direction by their familiarity with first-order logic's distinction between predication and quantification, and by the distinction between grammatical form and logical form.
In Fregean logic, properties like being a god, or a person, or being mortal or vain, get translated as predicates.
Existence is taken care of by quantifiers, rather than predicates.

To say that God exists, we say '$(\exists x)Gx$' or '$(\exists x)\ x=g$'
Note that the concept of God, and the object, are represented independently of the claim of existence.
First-order logic is supposed to be our most austere, canonical language.
As Frege says, it puts a microscope to our linguistic usage.
Thus, there does seem to be a real difference between existence and predication, and between the grammar of natural language and the true logical form of our claims.

Still, formal systems can be constructed with all sorts of properties.
We can turn any predicate into a quantifier, or a functor, even turn all of them into functors.
Is first-order logic the best framework for metaphysics?
Is Kant's linguistic solution to the ontological argument decisive?

These questions get discussed in courses on logic, philosophy of science, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mathematics.