

Aquinas and Kant on the Existence of God

To understand Kant we must know the two philosophers who influenced him most: Hume who woke him up from his dogmatic slumber and Wolff whom Kant considered the greatest of the dogmatists, i.e. the rationists who had used "pure reason without previous criticism of its powers." It is important then to know Hume's and Wolff's ideas about existence and the related idea of essence if we are to appreciate Kant's speculations on the existence of God.

Wolff defined essence as "that which is *conceived* of a being in the first place and in which is to be found the *sufficient reason* why *all the rest* actually belongs to it or else may belong to it."¹ All the rest includes actual existence which is defined as the 'complement of possibility'. Possibility is here equated with essence, for whatever has an essence is (intrinsically) possible and it is impossible for whatever has no essence (e.g. a contradiction-in-terms like a 4-sided triangle) to actually exist. Whatever Wolff meant by "complement" and Kant found it vague enough Wolff shares with the other Rationalists the ideas that essence is the object of a concept, that it is intuitively known and in it is to be found the sufficient reason for existence.

In the case of God, what according to the Rationalists, is the relation between essence and existence? For Descartes, actual

¹ Wolff *Ontologia*. n. 168, p. 172.

existence is one of the notes included in the essence of God, the All-Perfect Being. That is why from the idea or concept of the All-Perfect Being we can deduce God's existence. For Spinoza as for Descartes, God is *Causa Sui*, the Being "whose essence involves existence, or that whose nature cannot be conceived except as existing."² Leibniz says the same thing when he affirms that "in the Necessary Being essence involves existence, so that it is enough for God to be possible in order that He be actual." Wolff's idea is no different from that of the other rationalists or dogmatists, since for him God alone is the Being *a se*, the Being whose existence necessarily follows from His essence. The main point therefore common to all the Rationalists is that God's essence entails His existence. That is why they laid great emphasis on the Ontological Argument, the *a priori*, proof for the existence of God.

LOGICAL VS. REAL PREDICATES

Kant's first approach to existence was by distinguishing a logical from a real predicate. For him "a logical predicate may be what you please. Even the subject may be predicated of itself, for logic pays no regard to the content of a judgment."³ Thus in the proposition 'Peter is Peter,' the predicate is a logical, but not a real predicate, for it is not a predicate that "enlarges the conception of the subject." But in a proposition like 'Peter is white,' the conception of Peter (that of a man) does not contain the conception 'white'. Hence white is a real predicate, and in general, accidents are predicates.

For Kant however existence is not a real predicate. Hence it cannot be a mere accident. Is existence then what Wolff called an 'essential' like 'rational' of 'man'? If so, then a proposition like 'Peter exists' would be analytic, but Kant claims that "every *existential* proposition is *synthetical*." Why can the existence of an object not be discovered by *analysis*? Because "the cognition

² Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, In Great Books, Vol. 31 p. 355.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, In Great Books, Vol. 42 p. 181.

of the existence of an object depends upon the object being posited and given in itself *apart from the conception*.”⁴

Did Kant involve himself in a contradiction by claiming that existence is not a real predicate, and hence the proposition in which it is found as predicate is analytic and at the same time says that every *existential* proposition is synthetical? This seems to be the case. The main point however is that if for Kant existence is neither an accident nor an essential, the only conclusion left for Kant was to hold with Hume that the order of existence is *radically other* than that of essence. That Hume sharply distinguished the two orders is clear from his division of all objects of human reason to relations of ideas and matters of fact. Propositions regarding the first group, Hume adds “are discoverable by the mere operation of thought, *without dependence* on what is anywhere *existent* in the universe” while regarding the second group Hume asks for “the nature of the evidence which assures us of any *real existence or matter of fact*.”⁵ But if for Hume and thus a fortiori for Kant, the order of existence is radically other than that of essence, then no essence entails its own existence, not even God’s. If Kant’s dogmatic slumber consisted in his belief with Wolff that essences entailed one another (Gilson indeed describes the Wolffian universe as one of nicely concatenated essences) and in the case of God even existence, then it is no wonder that it was Hume who woke Kant up from his dogmatic slumber nor that Kant would center his criticism of the proofs of God’s existence on the Ontological Argument.

According to Kant there are only three ways of proving the existence of a Deity on the grounds of speculative reason. The first is the physical-theological argument; the second the cosmological; and the third, the ontological. But for Kant the physico-theological argument is based on the cosmological and this in turn on the ontological. So if the ontological argument can be shown to be invalid, the foundation of the whole edifice is undermined, and since there are only these three proofs available, it would

⁴ Ibid., p. 192.

⁵ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, In Great Books, Vol. 35, p. 458.

follow that it is impossible for speculative reason to prove the existence of God.⁶

CRITICISM OF THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Kant argues that the ontological argument does not distinguish between logical necessity (the unconditioned necessity of a *judgment*) and real necessity (the unconditioned necessity of a *thing*). Thus if I posit a triangle to exist I must also necessarily posit its three angles or else involve myself in a contradiction. But there is no contradiction involved if I deny the existence of the triangle and consequently of its three angles, for "there is nothing at all and therefore no means of forming a contradiction." In the same way, Kant says, that if I posit God and then deny e.g., His Omnipotence there will be a contradiction, but not if I deny the subject (and therefore the thing) by saying: God does not exist.⁷

According to Kant then, the weakness of the Ontological Argument lies in its failure to see that what holds true in the logical or purely mental order may not hold true in the real order. With this St. Thomas would heartily agree, for his objection to the Ontological Argument of St. Anselm is that it confuses logical with real *suppositio*. Thus he says: "Granted that everyone understands that by this name God is signified something than which nothing greater can be thought, it does not therefore follow that what the name *signifies exists actually, but only that it exists mentally*. Nor can it be argued that it actually exists, unless it be admitted that there actually exists something than which nothing greater can be thought and this precisely is not admitted by those who hold that God does not exist."⁸ In short, for St. Thomas, all that St. Anselm is justified in saying is that: "If that than which nothing greater can be thought *actually exists*, then God than whom nothing greater can be thought, actually exists," just as for Kant all that Descartes is justified in saying

⁶ Immanuel Kant, *ibidem*, p. 179 and p. 190.

⁷ Kant, *ibid.*, p. 180.

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings of St. Thomas*, Vol. I p. 20. S.T.I., Q2, Reply Oly. 2.

is that: "If the All-Perfect Being actually exists, then God who is the All-Perfect Being actually exists."

But Kant holds that the Rationalists may counter that there is a conception in which the non-being or annihilation of the object is self-contradictory and this is precisely the conception of the *ens realissimum* (the All-Perfect Being) for the notion of all reality embraces that of *existence* and if this thing is annihilated in thought, the internal possibility of the thing is also destroyed which is self-contradictory".⁹ Stated more simply, since the All-Perfect Being includes the perfection of existence, I may describe it as the existing All-Perfect Being. To deny existence to it would then involve a contradiction, for it would amount to saying: The existing All-Perfect Being does not exist.

To which Kant answers: "It is absurd to introduce into the conception of a thing which is to be cogitated solely in reference to its *possibility*, the conception of its *existence*."¹⁰ Here we see again the influence of Hume, for if the order of existence is radically other than that of essence or possibility, it would be wrong to include existence as one of the notes of the essence. To do so, according to Kant, would make the proposition "God exists" an *analytic* proposition which means that "there is no addition made to the subject of your thought by the affirmation of its existence" and the result is only a "miserable tautology" (the existing All-Perfect Being exists). But if "God exists" is not analytic, then it must be synthetic. And if synthetic, then "the possibility of such a synthetic proposition must be sought for in the world of experience." Or as Kant states it in another part: "To know the *existence* we must go *beyond the conception*. But it is utterly impossible to go beyond the conception without the aid of *experience*."

Here again Kant is not too far from St. Thomas, for whom the proposition "God exists" is *not self-evident* (as the ancients used to call analytic propositions or those in which the predicate is included in the essence of the subject) *to us* who do not know the essence of God, the proposition (God exists) is not self-evident to us, but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known

⁹ Immanuel Kant, *ibid.*, In Great Books, Vol. 42 p. 180.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

to us though less known in their nature, namely by His effects.”¹¹ God’s effects, where? Where else than in the world of sensible experience. This is clear from the starting-points of the Five Ways: “It is certain and *evident to our senses*, that in the world some things are in motion.” “In the *world of sensible things*, we find there is an order of efficient causes.” “We find *in nature* things that are possible to be and not to be.” “The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in *things*.” “We see that things that lack knowledge, such as *natural bodies* act for an end.”¹² The fact that the Thomistic proofs start from sensible experience and argue from effect to cause, in short, are a posteriori leads us then to the Cosmological Argument.

THE COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

According to Kant, the Cosmological Argument, termed by Leibnitz as the *argumentum a contingencia mundi*, can be framed thus: “If something exists, an absolutely Necessary Being must exist. Now I, at least, exist. Consequently, there exists an Absolutely Necessary Being.” And Kant adds: “The minor contains an experience, the major reasons from a general experience to the existence of a Necessary Being. Thus, this argument really begins at experience and is *not completely a priori or ontological*. The object of all possible experience being the world (cosmos), it is called the Cosmological Proof.”¹³

According to Kant, the Cosmological Argument at first glance seems to be valid and unassailable. “For what is contingent exists only under the condition of some other thing which is its cause; and from this we must go on to conclude the existence of a cause which is not contingent and which consequently exists necessarily and unconditionally.” Aye, but here’s the rub. Since “the properties of this Necessary Being cannot be learned from experience, we must” says Kant, “have recourse to Pure Reason. That is, pure Reason looks around for the conception of a Being that may be admitted without inconsistency to be worthy of the attribute

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings*, Vol. I, p. 37. S.T.I., Q. IV, 1st Art.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 22 and 23.

¹³ Immanuel Kant, In *Great Books*, Vol. 42, p. 182.

of absolute necessity.... and this it finds in the conception of the ens realissimum (or All Perfect Being.)" And that is why Kant says: "Instead of reasoning from the highest reality to a necessary existence like the preceding (Ontological) Argument, it (the Cosmological) concludes from the given unconditioned necessity of some being to its unlimited reality." In short, "pure Reason in trying to figure out the *nature* of the Necessary Being concludes with the proposition: The Absolutely Necessary Being is the All-Perfect Being". Now this proposition can be simply converted into: "The All-Perfect Being is the Absolutely Necessary Being". But this is precisely the major premise of the Ontological Argument as formulated by Leibnitz. Thus Kant shows how the Cosmological Argument reduces to the Ontological. As he himself puts it: "But as this proposition Every ens realissimum is a necessary being is determined a priori by the conceptions contained in it, the mere conception of an ens realissimum must possess the additional attribute of absolute necessity. But this is exactly what was maintained in the Ontological Argument and not recognized by the Cosmological, although it formed the *real ground* of its disguised and illusory reasoning."¹⁴

AQUINAS VS. KANT

Now when we compare Kant's ideas with that of St. Thomas, we note this difference. St. Thomas never requires us to know *before* he proves God's existence any of the real attributes of the Divine Being, not even that of His being All-Perfect. After all we are not supposed to know the Divine Essence and to use the definition of God as All-Perfect is to make our proof a priori. Only *after* he has shown that God exists, does he consider the question of God's perfection. Indeed he even notes that "some ancient philosophers did not predicate best and most perfect of the first principle. The reason being that the Pythagoreans considered only a material principle, and a material principle is most imperfect. Now God is the first principle, not material, but in the order of efficient cause, which must needs be most perfect. For an agent as such is in a state of actuality. Hence the first

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

active principle needs be most actual and most perfect because we call that perfect which lacks nothing of the mode of its perfection."¹⁵ In short, *God is All-Perfect because He is the First Efficient Cause, not the First Efficient Cause because He is All Perfect.* And that this First Efficient Cause *exists* is precisely the conclusion of the Second Proof. Indeed if analyzed more closely all the Five Ways argue to the *existence* of a *First Efficient Cause or Principle*; of motion in the first; of subordinate efficient causes in the second, of contingent beings in the third, of imperfect beings in the fourth, and of the order of the Universe in the fifth.

But it might be asked: the fact that it has been proven that there exists a First Uncaused Cause in these five spheres, does it follow that this first Uncaused Cause is God? St. Thomas seems to think so as evidenced by all the conclusions of the Five Ways. "The First Unmoved Mover... this everyone understands to be God." "The First Efficient Cause... to which everyone gives the name of God." "Of the being *causing* in all others their necessity, all men speak of as God." "Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end and this being we call God."¹⁶ Is it true that *everybody* understands God as the First (Efficient) Cause or Principle? It would seem so, for St. Thomas notes in discussing the name "God"; "So it remains that the name God signifies the divine nature. For this name was imposed to signify something existing above all things, *the principle of all things* and removed from all things, for this is ~~what those who name God intend to signify.~~"¹⁷

That Kant requires us to know God's nature in order to be convinced of His existence is clear from his words: "For after having *proved* that it (the Absolutely Necessary Being) exists, the question regarding its possibility is superfluous. Now when we wish to define more strictly the *nature* of this Necessary Being... we try to discover merely the negative condition without which such a being would not be absolutely necessary."¹⁸ Now why should we wish to know more strictly the *nature* of this Necessary Being which already is *admitted to exist*, and whose

¹⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings*, Vol. I, p. 37. S.T.I., Q. IV, 1st Art.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 23.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 172, *Summa Theol.*, I, Q. 13, art. 8, Reply 2.

¹⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Great Books*, Vol. 42, p. 184.

bare existence alone for the moment we are interested in proving. After all we may know that something exists without knowing for a long time its exact nature. A very simple example in the field of science is electricity. That electricity *existed* was already known from its *effects* at about the time of Benjamin Franklin, but its *nature* as a stream of electrons was only recognized in the early twentieth century.

KANT'S ERROR

St. Thomas would have described Kant's error as the fallacy of assuming that whenever a demonstration of the *fact* (quia) is made, this must be supported by a demonstration of the *reasoned fact* (propter quid). That once the existence of the Necessary Being has been established a posteriori, its property of necessity must also be *established a priori*. It is indeed strange that we should be asked to prove the necessity of the Necessary Being. For if it did not have this property of necessary existence why call it the Necessary Being in the first place? Anyhow Kant requires that we give the sufficient reason for God's necessary existence. But if God's existence has any reason at all it would be His essence. No wonder Kant thinks that the Cosmological needs the support of the Ontological Argument. But to seek the reason or cause of God's existence is to ignore the fact that God is the First Uncaused Cause. It is because of this that St. Thomas never denominates God (as the Rationalists did) as Causa Sui, as Cause of Himself, which to Aquinas would indeed have been a contradiction-in-terms. For St. Thomas does not hold with the Rationalists that God's essence, *entails* His existence. What he does hold is that God's "existence is such as is its own essence and the source of all other essences and existences."¹⁹

THE PRINCIPLE OF CAUSALITY

The Five Ways as we have seen all center around the idea that since "every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists,

¹⁹ Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p. 124.

the cause pre-exists." This brings us to the principle of Causality which Hume was supposed to have denied, and whose validity Kant limited to the realm of phenomena.

First as to Hume. To understand Hume vis-a-vis Causality, we must study his claims step by step. According to him (1) all reasonings concerning matters of fact seem to be founded on the relation of cause and effect, (2) that the knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance, attained by *reasonings a priori*, but arises entirely from experience, (3) for the mind can never find the effect in the supposed cause... for the effect is totally different from the cause and consequently can never be discovered in it.²⁰

We must note in the first place that Hume's objection is to the reasoning *a priori* from cause to effect as the Rationalists had done. But the traditional principle of causality reasons rather from effect to cause. "If the effect exists, the cause pre-exists." Indeed Hume himself admits the validity of reasoning from effect to cause, for he says: "It is confessed that the utmost effort of the human reason is to resolve the many particular effects to a few general causes by means of reasonings from analogy, experience, observation. Elasticity, gravity, cohesion of parts, communication of motion by impulse; these are probably the ultimate causes that we may discover in nature."²¹ Thus to explain the mutual attraction of bodies (effect) the scientist not finding the explanation in the bodies themselves attribute it to the force of gravity (cause), thus holding that every contingent event must have a cause. Hume indeed had too much respect for Natural Science to deny what Kant would call later the empirical law of causality.

HUME VS. SPINOZA

Properly analyzed, Hume's attack can be seen as directed against the essential sequence of Spinoza. Long before Hume,

²⁰ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, In Great Books, Vol. 35, p. 458.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 460.

St. Thomas had already seen the error of the Rationalists of applying essential sequence which holds for the relation of ideas to matters of fact or concrete things. For the essential sequence of the Rationalists correspond to what the ancients called mathematical causality, the cause is not really distinct from the effect. For example, it is the same triangle whose essence it is to be three-angled and whose property is to have the sum of its angles equal to two right angles. But in physical causality the cause (e.g. the mother) is really distinct from the effect (the child). Furthermore the mathematical effect can be deduced from the mathematical cause, for the relation is that of property to essence, and the property necessarily flows from the essence. In short, if Hume were to use Thomistic language, he would say that the error of the Rationalists consisted in confusing mathematical with physical causality.

The main reason, according to Hume, that one cannot reason from cause to effect a priori is that the effect is totally different from the cause or as he phrases it in another work: "that all our perceptions are *distinct existences* and that the mind never perceives any *real connection* between distinct existences,"²² which Kant approves when he says: "It is absolutely impossible to see why because a certain thing exists, something else should also exist necessarily, nor does one see how the concept of such a connection could be deduced a priori."²³ Applied to the relation between God and the world, Kant's statement can be seen as directed against Spinoza's idea that in nature there is nothing contingent, but all things are determined from the necessity of the divine nature to exist and act in a certain way," or in short, that the world emanates necessarily from God. Obviously it cannot apply to St. Thomas' idea that God was *free* to create the world.

KANT AND THE PRINCIPLE OF CAUSALITY

Anyhow Kant's solution to the problem of Hume about the real connection between distinct existences is that the mind does

²² David Hume, *In Appendix to: Treatise on Human Nature*

²³ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena to Metaphysics*, Preface

not perceive such connections, but *prescribes* them. Causality is then an a priori form of the understanding. But since the a priori forms of the understanding can only be applied to the phenomena given it by the sensibility, causality for Kant will be limited to phenomena. And that is why Kant will say "regarding the transcendental principle: 'Every contingent being must have a cause' that it is a principle *without significance* except in the *sensuous* world. For the purely intellectual conception of the contingent cannot produce any *synthetical* proposition like that of *causality*, which is itself without any distinguishing characteristic except in the phenomenal world."²⁴ The steps in Kant's reasoning seem to be the following: (1) Analysis of 'contingent being' will not reveal the predicate "being that must have a cause" (2). The proposition therefore is not analytic. (3) If not analytic, it must be synthetic. (4) If synthetic, it must refer only to the sensuous and the phenomenal world.

Perhaps Kant's understanding of 'analytic proposition' is too narrow. Aristotle distinguished two kinds of analytic propositions: (1) those where the analysis of the subject reveals the predicate (also analytic in Kant's sense) and (2) those where analysis of the predicate reveals the subject to be the distinctive subject of the predicate. A simple example of the latter is: Every man is capable of speech; Analysis of 'man' into 'rational' and 'animal' will not reveal 'capable of speech'. But analysis of 'capable of speech' will reveal 'man' as the exclusive subject of the predicate. For if speech means 'making articulate sounds expressive of one's ideas'; two questions can be asked: 1) what being is capable of making articulate sounds? And the answer would be 'animal'. 2) What being is capable of expressing one's ideas? And the answer would be 'intellectual' or 'rational'. Then, what being is capable of speech? And the answer would be: Only the intellectual (or rational) animal. And that would be 'man'.

In the same way, analysis of contingent being as Kant rightly claims will not reveal the predicate 'being that must have a cause'. But analysis of 'being that must have a cause' will reveal 'contingent being' as its exclusive subject. For to be caused in the order of existence, a being must be a composite of essence and existence

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Ibid.*, p. 184.

which must be really distinct (or else the being will not be caused). But if existence and essence are really distinct, it means that existence does not belong to the very essence of that being. Which amounts to saying that it may or may not exist and is therefore contingent. So the proposition 'Every contingent being must have a cause' is *analytic* in what is technically called the 'second mode of perseity' and not a synthetic proposition like 'Peter is white' where the synthesis would obviously require reference to the sensuous or phenomenal world. And that is why Maritain says: "St. Thomas, replying by anticipation to Kant's criticism of the principle of causality, observes that this principle is necessary in virtue of the second mode of perseity".²⁵

IMPOSSIBILITY OF AN INFINITE SERIES

Another fallacy of the cosmological argument according to Kant is that "from the impossibility of an infinite ascending series of causes in the world of sense, a first cause is inferred; a conclusion which the *principles of the* employment of reason do not justify even in the sphere of experience and still less when an attempt is made to pass the limits of this sphere."²⁶

What are these principles of the employment of reason which prevents us from arguing to a First Cause from the impossibility of an infinite series? They are according to Kant (1) the one that requires us to seek for a necessary ground for everything that exists (2) the other that forbids us to regard any member of the empirical world as unconditioned. Kant's analysis amounts to the following: (1) there is need of arguing to a First Cause or Necessary Being. (2) Since the secondary causes or the contingent beings are in the world of sense, the First Cause or Necessary Being must also belong to the world of sense, since the world of experience is a unity; (3) but this contradicts the second principle which requires that no member of the empirical world is unconditioned i.e. a Necessary Being. Indeed "we cannot" says Kant "discover any such existence (necessary) in the world (of sense)."

²⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Preface to Metaphysics*, p. 104.

²⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Ibid.*, Vol. 42, p. 184.

Now we agree with Kant that no member of the empirical world is unconditioned. For all material or sensible things are changeable, and whatever is changeable is composite, and whatever is composite (ultimately a composite of essence and existence) is contingent and therefore not necessary. But is it true that we cannot argue from the existence of contingent beings in this world to the existence of the Necessary Being out of and beyond this world? Kant's reason seems to be that there is no proportion between cause and effect. As he himself says: "If the possibility of passing the limits of experience be admitted by means of the dynamic law of the relation of an effect to its cause, what kind of conception shall we obtain by this procedure? Certainly not the conception of a *Supreme Being* because *experience* never presents us with *the greatest of all possible effects* and it only an effect of this character that could witness to the existence of a corresponding cause."²⁷ In short, if we are to argue to the Supreme Being as the First or highest Cause, we must be presented with the greatest possible effect, otherwise there is no proportion. Kant's position here is the same as those of the medieval thinkers who argued that we cannot demonstrate God's existence, for the world is finite and God infinite. As St. Thomas himself puts their objection: "If the existence of God were demonstrated, this could be only from His effects. But his effects are not proportioned to him, since He is infinite and His effects are finite, and between the finite and the infinite there is no proportion. Therefore since a cause cannot be demonstrated by an effect not proportioned to it, it seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated." To which St. Thomas' reply is: "From effects not proportionate to the cause no *perfect knowledge* of the cause can be obtained. Yet from every effect the *existence* of the cause can be clearly demonstrated and so we can demonstrate the existence of God from His effects though from them we cannot know God perfectly as He is in His essence."²⁸

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 191

²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Basic Writings*, Vol. I, p. 21, S.T.I., Q. 2. Art. 2. Reply Oly 3.

THINKING THE NECESSARY BEING

The third supposed fallacy of the Cosmological Argument is stated by Kant thus: "Reason allows itself to be satisfied upon insufficient grounds with regard to the completion of the series. *It removes all conditions (without which however no conception of Necessity can take place)* and as after this it is beyond our power to form any other conceptions, it accepts this as the completion of the conception it wishes to form of the series."²⁹ Kant here obviously requires the removal of conditions to form the conception of necessity such that if we have removed from the Necessary Being all the conditions that presumably make it contingent e.g., being a body, being changeable, being composite etc., we have effectively removed everything than can enable us to think of this Necessary Being and that is why Kant says: "we call this Being Necessary, but we cannot think its necessity." It would seem then that Kant requires for the thinking of necessity (1) positing of contingent conditions and then (2) the removal of the same. But the operation is hardly possible. For there will be an infinite number of these conditions and I may never finish the process. In the second place, we never think of necessity as requiring the removal of unnecessary conditions. When we say e.g. that a circle is necessarily round, we do not first posit conditions like large, green, drawn by Mr. Brown etc., and then remove these conditions. All that we mean is that it is impossible for the circle to be other than round, so that if a geometric figure is a circle, it must be round. Stated otherwise, it is of the essence of the circle to be round so that if there is a figure to whose essence it does not belong to be round, then it is not a circle. Similarly when we think of Necessary Being, all that we mean is, that that Being cannot be other than existing or it is inconceivable and therefore impossible for that Being to be other than existing, for it is of its essence, or better still, it is its essence to exist. Indeed Aristotle in discussing the meaning of "necessary" says: "I say that that which *cannot be otherwise* is *necessarily* as it is. And from this sense of necessary *all the others* are somehow derived."³⁰ The Argument from Contingency of St. Thomas

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Ibid*, p. 184.

³⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. Book V. Ch. 5. Definition 3.

indeed holds that the series of contingent beings (beings to whose essence it does not belong to exist) cannot find their explanation except in the Necessary Being (the Being to whose essence it belongs to exist).

LOGICAL AND TRANSCENDENTAL POSSIBILITY

Kant's fourth additional objection is that the Cosmological Argument confuses the logical possibility of a conception of the total of reality (the criterion of which is the absence of contradiction) and the transcendental possibility which requires the practicability of the synthesis — a principle which refers us again to the world of experience. I think Kant's meaning here can be made clearer by referring to a footnote he gives in a previous page wherein he says: "A conception is always possible, if it is not self-contradictory. This is the logical criterion of possibility, distinguishing the object of such a synthesis from the *nihil negativum*. But it may be notwithstanding an *empty conception* unless the objective reality of the synthesis by which it is generated is demonstrated and a proof of this kind must be based upon principles of possible experience and not upon the principle of the analysis of contradiction."³¹ Incidentally, a *nihil negativum* is a contradiction-in-terms, while an empty conception is an *ens rationis*, a conception to which no intuition can be found to correspond.

That Kant's objection is directed against the Rationalists is clear in the part of Kant's essay wherein repeating the distinction between the analytic criterion of possibility and the criterion of the possibility of synthetic cognition, Kant adds: "And thus the celebrated *Leibnitz* has utterly failed in his attempt to establish upon a *priori* grounds the possibility of this sublime ideal being (God)." Leibniz indeed had said that it is enough for God to be possible in order that He be actual. And all the possibility he demanded was what Kant called logical possibility based on the non-contradiction of the notes of the essence. And this because for Leibniz the proposition 'The All-Perfect Being' necessarily exists is analytic and this because according to Leibniz's dictum

³¹ Immanuel Kant, *Ibid.*, p. 180.

of *Praedicatum inest subjecto*, the analysis of the subject of a true proposition will reveal any predicate, whether essential or accidental.

In the case of Thomists however, they distinguish between intrinsic (i.e. logical) possibility based on non-contradiction and extrinsic possibility based on the *synthesizing* of existence with the essence by an agent. Extrinsic possibility then seems to be the same as Kant's real or transcendental possibility. But when we are talking of the possibility of God Himself does extrinsic or real possibility make any sense at all? How talk of an agent prior to God making the logically possible God actual? That would ignore the fact that God is the First Uncaused Cause. Or how talk of a real possibility based on sense-experience if God is admitted to be a pure spirit in Kant's own words, a being out of and beyond this world?

What indeed does Kant understand by God? He says: "As we are wont to understand by the term God not merely an eternal nature, the operations of which are insensate and blind, but a Supreme Being, who is the free and intelligent author of all things, and as it is this latter view alone than can be of interest to humanity, we might, in strict rigor deny to the deist any belief in God at all and merely regard him as a maintainer of the existence of a primal being or thing — the supreme cause of all other things." Further down, Kant adds: "It is more correct — as it is less harsh — to say, the deist believes in a God, the *theist* in a living God (*summa intelligentia*)."³²

CRITICISM OF THE PHYSICO-THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The mention of God as Supreme Intelligence leads us to the physico-theological argument which tries to prove the existence of God as the Supreme Intelligent Designer of the Universe. What is Kant's objection to this proof? He says: "According to the physico-theological argument, the connection and harmony existing in the world evidence the *contingency of the form merely, but not of the matter*, that is of the *substance* of the world. To estab-

³² *Ibid.*, p. 190.

lish the truth of the latter opinion, it would be necessary to prove that all things *in themselves* would be incapable of this harmony and order unless they were, even as regards their substance, the product of a Supreme Wisdom. But this would require very different grounds of proof from those presented by the analogy of human art (where the world is compared to a watch with God as watchmaker). This proof can at most, therefore, demonstrate the existence of an *architect* of the world, whose efforts are limited by the capabilities of the material with which he works, but not of a creator of the world, to whom all things are subject."³³

And thus according to Kant, the physico-theological argument is in itself insufficient. In his own words: "After elevating ourselves to admiration of the magnitude of the power, wisdom and other attributes of the author of the world, and finding we can advance no further, we leave the argument on empirical grounds, and proceed to *infer the contingency of the world from the order and conformity to aims that are observable in it*. From this contingency we infer, by the help of transcendental conceptions alone, *the existence of something absolutely necessary*... thus the *physico-theological*, failing in its undertaking, recurs in its embarrassment to the *cosmological*; and (as) this is merely the *ontological argument* in disguise..."

Kant is of course right when he says that if the argument from design evidences only the contingency of the *form* and not also that of the matter or substance, then the Intelligent Designer is only an Architect of the World and not a Creator. Especially is this so if we press the analogy of God to a watchmaker, for it is obvious that the latter is responsible only for the arrangement of the parts of the timepiece and not for the existence of the parts arranged. As Gilson points out: "The celebrated example of the watchmaker misses the point, unless we leave the plane of *making* for the plane of *creating*." How does making differ from creating? In making, the Maker is not responsible for the *existence* of the elements of the things made. Thus the carpenter makes the table out of wood which comes from a tree and in the words

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

of the poet: "Only God can make a tree." In creating, on the other hand, the Creator is responsible for the entirety of the thing created, for its matter (or what Kant calls substance) as well as its form.

The problem is therefore whether finality properly understood involves the very being or existence of the things arranged. Gilson thinks so for he says: "From a *philosophical* standpoint *finality* is to be admitted whenever in a given whole neither each element separately nor in consequence their sum suffices to account for the existence of the whole. The analysis and reconstitution of the whole by *mechanistic* methods might suffice for the purposes of scientific explanation, but an exhaustive analysis of this kind, even if it were possible, would still leave two questions open: that of the *existence* of the elements adapted to enter into the synthesis and that concerning the *order* of these elements in the synthesis. That is why St. Thomas considered it possible to prove the *existence* of God as cause of the *existence* of the order and we may even add that it is demanded also as *cause* of the *aptitude* of the elements to enter into the order."³⁴

Gilson's point seems to be well taken especially if we remember that the proof from finality deals with natural things that are not man-made. In the ordering of natural things, God will not be a mere Orderer (as was the Platonic Demiurge), since the natural things put in order, owe their *existence* to Him, as well as their *aptitudes* to be ordered to a more complex whole. If we hold that "all (natural) things" in the words of Kant "are in *themselves incapable* of producing the harmony and order" of the universe, it is because we hold in the first place that they did not owe their existences and their natural aptitudes to be ordered to themselves but to God. In short, creation is part of the very texture of the Thomistic argument from finality rightly understood.

THE FIVE WAYS ARE METAPHYSICAL PROOFS

Indeed all the Five Ways of St. Thomas move on the plane of being or existence. That is, the idea of creation is necessarily

³⁴ Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (Notes) Ch. V, p. 450.

implied in every demonstration by Aquinas of the existence of God. Take the case of the First Proof considered by many the most 'physical' of them all. Although following closely Aristotle's proofs, the main points of which are: a universe in movement, a gradated series of movers and things moved; a first Unmoved Mover causing movement to the entire series, St. Thomas' proof moves on a different plane from that of Aristotle's. Not only because the First Unmoved Mover of Aristotle is a final rather than an efficient cause. Even assuming that Aristotle's first mover is an efficient cause, *his causality falls on beings whose existence does not depend on his*. Aristotle's God is then merely the originating point in the transmission of movements; but not the creator of movement itself. For in the world of Aristotle all is *given* (i.e., their *existence* is taken for granted): The First Mover, the moved movers, the movement and the beings generated by the movement. But it is otherwise with St. Thomas who links the idea of creation to the proof from motion. He says: "It has been shown by Aristotle's arguments that there exists a first unmoved Mover who we call God. Now the first mover in any order is the cause of all the movements in that order. Since, then, many things come to existence in consequence of the movements of heavenly bodies and since God has been shown to be the first mover in the order of movements, it follows *that God is the cause of the existence of all these things*."³⁵ As Gilson comments: "It is obvious that if God creates things solely because He moves the causes which produce these things by their movement, God must be a Mover as Creator of movement." So the Thomistic proof for God's existence from motion even if its terms seem to simply reproduce Aristotle's has a meaning altogether its own, a meaning the Greek philosopher could not even imagine, because it involves the idea of creation which is lacking in the Stagirite.

As pointed out previously all the Five Ways involve *efficient* causality. God is the efficient cause of the being of motion in the first, of the being of secondary causes in the second, of the being of contingent beings in the third; of the being of imperfect beings in the fourth and of the being of order in the fifth. And for St. Thomas the proof of the existence of God by efficient causality

³⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Contra. Gent.* II 6.

is also the proof for Creation. Thus Thomas: "We have shown by Aristotle's arguments that there exists a First Efficient Cause whom we call God. But the efficient cause produces the being of its effects. God therefore is the cause of the *being (esse or existence) of all other things.*"³⁶ Kant's requirement that the proofs for God's existence prove God a Creator as well as Mover, First Cause, Necessary Being, etc., is thus fully satisfied by St. Thomas' arguments rightly understood.

From the fact that St. Thomas' proofs move on the plane of *esse or existence*, and not merely as Aristotle's does, on the plane of change or movement, it follows that the Five Ways are genuinely metaphysical. For where the physical (natural) ends, the metaphysical begins, but since there is nothing else beyond the nature of a thing than its own existence, metaphysics begins with the consideration of existence. As Gilson points out: "Aristotle's proof of the existence of the *first mover* is quite in its place in his *Physics* (lib. VII), it is reached directly as the *cause of movement*, the proper object of Physics. In St. Thomas on the other hand the proof is developed on the plane of being, and is *altogether metaphysical*, the contingency of movement being here nothing but a particular and very evident case of the radical contingency of the created being. To be convinced of this we have only to remember that the proof of the first unmoved and therefore immutable mover implies for St. Thomas that this being is eternal, necessary, *habens esse per seipsum* whence it follows: *quod essentia divina quae est actus purus ultimus*, sit *ipsum esse* and finally *quod Deus est primum et perfectissimum ens*, unde oportet quod sit *causa essendi omnibus quae esse habent* (Creator). Such a first mover (in the words of Duns Scotus, a later Scholastic) is evidently more *metaphysical* as *first* than *physical* as a *mover*.³⁷

KANT'S PURELY PHYSICAL OUTLOOK

We are now in a position to pinpoint the difficulty facing Kant vis-a-vis the problem of God's existence. Aroused from his

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Also in II, 15

³⁷ Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*. Ch. IV. Notes p. 442.

dogmatic slumber by Hume, Kant could not accept the ontological argument of the Rationalists. Furthermore, sharing the empiricists' view that Newtonian Physics was the ideal science, the model of those disciplines that could give rise to apodictic certitude, he could not but give to basic principles a *purely physical* interpretation. But being a Christian he could not but require of the Supreme Being *metaphysical* attributes. Thus he requires us to show that God is among other things 'the Creator to which all things are subject' but would limit the principle of causality to sense — experience and he is then surprised that it cannot be done. That we are not here misinterpreting Kant becomes clear if we compare his formulation of the principle of causality with that of St. Thomas. Thus he says: "The principle that '*everything which happens* must have a cause' is a principle of the *cognition of nature* (i.e. a *physical principle*, for it is limited to objects or predicates presented in a possible experience), but not of *speculative cognition* (relating to objects or conceptions not given and which cannot be discovered by means of experience i.e., metaphysical objects)." ³⁸ That for him the principle of causality is physical and not metaphysical, is clearer still in his statement that his principle enounces, not that things themselves or substances, *but only that which happens or their states* — as empirically contingent — have a cause. The assertion that the existence of substance itself is contingent is not justified by experience." ³⁹ In short, for Kant, the cause is responsible only for the *change of state* (how reminiscent of Newton's first law) and not for the thing itself. In this Kant is showing that he always remains on the physical and never rises to the metaphysical plane. On the other hand, for St. Thomas the principle of causality is on the metaphysical plane, the plane of being or existence. This is clear from its formulation as: Every contingent being (i.e. a being that may or may not *exist* or in the words of the Summa, things that are possible *to be* or *not to be*) must have a cause or even in: "Nothing can pass from passive potency to act unless under the influence of another being in act"; for act and potency are the intrinsic principles of every *being*, material or immaterial.

³⁸ Immanuel Kant, *Ibid.*, p. 191.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 191

KANT & NEWTONIAN PHYSICS

That Kant was obsessed by Newtonian Physics is evident in the emphasis he gives to synthetic a priori judgments, the idea of which I believe he derived by studying physical laws. Take the case of Newton's first law: Every body continues in its state of rest or of uniform motion unless impelled by an external force to change that state. Analysis of 'body' (extended body) will not reveal the predicate "continues in its state of rest... etc." Therefore according to Kant the proposition is synthetic. But Newton's first law is universal and necessary and consequently a priori, for a posteriori refers to what is particular and contingent. Since Physics is the model science for Kant, and the propositions of Physics are synthetic a priori, then any discipline aspiring to be scientific, must consist of synthetic a priori judgments. Indeed it is this criterion that is applied by Kant to solve the problem of whether Metaphysics is a science or not. Are the propositions of Metaphysics like those of Physics synthetic a priori or not? If they are, then Metaphysics is a science; if not, Metaphysics is not a science. Was Kant justified in requiring Metaphysics to be made to the image and likeness of Physics? Was that not to betray the very nature of Metaphysics, which even according to its very etymology is a discipline *beyond* Physics?

It is only against this background of the 'synthetic a priori' that we can understand Kant's speculations on God's existence. For the 'synthetic' requires reference to 'possible experience' while the 'a priori' refers to the formal conditions — either of intuition (the a priori forms of the sensibility) or of conception (the a priori forms of the understanding). That is why Kant says that "... all *a priori* *synthetical cognition* is possible only as the expression of the *formal conditions* of a *possible experience*". Since God, the human soul and the spiritual will of Man are beyond possible experience, no wonder for Kant speculative reason cannot prove the existence of God, the immortality of the human soul or the freedom of the will. To be fair to Kant he also said that the speculative reason cannot disprove the same. We are thus led to the famous antinomies of Reason.

THE ANTINOMIES OF REASON

If, as Kant himself admits, God is beyond possible experience, this can only mean that the problem of God's existence is a *metaphysical* one. And it is not surprising that Kant will never be able to solve the problem, whether for or against. For Kant's "physicism" will always prevent him from doing so. The most he can arrive at are the antinomies, which for me is more a sign of Kant's physicism than a sign that the problem of God's *existence is above human reason* and belongs to a realm where the principle that holds is not the principle of contradiction but the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Incidentally the claim that Kant's antinomies is an example of the identification of opposites is both to misread Kant and to misunderstand the principle of Contradiction. For in his observations on the 4th antinomy, Kant says: "The reader will observe in this antinomy a very remarkable contrast. The very same grounds of proof which established in the thesis the existence of a Supreme Being, demonstrated in the antithesis — and with equal strictness — the non-existence of such a being..." Kant then explains the cause of this seeming incongruity but concludes saying: "In both, the mode of proof is quite in accordance with the common procedure of human reason, which often falls into discord with itself, from considering *an object from two different points of view*." Kant then gives an example of the "contradictory" conclusions of two astronomers basing themselves on the same reason, but adds: "Both conclusions (the moon revolves on its own axis and the moon does not revolve on its own axis) were *perfectly correct according to the point of view* from which the motions of the moon were considered."⁴⁰ But the whole point of the Principle of Contradiction is that "It is impossible for a thing to be and not to be at the same time and *from the same point of view*."

Why do we claim that the antinomies are a sign of Kant's physicism? Because natural Science as such has no use for existence. Physics *does not prove nor disprove* the existence of anything. It just takes for granted the existence of sensible things. As to supra-sensible things, whether they exist or not, Physics is not interested in them. Kant was thus right in making

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 144. and 145.

the existence of reality a necessary condition for knowledge but at the same time "holding that this fact does not enter our *scientific* knowledge of reality. For if there is such a thing as a knowledge of existence, it cannot be a physical, but a *metaphysical one*." The existence of God is a problem that belongs to Metaphysics (more specifically to Natural Theology) and so can never find a satisfactory solution in systems that either deny Metaphysics or fashion the Queen of the Sciences to the image and likeness of an inferior science like Physics as Kant has done.

The main points of this short essay are the following:

1. To understand the philosophy of Kant we must know the philosophies of Wolff and Hume.

2. For Wolff as for the dogmatists (rationalists) in general, God's essence *entails* His existence.

3. For Hume no essence entails its existence, not even God's for the order of existence is radically other than that of essence.

4. Kant shares the foregoing idea of Hume as shown by his claim "that every existential proposition is synthetical."

5. For Kant the only three ways that Speculative Reason has of proving God's existence is the physico-theological which presupposes the cosmological, which in turn presupposes the ontological argument.

6. For Kant the ontological argument is invalid for it does not distinguish between logical and real necessity.

7. It is shown that St. Thomas also holds the Ontological Argument to be invalid and for practically the same reasons as Kant.

8. Both Kant and St. Thomas hold that God's existence must then be proven *a posteriori*.

9. Kant however believes that the *a posteriori* proof (also known as the Cosmological argument) reduces to the ontological, for it presupposes the major premise of the Ontological Argument: "The All-Perfect Being necessarily exist" i.e., the term "All-Perfect Being" is the middle term of the reasoning.

10. In contrast, St. Thomas does not require us to assume God's nature in order to prove His existence.

11. Kant's error is to require that a demonstration of the fact (quia) of God's existence must be supported by a demonstration of the reasoned fact (propter quid) of God's necessity.

12. The proofs for God's existence involves the principle of Causality which Hume is erroneously supposed to have denied. Hume's attack is seen to be directed against the essential sequence of Spinoza which is different from physical causality. The distinction between the two was also made by St. Thomas when he contrasted mathematical with physical causality.

13. Kant's limitation of the principle of Causality to the sensuous or phenomenal sphere is analyzed. It is shown that the principle of Causality is analytic according to the second mode of perseity.

14. Kant's claim that we cannot argue from the contingent existence of things in the material world to the necessary existence of a Being that does not belong to it is shown to be an objection already known to and refuted by St. Thomas.

15. Kant's claim that no conception of necessity can take place without removal of conditions is contrasted with Aristotle's conception of necessity.

16. Kant's distinction between logical and real possibility is shown to be a distinction already known to St. Thomas. It is further shown why real possibility cannot be applied to God.

17. According to Kant, the Physico-theological argument proves only that God is the Architect, but not the Creator of the world. It is shown that Kant is right if finality is given a scientific and not a philosophical interpretation.

18. It is shown that the proofs of St. Thomas argue to God as creator since his proofs unlike that of Aristotle are genuinely metaphysical moving as they do on the plane of being or existence.

19. Kant's understanding of the proofs is shown to be on the plane of physics, not metaphysics, inasmuch as Kant saw Newtonian physics as the model of scientific knowledge.

20. Kant's "physicism" is shown to be the reason why he can *neither prove nor disprove the existence of God*.

21. The antinomies of Kant are shown to be a sign of his physicism rather than a sign of the inability of reason to prove the existence of God.

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