

XV.—THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE  
EXISTENCE OF GOD.

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IT is over twenty years ago\* since Anselm's Ontological Argument was put before this Society in the acute and learned paper by Mr. C. C. J. Webb. Since then, the perpetual philosophical scrutiny of this argument has been augmented by the attention bestowed upon it by a number of writers such as Dr. Bosanquet, Baron von Hügel, and Professor A. S. Pringle-Pattison, while it forms the opening section in Dr. Caldecott's *Selections from the Literature of Theism*. Moreover, the current programme of the Aristotelian Society has an unwonted theistic flavour about it, and although the argument has provoked Dr. Schiller† to the scornful epithet "juggling," it seems not inappropriate for the Society once more to give Anselm's position some serious consideration. My concern is chiefly to suggest that the Kantian criticism of the argument is illegitimate (despite Dr. Ward's assertion that Kant "has for all time exposed its fatal defects"); and, further, to suggest an escape from Mr. Webb's contention that what the Ontological Argument demonstrates is an Absolute Reality, but not a personal God, not the God of religion.

I.

The argument is too well known to need more than the briefest epitome. Given that there is in common use amongst men a term "God," and that the reality (or a certain reality)

\* *Proc. Arist. Soc.*, O.S., Vol. 3, No. 2 (1896).

† In his paper on "Omnipotence," *supra*, p. 250.

implied in this term is denied by some "Fool" who says, "There is no God," it proceeds to inquire whether the term and notion itself does not carry its own guarantee with it, independently of any *a posteriori* confirmation, and independently (be it noted) of any particular theory of knowledge—Kantian or otherwise. Is the notion of God a self-demonstrating one? If so, how? It is not Anselm's business to fit in the notion with psychological accounts of its origin, but to show that the notion is itself valid and self-demonstrable. Terms admittedly mean something; here is a term, a significant term to whose meaning reality, existence, is denied. Can the denial be countered *a priori*? Anselm thinks it can.

An agreed definition of God is necessary; the term must not be used equivocally. It will not do, for instance, to begin by thinking of God as a horse, or as having bodily parts, for while some might so figure Him not all would. I refer to this because one of the objections taken by St. Thomas to Anselm's argument is that the definition *quo nihil maius cogitari potest* is not universally understood as expressing God's nature. But surely this misses the point. Anselm wants an argument that shall compel the intellect for all thinkers. Now (he in effect urges), whatever else you may presently include as *propria* of the definition of God, this at least you must certainly mean by God, that He is "that than which nought greater can be conceived." This holds for every one who uses the term. The Fool, however, denies the reality of this "*quo nihil maius cogitari potest*." He can only do so by setting up an opposition between thought and reality, and hence asserting that God is thought but is not real. Anselm admits that the opposition between thought and reality holds in the case, for example, of a painting conceived but not executed by the artist. Examples of such opposition are easy to find upon condition that they are drawn from the world of space and time, not otherwise,

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\* Certainly, Mr. Webb seems to think so. Cf. his *Problems in the Relations of God and Man*, 2nd ed., p. 141.

and to assert that all reality is necessarily subject to space and time is, for the Ontological Argument, an unwarrantable assumption.

Now, for God (as defined by Anselm) such opposition cannot hold, "for if it were only in the understanding, it could then be further conceived to be also in reality, which would be a greater [and a 'better' is implied] thing."\* It is this form of the argument which exposes it to criticism. It appears to be a kind of addition with abstruse and ill-defined units. But it is not Anselm who is responsible for this apparent defect. It is the Fool. The latter has asserted that God is *in intellectu* only; Anselm's reply is, *If so*, etc. That is, the apparent method of addition is due to a previous attempt at subtraction. The Fool has attempted to subtract reality *in re*, not from *any* reality *in intellectu*, but from *id quo nihil maius cogitari potest*. In attempting the impossible he has, *ipso facto*, demonstrated the reality. Anselm works this out more fully in his *Liber Apologeticus* or *Rejoinder to Gaunilo*. There he says "If that being can be even conceived to be, it must exist in reality. For that than which a greater is inconceivable cannot be conceived except as without beginning. But whatever can be conceived to exist, and does not exist, can be conceived to exist through a beginning. Hence, what can be conceived to exist but does not exist is not the *quo nihil maius*. If, therefore, such a being can at all be conceived to exist, it must exist of necessity."† The non-existence of any existent, and the existence of any non-existent, are both conceivable and possible provided the said existents are subject to time and space. Yet, this is not the case with God, for "that than which no greater can be conceived, if it exists, cannot be conceived not to exist. Otherwise it is not a being than which a greater is inconceivable, which is inconsistent. By no means, then, does it at any place or at any time fail to exist

\* *Proslogion*, c. 2. I follow Dr. Caldecott's translation.

† *Liber Apologeticus*, c. i.

as a whole, for it exists as a whole, everywhere and always." God is the only possibility whose impossibility is inconceivable. He cannot be at once thought to be real and not real. In this way Anselm really reaches (as Mr. Webb has noticed\*) the Leibnizian form of the Ontological Argument. The inconceivability of the non-existence of God (as defined) is clearly asserted in the *Proslogion* itself (c. 3): "If that than which nothing greater can be conceived can be conceived not to exist, it is not that than which nothing greater can be conceived. And this is an irreconcilable contradiction. . . . So truly art Thou, O Lord my God, that Thou canst not be conceived not to be, and rightly so. For if any mind could frame the conception of something superior to Thee, the creature would be transcending the Creator, which is most absurd. And, indeed, all else that exists can be thought not to be save Thee alone."

The subsequent development of Anselm's definition of God (always in close conjunction with the argument itself) should be noted in two respects. (i) God is not only *maius* but *melius*, i.e., ethical and æsthetic predicates are transcendently included in His nature: "He is that than which nothing better can be conceived, . . . is very life, light, wisdom, goodness, eternal blessedness, and blessed eternity, everywhere and always. . . . Thou hast beauty, harmony, sweetness, goodness after thine own ineffable manner."† And (ii) He is "not only that than which no greater can be conceived," but also "a being greater than can be conceived. For, since it can be conceived that there is such a being, if Thou art not this very being, a something greater than Thou can be conceived, which is impossible."‡

Before passing to the Kantian and some more recent

\* *Studies in the History of Natural Theology*, p. 185.

† *Proslogion*, c. 14, c. 17.

‡ *Ibid.*, c. 15.

discussion of the Ontological Argument, I would emphasise certain points in Anselm's position which (I contend) secure it against assault. He is not claiming to demonstrate God from any contingent considerations or experience whatsoever; he is not claiming that his argument applies to islands, dollars or any other existent in time and space; nor is he claiming to fit it in with any particular epistemology. When Mr. Bradley says\* that "by existence (taken strictly) I mean a temporal series of events or facts," either the Ontological Argument is non-suited at the start or it falls entirely outside such a statement. Anselm is not attempting to prove God as a Bradleian existent, *i.e.*, as "a temporal series of events or facts." Nor is he attempting to demonstrate the simultaneous existence of a number of differently defined deities "who are in being and in competition together."† However much theology may subsequently develop into theologies does not matter. Anselm is solely concerned with an initial and a minimum definition of God. All criticism which ignores this will really be beside the point.

## II.

I propose now to ask whether the Kantian criticism is really valid and legitimate. Kant overthrows all members of the three proof system. Doubtless he is right in maintaining that the teleological and cosmological proofs both ultimately imply the ontological, and in overthrowing this last he was condemning all three. But is it so certain that he really does "expose their fatal defects for all time"? It was an inherent necessity for the Kantian system to get rid of an argument which, if accepted, would have necessitated jettisoning the whole. At most, only the inferior status of being a regulative "Idea" could be conceded by Kant to God.

The fundamental axiom of Kant's epistemology is that

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\* *Appearance and Reality*, p. 317, note.

† Schiller, *loc. cit.*, p. 251.

human cognition is limited to the "given, subsumed by us under the forms of space and time, and organised by the understanding through its categories. All phenomena, he insists, are limited and conditioned; and, moreover, man, as the principal phenomenon, is conditioned in the physical and imperfect in the moral order.

Now, the problem of speculative theism is to find or establish deity, and the God of Kant's conception is the free and intelligent author of all things, unconditioned and perfect. The definition is an extension of that with which Anselm begins, but, even so, Kant's epistemology non-suits the definition of God and the proofs at the start. For the "given" is a conditioned and an imperfect given, and, naturally, will not present us with a free and unconditioned Being that is also perfect. But, I suggest, Kant's position precludes him from examining the Ontological Argument. For the problem is, *ex hypo.*, to demonstrate a free, perfect, unconditioned and intelligent Being. We ask, is it pertinent for this problem to be raised in a theory of knowledge which by its fundamental axiom excludes all possibility of an affirmative solution? It is not a question of constructing a deity to fit a theory of knowledge, but of constructing a theory of knowledge to fit (if it be possible) deity. In the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant emphatically states that we must not attempt to think of God in terms of space and time. To do so is to court disaster. Then by what right does he in the first *Critique* challenge a deity that, by his own definition, is not to be brought within a time-and-space epistemology? It is he who has courted disaster, not the Anselmian argument. I do not think sufficient attention has been given to this—the illegitimacy of any discussion of an *a priori* argument for God, within the restricted range of any metaphysic which, at the outset, limits cogitability to sense-data. The Ontological Argument, being *a priori*, does not come within Kant's theory of knowledge at all. It does not claim to establish anything whatever that will conform to his restrictions.

He has limited cognisable existence to the "given," a given which is necessarily subsumed by us under the forms of space and time, and organised by the categories of the understanding. That reason (as he admits) is dissatisfied with this, and seeks a close in the regulative Ideas; this ought to have made him wonder whether his preliminary exclusion of the unconditioned from human experience was really sound. Yet, because he could not avoid recognising the dissatisfaction of Reason with his account of reality, he proceeds to admit the Ideas under protest. They come in on promise of good behaviour, as it were; they must not meddle with things; they must be regulative, not constitutive.

The Ontological Argument, however, does not profess to establish anything at all that partakes of the nature of the Kantian "given." The only *a priori* factors that Kant admits are the two "forms of perception," the categories of the understanding, the moral law and the æsthetic judgment. All possible knowledge is otherwise limited to the phenomenal. Clearly, the ontological *a priori* is unamenable to the Kantian scheme. He is entirely disqualified by his own conditions from examining any *a priori* which makes no claim to conform thereto.

Kant's attack upon the argument is, indeed, fundamentally circular. By his own definition, God is excluded from the Kantian account of human knowledge, but the argument does not profess to square deity with Kant's position. Rather, taking the Anselmian or the Kantian definition as common ground in speculative theism, it offers an *a priori* demonstration. But Kant's criticism is grounded in a theory of the "given," *i.e.*, in an empirical and *a posteriori* position. It is, therefore, not *ad rem* where the Ontological Argument is concerned. The latter is not bound to accept Kant's definition of cognisable existence. It merely says that that than which no greater can be conceived must *be* or yield its quality to what is. It does not claim to exhibit God as an object "given" under

the forms of space and time. Kant's argument is really this :—

What is not-"given" (*e.g.*, God at least, as conceived by him) is not matter of human cognition :

God is not-"given."

∴ God is not matter of human cognition.

This is surely fallacious. All that Kant does is to assert positively that God is not what by definition He is not, viz., given and subsumed under the forms of space and time. But no theistic proof, least of all the Ontological Argument, says that He is this. We are left where we were, with a theory of knowledge on one side, and, on the other, a definition of God which makes no pretension to enter into that theory of knowledge.

Again, Kant says that, while reason cannot affirm, it may not deny, the existence of God. It must be neutral. In the Kantian school, the Ideas, the regulative Ideas, are neither good boys nor bad boys; they are paralysed marionettes, neutrals. Let us ask, however, whether Kant does not himself violate this neutrality. For :—

All cognisable existences are subsumed under the forms  
of space and time.

God is not so subsumed (by definition).

∴ He is not a cognisable existence.

While this is not a denial of the existence of God, it is a denial of the cognisable existence of God; and, therefore, a denial of a possible attribute of an undenied (though unaffirmed) existent. This is "unfriendly neutrality," at any rate. We are again left where we were. Kant only succeeds in showing that in his epistemology God cannot be regarded as cognisable. But Anselm did not maintain the contrary. Neither his definition nor that of Kant places God within the spatial and temporal series. Between Kant's epistemology and his definition of God



there is no *via media*, because none is wanted. Kant's argument is very well as a criticism, say, of early Semitic anthropomorphism, but speculative theism makes no attempt to be anthropomorphic; and the strength of the Ontological Argument lies in just this, that, being *a priori*, it is free from any such taint. Kant seems to have a grudge against God for not being amenable to the forms and categories.

He is not more fortunate in his quasi-rehabilitation of God in his ethics. There he quietly introduces what may be called an ontological argument in ethics. In Book ii, Chapter 2, § viii, of the *Critique of Practical Reason*,\* Kant discourses "Of Delief from a Requirement of Pure Reason."† He urges that if a requirement of pure practical reason is based upon duty, its possibility must be supposed, and, consequently, all the conditions necessary thereto, viz., God, freedom, and immortality. He, then, proceeds to insist that the moral law, which is apodictically certain, has this subjective effect of compelling us to strive to attain it, because it presupposes at least that the *summum bonum* is possible. For, he continues, "it would be practically impossible to strive after the object of a conception which at bottom was empty and had no object." But we do strive. Hence the conception is validated. That is, it carries its own authenticity within itself. The possibility of the *summum bonum* is guaranteed by the very conception itself. Is this not what the Ontological Argument really urges? If, as he maintains, the *summum bonum* is self-authenticated, ought not Kant to have applied the same reasoning to "the conditions necessary thereto, viz., God, freedom, and immortality"—particularly to the conception of God, which the mind of man has ceaselessly striven for, and which, therefore, in Kant's own words, "cannot be empty and have no object"? The moral law is independent of the forms

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\* Abbott's translation, p. 240 ff.

† *Italics* mine.

of space and time, and Kant does not apply any destructive criticism to it. It is a categorical imperative; it cannot proceed from or be created by man, who is a member of both the phenomenal and the noumenal orders. God, freedom, and immortality are the conditions necessary to it, therefore prior, and at least equally real and imperative. If Kant's criticism of the Ontological Argument is to stand, then it must be consistently extended and applied to everything *a priori*, and particularly to that *a priori* which he valued above all else, viz., the moral law. If the concept of a free and unconditioned Being has to go, has to be regarded as merely regulative, not constitutive, then the concept of a free, unconditioned, autonomous moral law must go, or be regarded in its turn as only regulative and not imperative. And this would be to sacrifice all its authority.

Moreover, while elsewhere Kant says the Idea of a Supreme Being is a regulative principle only, he gives us no further reason why just this particular regulative principle *and no other* should be conceived. Had he done so, the answer would have compelled him to admit the Ontological Argument. We can have no other regulative principle because it is the most constitutive, most real, and most necessary. It is regulative for conduct just because it is constitutive for thought: the *terminus ad quem* for conduct, the *terminus a quo* for thought.

But, says Kant, "existence is no real predicate." Does the Ontological Argument really assert that it is? The opposition between thought and reality is possible only upon a previous union of the two. It is, we must recollect, the Fool who has subtracted Being from the *quo nihil maius*. The divorce between thought and reality is possible for the temporal series, but not for the unconditioned God. Yet, argues Kant, "the unconditioned necessity of a judgment does not form the absolute necessity of a thing." Is, then, God a thing? Has He been defined as a thing? Kant urges that no contradiction arises

if both subject and predicate are suppressed in thought. Is it, however, possible so to think away God, the "that than which no greater can be conceived"? Whatever can be annihilated in thought assuredly does not conform to Anselm's definition. It will not be possible to annihilate God (as defined by Anselm) until thought itself is annihilated. No comparison is possible between finite existents that can be annihilated in thought, and the non-temporal existent of the Ontological Argument. The argument does not attempt to *add* existence or reality to the content of the idea, though this is the usual (and Kantian) criticism of it. Rather it shows that for this one Idea the attempt to *subtract* reality from the content fails, for that content *is* reality. The onus is on the "Fool"; by denying God he is attempting to subtract reality from reality, which is impossible. For all other cases the subtraction of objective reality from a supposed given may be effected, and that given thereby reduced to the inferior status of being *in intellectu* but but not *in re*. If, then, Kant urges that the Ontological Argument is an unwarrantable, impossible or meaningless *addition*, the answer is that the Fool's denial is the precedent cause; it is the impossible and meaningless *subtraction* which is at fault.\* "The possibilities of thought," says Professor A. S. Pringle-Pattison† "cannot exceed the actuality of being." Attempted subtraction fails.

Croce,‡ on the other hand, declares that "existence cannot be anything but a predicate; it can only be asked what sort of predicate it is." He adds that "outside the judgment A is not not thinkable but only representable, and therefore without existentiality, which predicate it only acquires in the act of judgment." We could not, however, accept this as meaning

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\* I fancy that this train of thought is akin to Mr. C. C. J. Webb, when he says (*Problems in the Relation of God and Man*, p. 141) that "proof" of the divine existence is unnecessary.

† *The Idea of God*, p. 241.

‡ Croce : *Logic* (trans. D. Ainslie), pp. 173-4.

that God (as defined by Anselm) "acquires" existentiality in the act of our judgment. Rather, I should say, that in respect of God there is a continuous affirmation of Him by us in all our judgments. The ultimate subject of all our judgments is God, the *quo nihil maius*; perhaps our true judgments are His self-affirmations. And, although Croce dismisses the "myth of a personal God," he perceives that the task of thought is to render the definition of Deus increasingly exact, rich and spiritual. He recognises the importance of the Anselmian argument for "the unity of Essence and Existence," "the reality of . . . the being than which it is impossible to think a greater and a more perfect (the true and proper concept)."\*

I leave the Kantian criticism, then, with the contention that as against the Ontological Argument it is not only irrelevant from the epistemological standpoint of Kant, but also destructive of his ethics.

### III.

That Mr. Bradley uses the Ontological Argument has already been pointed out by Mr. Webb. On p. 196 of *Appearance and Reality*, we read: "What is *possible*, and what a general principle compels us to say *must be*, that certainly *is*." But Mr. Bradley has objections to the argument. He denies its applicability.† "For if an idea has been manufactured and is composed of elements taken up from more than one source, then the result of manufacture does not necessarily exist out of my thought, however much that is the case with its separate elements." This is the familiar objection to the validity of a concept on the ground of its origin. Yet, origin and validity are not identical; origin cannot invalidate the valid. The tests of validity are to be sought elsewhere. And even if we admitted that the concept of the "*id quo nihil maius*" is a compound, we

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\* Croce : *Logic* (trans. D. Ainslie), pp. 496, 522, 537, etc.

† *Appearance and Reality*, pp. 149-50.

may reflect that, like other compounds, it has properties and rights of its own, which are not those of its ingredients. Mr. Bradley does not in the chapter (xiv.) tell us in what respect God, as defined by Anselm, is a compound; and, therefore, it seems to me, his objection fails for want of support. Cudworth's sentences are here to the point: "Our human soul cannot feign or create any new cogitation or conception that was not before, but only variously compound that which is, nor can it ever make a positive idea of an absolute nonentity . . . much less could our imperfect being create the entity of so vast a thought as that of an infinitely perfect Being out of nothing."\*

Elsewhere, however, Mr. Bradley non-suits the argument in a manner reminiscent of Kant. He draws a distinction between reality and existence. "By existence† (taken strictly), I mean a temporal series of events or facts." Hence, while "the religious consciousness does imply the reality of that object which also is its goal,"‡ that object cannot, for Mr. Bradley, be an existent. But, as we have seen, the Ontological Argument does not say that the *quo nihil maius* is an "existent" of this sort. And, of course, Mr. Bradley subsequently rehabilitates the argument if applied and confined to the Absolute.§ "The idea of the Absolute, as an idea, is inconsistent with itself; and we find that, to complete itself, it is internally driven to take in existence." We must not, however, identify the Absolute with a personal God, because, for Mr. Bradley, "a person is finite or meaningless."|| Yet, the Absolute, though non-personal, is "individual and perfect."¶

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\* Cudworth (*Intellectual System*, (i), c. v), quoted by Caldecott, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

† Bradley, *op. cit.*, p. 317, n.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

§ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

|| *Ibid.*, p. 532.

¶ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

It comes, then, to this, that the objections to the Ontological Argument really spring from objections to the definition of God. Yet, though our definitions of God may be (and are bound to be) defective, His reality, as demonstrated by the argument, is not thereby impaired. Mr. Bradley returns to the problem in his last book, where it appears that his inability to bring together God and the Absolute is due to the fact that for him, "self is but a limited construction, more or less ill-defined and precarious, built one-sidedly out of materials which fall within my centre."\* This is a somewhat gloomy view of the nature of personality. Again, "a God that can say to himself 'I' as against you and me is not, in my judgment, defensible as the last and complete truth for metaphysics." But supposing God says not only "I" as *against* us but also "we" as *with* us? Anselm's argument does not entail so austere and exclusive a view of what the divine personality could mean. Is there any evidence that personality is only a finite and precarious construction? Has it no constitutive elements? If Goodness, the Good Will, be a constitutive element, how can it be meaningful unless it be personal? The concept of a personal God may be difficult, but the concept of an impersonal or super-personal Absolute which will guarantee for us the constitutive character of the moral and æsthetic predicates is still more difficult. Mr. Webb's commentary on Mr. Bradley's position may here be quoted:—

"If the Absolute reached by the Ontological Proof is not understood, as by Anselm . . . to be the Supreme Good, and, in an intelligible sense, personal: unless the hierarchy of perfections which sees the Greatest in the Best . . . be recognised; then the result is that the true Nemesis of error comes, the Supremely Intelligible, or the Noumenon of Plato, passes over into the Supremely Unintelligible or Noumenon of Kant, and idealism commits suicide."†

\* *Essays*, ch. xv, "On God and the Absolute."

† *Proc. Arist. Soc.*, O.S., Vol. 3, No. 2 (1896).

## IV.

Mr. Webb, indeed, argues\* that the Ontological Argument is not a proof in that it does not "bring any particular fact under a general rule." He regards it as merely an assertion of "the fundamental nature of knowledge as being knowledge of the Real." I have already suggested that it is more than a mere assertion; it is a demonstration of the invalidity of subtracting any perfection from the *id quo nihil maius*. Mr. Webb, then, accepts the argument on behalf of an Absolute, but considers that whether the Absolute is also personal is matter for subsequent discussion; and this he undertakes, fully and admirably, in Chap. 8 of his book, and his final word on the inadequacy of the Absolute as such is that "it implies that nothing is left out; but it does not say what is there." There would appear to be very general agreement with this view of the argument. Baron von Hügel,† for instance, accepting the Kantian objection to the addition of the predicate of existence, yet declares that "at its best, this argument covers three great abiding facts." Briefly, these are that (i) "in all knowledge there is knowledge of reality, a trinity of Subject, Object, and the subject's Knowing which simultaneously includes knowledge of the Object and of itself, the Subject. We do not know the Thing-in-itself exhaustively, but we do know the Thing in our knowledge of it, and that without further mediation; (ii) all knowledge includes a sense of finitude, contingency, and insufficiency, and we only apprehend Succession and Fleetingness as contrasting with the spontaneously awakened sense of Simultaneity and Abidingness; and (iii) this latter sense cannot be explained away as mere subjective projection." And although (for von Hügel) the argument does not prove more than that in all our knowledge of finitude a contrasting knowledge of infinite and necessary reality is involved, yet "the

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\* *Problems, etc.*, p. 187 ff.

† *Eternal Life*, p. 152 ff.

Ontological Proof is one far beyond any simple deduction, and consists in an infinitely multipliable tracing of the Religious Knowledge in all our ordinary knowledge and of its ceaselessly elevating operation within our human lives."

A still more recent general approval of the argument comes from Professor A. S. Pringle-Pattison in his *Gifford Lectures*.\* His commentary is too good not to be quoted in full: "We have most of us," he writes, "as good moderns and children of the light, had our gibe at the ontological argument, and savoured Kant's pleasantry of the hundred dollars. But this fundamental confidence of reason in itself is just what the ontological argument is really labouring to express—the confidence, namely, that thought, when made consistent with itself, is true, that necessary implication in thought expresses a similar implication in reality. In this large sense, the truthfulness of thought—its ultimate truthfulness—is certainly the presupposition of all thinking; otherwise there could be no inducement to indulge in the operation. To that extent we all believe, as Mr. Bradley puts it in a rather incautious phrase, that 'existence must correspond with our ideas.' When I say 'we all believe it,' I mean that it is the first and natural attitude of the mind to the world, that it never ceases to be our practical assumption, and that, although a little philosophy may lead us for a time into the wilderness of scepticism and relativism, depth in philosophy brings us back with fuller insight to the sanity of our original position. And Mr. Bradley's confidence that 'the main tendencies of our nature' must 'reach satisfaction in the Absolute,' or Professor Bosanquet's readiness to 'stake [his] whole belief in reality . . . on the general "trueness of being" of whole provinces of advanced experience such as religion or morality or the world of beauty or of science,' is, in effect, an extension to our nature as a whole of the fundamental confidence expressed in the onto-

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\* *The Idea of God*, p. 240 ff.; cf. also Lotze, *Microcosmus*, Vol. II, p. 669 ff.



logical argument. . . . The claim is made by modern philosophy in a more general form, and because it has been more critically sifted, it is no doubt vaguer in its outcome than the old intuitional argument used to be. Fundamentally, it is the conviction that 'the best we think, or can think, must *be*'—a form of statement which perhaps enables us to see the real intention of the old scholastic argument that 'a perfect being necessarily exists.' In other words, the possibilities of thought cannot exceed the actuality of being; our conceptions of the ideal in their highest range are to be taken as pointing to a real Perfection, in which is united all that, and more than, it has entered into the heart of man to conceive. Admittedly, however, such a conception transcends the empirical reality of man's own nature or of the factual world around him, just as the perfectly coherent intellectual whole transcends the achieved results of knowledge. And, so far, the argument seems parallel in the two cases; in both there is an aspect of faith, and in both a similar claim to objectivity. But it is idle to deny that, although the belief in ultimate Goodness and Perfection at the heart of things may be held with a more passionate energy of conviction than the more colourless postulate of the intellect, it does not present itself to most minds with the same impersonal logical cogency. . . . It has been treated as not in the strict sense a conclusion of the intellect at all, but a decision of character, given out of a man's own moral and religious experiences."

This lack of conviction appears to be a common occurrence in first meeting the Ontological Argument. Mr. Webb, even, thinks that the simplicity of Anselm's discussion suggests to the mind a trick. I am not certain that this is either necessarily or invariably so. Rather, what appears to occur is that the mind confronted with this argument is like Rossetti when he saw "Beauty enthroned:

"And though her gaze struck awe,  
I took it in as simply as my breath."

The defect is that it attempts to prove Deus exclusively by the intellect and defines Him in intellectual terms. Can we expect one function of mind (thought) to demonstrate Deus for mind in its integrity? Must we not demonstrate Him as "the heart's desire," in every function of mind, in æsthetic and moral activity as well as in intellectual predication? \* Our dubiety, then, is due not to suspicion of a trick but to the *whole* mind's dissatisfaction with any purely intellectual argument for this thesis. Deus cannot with dignity be demonstrated so. "The mind is aware that the real contains more than the intellect can supply." \* The dubiety is not a doubt but an awe: in the Ontological Argument we are on holy ground.

In reply, then, to the contention that the argument stops at the demonstration of an Absolute and does not reach to a personal God, I would urge that if the Absolute and God both be "that than which no better can be conceived" yet Deus need not be only this, not only an abstract, intellectually conceived Absolute. Anselm expressly develops as *propria* of his definition the personal characteristics, the moral and æsthetic predicates of the *id quo nihil*, etc., and it seems illogical to accept the demonstration of Deus as defined, and then to refuse the *propria* thereof. Moreover, if the Ontological Argument proves an Absolute it does prove a personal God; for if the Absolute be not God, then God is either "less" than, "greater" than, or "equal" to the Absolute. But the argument cannot apply to two entities than which nothing greater can be conceived. It applies only to one, and the Absolute thus reached is best characterised under the category of personality.

#### V.

There is, however, another difficulty with the argument. It demonstrates an upward limiting notion for thought. Does it not similarly demonstrate a downward limiting notion? If it be accepted as demonstrating a God, must it not

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\* Cf. Professor Baillie's paper in this vol., pp. 210-11.

equally be accepted as demonstrating a devil? It seems possible to apply Anselm's reasoning in strict parity. A "Fool" has said in his heart, there is no devil. Is there then nothing real that can be so described? Of a truth, the devil, as a significant term, signifies that than which a lesser (or a worse) is inconceivable. The "Fool," then, is certain that there exists, at least in his understanding, that than which a lesser (or a worse) is inconceivable. Surely, that than which a worse is inconceivable cannot exist only in the understanding. For if, indeed, it exist only in the understanding, it can be further thought to be also in reality, and this is worse than a thought evil being. If, then, that than which a worse is inconceivable exists *in intellectu* only, then it is that than which a worse *can* be conceived, viz., a worse *in re*, but this is impossible. Therefore, it is certain that something than which a less (or worse) is inconceivable exists both in the understanding and in reality.

The Ontological Argument, therefore, really covers two limits, an upper and a lower. It might appear, therefore, that if it be received as pointing to a personal God it also points to a personal devil. It is not so alarming as that, however. For just as Anselm develops *propria* for his definition of the upper limit and those *propria* include the predicates of personality, so we may develop *propria* from the definition of the devil, and these would be found to exclude the predicates of personality. An impersonal devil is a great relief. We could not say that not to be is worse than to be, and, therefore, no devil at all, for it is clear that to be a devil is worse than not to be one. Whether Anselm contemplated the dualism of God and a devil as a result of his argument or not, I suggest that by parity of reasoning it really does involve this, strictly *a priori*. That the impersonal devil or evil thus reached is eternal follows equally, for a finite evil is not so bad as an infinite. Dr. Bosanquet\* would appear to have to accept this conclusion,

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\* *Principle of Individuality and Value*, p. 80, n.

for "the truth of the Ontological Argument is conceded in principle, and the value of the knowledge to be obtained under it is only a question of degree, *i.e.*, of the reservation under which any predicate truly qualifies Reality." And since (he has told us) every predicate has a place, and there is a place for every predicate, the devil, as demonstrated, must have his.

This is not frivolity. It does matter, as von Hügel shows\* when treating of Feuerbach, whether we affirm or deny an eternal personal subject of moral predicates. Denial of this, he says, leads to disaster. What will be the consequences of affirming an eternal subject of immoral predicates? I confess to being uncomfortable over my deduction from Anselm's argument; but, perhaps, my critics will show that the reality of the devil is, after all, only a pseudo-reality, and that its place as the downward limiting notion is merely regulative, whereas the upward limiting notion is truly constitutive of reality. Mr. Webb entertains the supposition of a devil (or devils), of non-human wills, in his chapter† on the personality of God, but it does not appear there as a consequence of the Ontological Argument, but as an hypothesis to account for the observed facts of suffering and sin.

## VI.

To sum up, then, I urge that—

(i) The argument is wrongly represented as implying the addition of existence as a predicate. It is rather a demonstration of the invalidity of the subtraction thereof, of the unity of thought and reality in respect, and only in respect, of that which comes within the definition. "Mere existence is not a predicate, but specifications or determinations of existence are predicable."‡

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\* *Op. cit.*, p. 243-4.

† *Op. cit.*, p. 269.

‡ R. Flint, *Theism*, 278 ff.

(ii) The question at issue, therefore, is a matter of the definition of God, the Absolute Reality. The Ontological Argument, having *a priori* demonstrated the reality of the *id quo nihil maius*, leaves it to subsequent deduction, based upon experience, particularly religious experience, to fill in the characterisations of God. It will do this in the progression of experience in the great historical religions.

(iii) For Anselm, the characterisations of God which follow from the definition, include the predicates, moral, æsthetic, and intellectual, of personality; but since the *id quo nihil maius* is absolute, these predicates make no claim to be exhaustive; and they may even be absorbed in others, at present beyond our ken, in such a way as to unify a fully abstract view like Mr. Bradley's with a fully concrete view like Anselm's.

(iv) When it is said that the argument is an assertion, not a proof, this means not so much that it is the assertion of the reality of a perfect Being by an imperfect, in virtue of the presence of the concept in his mind, but rather that it is the assertion or self-affirmation of that perfect Being, to an imperfect, of His own reality and His own perfection. The "argument" is an intellectual Epiphany: God with us.

(v) It is a confusion of the issue to refute or attempt to refute the argument by means of any illustrations drawn from the temporal and spatial series of finite existents; the Kantian criticism, in particular, is irrelevant, impertinent; and further, if admitted, is fatal to the Kantian ethics. For the Kantian ethics regards the Good Will as self-authenticated, yet denies the constitutive authenticity of the good willer, that can be but God, since finite wills and willers are admittedly imperfect.

(vi) Yet the Ontological Argument, if it is valid for the upper limiting notion and reality of God, is logically also valid for the lower limiting notion and reality of devil; and this is implicative of an unresolvable dualism.

(vii) It is not a trick or piece of juggling, but it fails to satisfy the mind because it is exclusively intellectual. It is not

deficient in validity, but it is deficient in value, in emotional value in particular. It constrains the intellect but does not constrain the will or the emotions; and it cannot do this until the definition with which it begins is amplified. Nevertheless, its supremacy over the *a posteriori* proofs is that it alone can really coerce the intellect, and Kant's treatment, by giving it pride of place amongst the proofs, is a realisation of this.

(viii) That (as against Mr. Webb) the argument *is* valid for a personal God; its failure to awaken a worshipful attitude in us arises because, by appealing solely to the intellect, its appeal is relatively impersonal and only a whole person can worship. Yet, it does not altogether fail even in this respect, as Anselm's perorations show.

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