

the categories; if it cannot, it is nothing. Kant himself grants that it may seem strange: “it seems striking to think of an object that comprises a nothing; but a nothing also presupposes only a thought which then cancels itself {i.e. which contradicts itself} and therefore has never had an existing object as its ground” (MK3, AA 29:960–1). In calling Baumgarten to account for not unifying the possible–impossible dichotomy at a higher level, Kant immediately negates this dichotomy by positing the very nothing in the terms upon which Baumgarten bases the very possibility of the possible. For, Kant holds that alongside the positive possibility, the object in general is also to contain a negative impossibility as nothing. But this very impossibility does not exist by Kant’s own admission (after all, it is, or at least it includes, the *nihil negativum*), which means that the object in general could only truly comprise possibility, however privated it may be, unless its possibility is completely privated in contradiction, in which case it is simply impossible. This, however, is precisely Baumgarten’s position: possibility is found in the negation of the impossible, that is, in not being impossible, and hence in being non-contradictory. In short: it is difficult to say what Kant’s concept above “the possible,” that is, “the object in general,” would mean in relation to Baumgarten if it itself were not simply a synonym for “the possible.” For, Kant is quite clear that the categories apply to objects in general, which is to say, to any possible—and not any impossible—object of intuition. If the categories are not applicable, we simply have: nothing

8

Baumgarten and Kant on Existence

Courtney D. Fugate

Few things are as recognizably Kantian as the claim that “*being* is obviously not a real predicate” (A599/B627). By means of it, Kant seems to have finally disclosed, once and for all, the *hamartia* that most philosophers suspected would eventually come to light in the drama of the ontological argument. And this may indeed be the case. But still, as difficult as it may be, we must not allow our presumption against the argument to cloud our appraisal of Kant’s particular attempts to refute the argument. To do so would expose ourselves to unnecessary risks in two ways; for if Kant is right, then we risk overlooking his real insight, rendering his victory pyrrhic; and if he is wrong, or if his arguments are not fully sufficient to the task, then we risk overlooking the deeper insight that a genuine refutation of the ontological argument might bring.

In either case, the greatest gain is to be expected from pitting Kant’s criticisms against the strongest version of the argument he attacks. Although such has only recently been recognized, the strongest version of the ontological argument is found in Baumgarten’s *Metaphysica*.¹ In this chapter, I will only consider Kant’s pre-Critical attack on the ontological argument in general, and on Baumgarten’s version in particular. I limit myself in this way in part due to considerations of space, but mainly because I think Kant’s arguments must be seen from within the context of the philosophical project he aims to bolster by means of them. And, clearly, the pre-Critical project of the *Only Possible Argument*, where Kant first argues that existence is not a predicate, is radically different from that of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

I will, however, approach Kant’s pre-Critical attack only after attempting to fully explain Baumgarten’s conception of existence and his version of the ontological argument from his own point of view. So in section I, I will explain how Baumgarten defines existence and distinguishes it in a fundamental and important way from actuality. I will also show that, despite what Kant and subsequent commentators have claimed, existence for Baumgarten is not complete determination. In section II, I will relate this concept of existence to other key concepts in the *Metaphysics*, and argue that it is not

¹ See Kannisto (2016) and Stang (2016). The latter in particular provides an exemplary case of the kind of even-handed assessment of Kant’s supposed refutation that I propose in this chapter.

a relation, but an internal affection composed of other attributes and sometimes also other modes, an internal affection which in contingent beings is grounded in a relation. In section III, I will use this to argue that, although for Baumgarten existence *per se* is not a mode, he agrees with Wolff that the existence of a contingent being is a mode that is grounded in an external causal nexus, either within a world or with an extramundane being. I then provide a response to the objection that existence as an internal mode is different from and so inconsistent with Baumgarten's general definition of existence. In section IV, I explain how Baumgarten's definition applies also to the case of the divine being, where this existence is not part of the essence of God, but is rather one of his attributes. I then use this, along with the previous distinction drawn between existence and actuality, to reconstruct Baumgarten's version of the ontological argument. In section V, I compare this briefly to Wolff's argument, and in sections VII and VIII, I finally explain and assess Kant's pre-Critical attack on the ontological argument in general, and on Baumgarten's version in particular.

I

Why existence is not synonymous with actuality and is not complete determination. As with other central terms, Baumgarten defines existence with great care:

EXISTENCE (act, cf. §210, actuality) is the collection [*complexus*] of affections that are compossible in something; i.e. the complement of essence or of internal possibility, insofar as essence is considered only as a collection [*complexus*] of determinations (§40). (BM, §55)

In approaching this definition, or indeed any definition, in Baumgarten's *Metaphysics*, it is crucial to keep two things in mind. The first (I will consider the second of these in the next section), which is so often overlooked by commentators that it bears stressing once again, is that we must not assume that the terms enclosed by parentheses are meant to serve as synonyms for the term which precedes them. In the Preface to the second edition, Baumgarten refers to these as "*denominaciones*," the Latin term for a metonym, or for a related name, which is used in place of a thing's correct name. He included these, as he explains, "so that the two [i.e. the term and those metonyms within parentheses] may also be more easily distinguished from each other, and I certainly did not thoughtlessly appropriate the parenthetical metonyms that have been rejected, whose defects even now I usually enumerate in my lectures" (BM, 89). To underscore his point, Baumgarten notices that in §40 he has placed "nature" in parentheses after "essence," two things he says he would never dream of equating, though others have done so. It is clear, then, that the inclusion of such metonyms was meant not to signal synonymy, but to serve the pedagogical function of reminding the lecturer when to explain the difference between the use of a term in the handbook and the way related terms have often mistakenly been used in its place.

Despite this, there are clearly also cases where the terms are indeed much closer in function, though also not synonyms in a strict sense. This is the case in the definition

of existence just given. Here "act" is clearly just a metonym, since it properly refers to the production of accidents in a substance (BM, §210). On the other hand, "actuality," also included within parentheses, must be defined in relation to the previous paragraph, where an actual being is said to be something that, "aside from essence... is... determined with regard to all the affections that are also compossible in it" (BM, §54; both emphases added). This would seem to be the same as "existence," and indeed the two are intimately related. But yet they are not synonyms. Just circumstantially, this is already indicated by the use of two different terms in such close proximity. Baumgarten, the great analyst (as Kant referred to him), has crafted his text in such a careful way and with such a single-minded focus on consistency and precision, rather than elegance (BM, 93), that it is simply incredible that he would alternate between synonyms for no philosophical reason.

So why, then, the two terms, "*actualitas*" and "*existentia*"? The difference between existence and actuality lies in the difference between what is or may be determined (a specific content, *determinabile* or *determinatum*) and the act of determining or being determined (*determinare*). Notice that the definition of existence cited above makes no reference whatever to the act of determining or being determined.² "Existence" is rather specifically the collection (*complexus*) or set of compossible affections that a thing may have ("compossible"). It is only with the introduction of "actuality" that determination first begins to play a role; for actuality lies in something's *being determined* with respect to all affections, that is, with respect to existence. Now, since "the ground of each and every thing that is in something is its SUFFICIENT (complete, total) GROUND" (§21), actuality can also be said to lie in something's being sufficiently determined with respect to the collection of its compossible affections, that is, its existence. Hence, existence is itself a being with a specific content, namely a certain set of compossible properties; actuality, by contrast, is the position or sufficient determination of something with respect to this being. It follows that, whatever else existence might be, for Baumgarten it is *not* complete determination; for existence does not, by itself, imply sufficient determination or actuality.³ This is why "possible existence" and "actual existence" are well-formed phrases, while "possible actuality" and "actual actuality" are not.

Another way to understand this key distinction is by noting that since existence is a set of affections, and hence possesses a certain content that corresponds to the kind of

² Some subtlety is required here; for in one sense existence as such does imply determination, namely determination by the essence. All grounds are determining, and what is determined by a ground is a determination. Hence, since essence is the ground of affections, these are indeed internal determinations, which to this extent are determined. However, and this is the key point, such determination is insufficient with respect to modes. Hence, while modes are determinations, and indeed are determined by the essence, they are only partially so. Positing the essence posits merely the real possibility of the modes (i.e. their determination as possible), not the modes as fully determined. So to be most correct (but at the risk of confusion) one would have to say that existence, which can remain merely possible, by itself implies only insufficient determination, whereas actuality implies sufficient determination with respect to all affections.

³ This mistaken view is found in Proops (2015).

being whose existence it is (or would be), there are in fact possible different species of existence. This is what explains the otherwise curious way in which Baumgarten often uses the term "existence." For instance, in §192 we are told that the "existence of an accident as such is INHERENCE, whereas the existence of substance as such is SUBSISTENCE." Inherence and subsistence thus describe *ways* in which something *can be* determined, or *can be* actual, namely, as having to be in another or as not having to be in another (BM, §191); as *ways* alone, they therefore do not directly imply or include actuality. This is also part of the reason why Baumgarten can consistently claim that the existence of a contingent being is a mode (§257) (i.e. a specific kind of predicate), and why, without violating the traditional definition of a reality as being a positive thinkable content (indifferent to actuality as such), he can claim that existence is a reality (§66). By contrast with this, "actuality" lies quite simply in being *sufficiently determined* with respect to existence, and since determining or positing is a completely simple concept for which there are no further species, in principle there cannot be different species of actuality.

Baumgarten's discussion of congruence in §270 provides an illuminating instance where this difference between existence and actuality indeed plays a crucial role. It reads:

It is impossible for many actual beings outside of one another to be totally congruent. For, if they exist mutually outside of one another, then any given one will possess its own proper existence (§86), which will be different from the existence of any other (§38). Hence, there would be at least one unique attribute or mode (§77), and in fact either a quality or a quantity (§69), which was in one being but not in another (§38, 55). Hence two beings would not be totally congruent (§70, 267). Totally congruent beings are the same with respect to all internal distinguishing marks (§267, 70). Hence the existence of one is not different from the existence of the other (§70), and therefore they do not exist mutually outside of one another.

What is most important in this argument is the way in which existence is clearly linked with the specific identity or character of a being. As Baumgarten argues, if two beings are different (outside of one another), then each must have its "own proper existence" ("*sue et propria*"), and this means ("Hence"), they must differ in respect to their content, that is, their determinations. This argument makes sense only because the existence of a being is precisely the collection of its affections, that is, the determinations that go beyond its bare essence. We should notice also that this argument would not work if "existence" were replaced by "actuality." For "actuality," as we have seen, consists simply in a thing's *being determined* with respect to its existence, of whatever kind that may be. And the mere fact that two things are determined separately does not allow us to conclude straight away that they are determined *differently* (i.e. in different *ways*), and thus that they differ in regard to their existence and hence are not totally congruent. To show this, we must know the *way* in which they are actual, namely, as differing with regard to their existence; then, since any difference in existence just means a difference with respect to at least one determination, it follows that they cannot be totally congruent.

What all of this means is that we must be exceedingly careful, as Baumgarten himself evidently is, not to treat "existence" or the verb "to exist" as equivalent to "actuality" and "to be actual." As we will see more fully below, existence stands in a class with essence, both of which together compose the "whatness" or content of a being; while actuality, by contrast, stands in a distinct class along with possibility and necessity, all three of which are modalities (not species) of determination. The relation between existence and actuality can therefore be understood along the lines of the distinction between *what* something is and *that* it is, respectively. And just as *that* a being has a color, does not entail *what* color it has, so also the actuality of a being (which is just the having of an existence), does not entail what existence the actual being has. Similarly, existence by itself does not entail actuality, for the same reason that the collection of affections a being may have, does not by itself entail that the being has it. As we will see further below, this distinction is of the utmost importance, and a failure to notice it has led to a nearly complete mischaracterization of Baumgarten's views on existence.

In particular, as we have seen, the constant refrain one hears in the literature, that Baumgarten takes existence to be complete determination or complete internal determination, is clearly inaccurate. And the same goes for the claim that Baumgarten takes complete internal determination to be the criterion of existence.⁴ Kant ascribes this view to Baumgarten (EMB, AA 2:76), but Baumgarten himself does not oblige. As Mario Casula has noted, Baumgarten indeed never explicitly relates existence to complete determination or to complete internal determination in the *Metaphysics* (Casula 1973, 102ff.). In §148, "complete determination" is defined not as the collection of compossible affections (i.e. existence), but rather as "the collection of *all determinations* compossible in a being" (emphasis added). This definition is then used to differentiate not existence from the merely possible, but the singular from the universal. Unlike "all determinations," "affections" include only those that are internal (§41).⁵ As for "complete internal determination," in §152 Baumgarten states that "Singular beings are internally entirely determined (§148), and hence are actual (§54)." He thus explicitly ties complete internal determination to actuality, not to existence. So there are many reasons why both complete determination and complete internal determination are not simply equivalent to existence.

II

What existence is. Above I said it is crucial to keep two things in mind when approaching Baumgarten's definition of existence. The second is the rule that Baumgarten followed

⁴ This view is found in Kannisto (2016). Of course, complete internal determination is a criterion, or rather the very definition, of actuality. Since, however, existence is essentially a whatness, and *that* a being is actual, does not provide a criterion for *what* a being actually is, I cannot agree that complete internal determination is also a criterion of existence. It is at most a criterion of *having* or being sufficiently determined with respect to some existence, that is, being actual. My thanks to Toni Kannisto for pushing me to clarify this point.

⁵ Angelica Nuzzo makes essentially the same point in her contribution to this volume.

uncompromisingly throughout the composition and subsequent refinement of his *Metaphysics*: “Any note which is sufficiently determined by another does not enter into a definition” (BM, 88). Although this had long been a central tenet of Aristotelian logic, it was very often violated for the sake of clarity and explicitness.⁶ The acroamatic character of Baumgarten’s textbook, however, allows him to follow this rule religiously, leaving the derivation of further notes, and thus the clarification of the full significance of his definitions, to the lecture hall. Since Baumgarten’s lecture hall is all but closed to us today,⁷ the onus lies on us to reconstitute the “desiccated skeleton” of his *Metaphysics* into the good lady it was meant to be (BM, 91).

To really enter into and understand Baumgarten’s definition of existence, we therefore have to examine its entheses so that we can properly reconnect it by way of tendons and nerves to all the related members of the *Metaphysics*. The first such entheses is located in the phrase “collection of affections.” Here the usual translation of “*complexus*” (German, “*Inbegriff*”) by “sum total,” which derives from a somewhat dubious practice in Kant translation, must be avoided.⁸ In Latin, *complexus* connotes not totality or the result of summing all things of a certain kind, but rather what is embraced within a common area or boundary (notably as does *Inbegriff*)⁹, thus a “set” or “collection.” The *complexus* of the numbers 1, 2 and 3, for example, would be {1, 2, 3}, not 6; and a “*complexus* of numbers” would not necessarily mean the set of all numbers, but could also be some specific set of them. This latter ambiguity is compounded in the Latin language by the absence of definite and indefinite articles, which means that the difference between “the collection” and “a collection” must be judged carefully by context. In the present case, if by “*complexus*” Baumgarten meant *the* totality or sum of all affections that are compossible in something, then it would follow that the existence of any two beings with the same essence would have to be identical. For instance, if we assume that two beings share only the essence “duck,” then the totality of affections that could (compossibly) be added to each of them, and hence also their existence, would be the same; they could each be brown or white, Eider or Stifftail, etc. But as we have seen, it is Baumgarten’s view that the existence of each being is distinct from the existence of any other. So, Baumgarten’s meaning must rather be that the existence of a being consists of some set or specific collection of compossible affections distinctive to said being as the individual that it is (or that it would be, were it actual).

So far so good. But what then is an “affection”? Baumgarten defines affections as being “the internal determinations of a possible thing that are consequences of the

essence” (§41). If an affection is sufficiently grounded in the essence of a being, Baumgarten calls it an “attribute” of that thing; but if it is only insufficiently (partially) grounded in the essence, he calls it a “mode.” The role of the mode in Baumgarten is thus to capture the idea of an affection, whether it be positive or negative, that may or may not belong to a being. Furthermore, since it *can* belong to a being, or since it is a possible affection of a being, the mode must have some ground in the essence; for it is in virtue of just such a ground that it is said to be a determination, and indeed an internal one, of that very being. But because a given mode is also only partially grounded in the essence, it can also fail to belong to the thing, thus remaining a merely possible determination of it. This means that the determination of a mode requires something outside of the essence to supply the remaining grounds, which, together with the essence, provide the entire sufficient ground for a given mode.

Of course, there remains a legitimate question as to why, if the sufficient ground of a mode is supplied by two separate beings, the mode happens to be ascribed only to one as an internal determination or “affection.” Why, for instance, is the burn ascribed to my hand, and so to its particular existence, rather than to the fire that caused it? Baumgarten presents a reasonable answer to this question in §37: We can represent my hand as possibly being burned based on a knowledge of its essence, without at the same time representing a fire that will or has burned it. This possibility can thus be represented as internal to the very structure of what it is to be a hand, that is, to be a lump of matter capable of decomposition in the presence of oxygen. In other words, we can understand that there remains in my hand a real ground of the possibility of being burned, even if my hand never is actually burned. Yet we cannot also, in the same way, represent the fire as possibly burning my hand, or anything else, without representing the fire *and also* a being capable of being burned.

It is this asymmetry in representability that accounts for the special belonging of a mode to a thing as an internal determination. It is thus also what distinguishes attributes and modes from relations, which latter are external determinations. By contrast with those internal determinations that are “determinations of a possible being . . . representable in it even when it is not yet considered in a nexus,” relations or external determinations “are respects [i.e. respective determinations] of possible things that are not representable in these considered in themselves [i.e. ‘not in a nexus with those things that are posited externally to it,’ BM, §15]” (§37). This distinction between attributes and modes, as internal determinations, and relations, as external determinations, can be well illustrated by the examples of spatial location and age. For instance, it is not possible to represent August as to the left of Max, without representing Max and his being to the right of August; and it is not possible to represent William as older than Abraham, without representing Abraham as younger than William. While these relations are not themselves symmetrical with respect to their content, they are perfectly symmetrical with respect to their dependency (or the dependency of their being representable) on the two beings in question. This symmetry is characteristic of relations and is what precludes their being ascribed

⁶ A version of this rule is also found in the logic textbook of Baumgarten’s famous student, Georg Friedrich Meier. See Meier (2016, §270, p. 61).

⁷ Although not entirely reliable, the writings of Meier provide many insights into what might have been said in the lecture hall. See his *Metaphysik*, 4 vols (1755–9).

⁸ For a defense of this point, see Eberhard (2016, xliii).

⁹ Adelung (1774–86) defines “*Inbegriff*” as follows: “1) Ein in seine Gränzen eingeschlossener Ort, ein gewisser Bezirk; in welcher Bedeutung es doch wenig mehr gebraucht wird. 2) Figürlich, was in einem solchen Raume begriffen und beschlossen ist, und in noch weiterer Bedeutung, alle in einem Raume beysammen befindliche Dinge als ein Ganzes betrachtet.”

properly to one being rather than the other: “to the left of” is not a property that can be attributed to August, or “older than” to William, considered totally in isolation from anything else.

Nevertheless, it is no doubt true that relations are often founded upon internal determinations. The actual burning of my hand by fire, a typical case of efficient causality, is itself a relation (see BM, §312, 319). But it is founded upon the internal decomposition of my flesh and the power of the fire to effect such decomposition, both of which are internal determinations. A Baumgartian analysis of this case would go as follows: When my hand is burned by fire, (1) the possibility of decomposition of the hand, (2) is actualized (3) by the power of fire to impart heat. Here the ability to represent this possible state in the fabric of my hand by itself is the basis of the ascription of the eventual burn to it; the ability to represent (3) in this same way is the basis for the ascription of the agency to the fire; and the inability to represent (3) without representing both (1) and (2) accounts for fact that causality is as an external relation. According to this model, internal determinations can be dependent upon those within another being and also be a member within an external relation, without thereby ceasing to be internal.

This may or may not be a satisfying account of relations, and it may or may not require considerable reframing in light of Baumgarten’s unique flavor of pre-established harmony (see BM, §448–65). But the importance of this brief foray into his theory of internal and external determinations lies rather in its implications for his definition of existence. Existence is a “collection of affections.” As we have now seen, affections include attributes and modes, both of which are internal determinations. Neither attributes nor modes are relations, but both can serve as members within, or foundations for, relations. Moreover, whereas attributes are sufficiently grounded in a thing’s essence, modes are only partially grounded. Their actuality as determined internal modes therefore rests on something else, indeed on something external to the being in question.¹⁰ Existence, therefore, may consist of either attributes alone, or of attributes and modes, depending on the kind of being in question. In no case, however, can existence be a relation, although in the case of all contingent beings (as we will see later) their actual existence is always a member in a relation of causality.

Before passing to a consideration of the different species of existence, we should say something about the remaining elements in Baumgarten’s definition. As we read, the affections constituting existence must be “compossible.” Although (or perhaps because) Baumgarten says next to nothing about compossibility in the *Metaphysics*, it likely just means possible as together in one being, that is, that no contradiction arises from several things being posited together in one being (see BM, §8–12; cf. §807).

¹⁰ Again, Baumgarten’s argument here is complicated by his very subtle conception of pre-established harmony, which maintains the mutual dependency of beings with respect to their modes and their internal sufficiency in this same respect. This larger picture, however, complements rather than overturns the present argument. Still, a fuller account of Baumgarten’s theory of pre-established harmony, along with its relevance to his conception of existence, should be undertaken.

The part following the semicolon in Baumgarten’s definition of existence is obviously intended to be a paraphrase of what came before. So does this agree with the foregoing interpretation? As it reads, existence is “the complement of essence or of internal possibility, insofar as essence is considered only as a collection [*complexus*] of determinations (§40).” “Complement” is defined in §155 as “those parts that must be taken together with a given part so that [together] they are entirely identical with the whole,” which means that existence is that which must be added to the essence in order to constitute the whole being. Since essence consists only of the collection of essentials in a thing, that is, “the internal determinations of a possible thing [that] are... the unqualified grounds of the rest of the internal determinations” (§39), the complement to this (and so existence) must be whatever attributes or modes also belong to the being in question. This clearly agrees with what we found earlier: Neither part of the definition of existence includes or implies actuality; rather, existence is a certain part of the content or whatness of a being.

In the literature it is often said that Baumgarten follows Wolff in taking existence to be the complement of possibility. Since Baumgarten in fact never said any such thing, it is worthwhile to pause and recognize what he actually said and had in mind while saying it. As we saw above, existence is in fact the complement of *essence* or of *internal possibility*, that is, the complement of the collection of the internal determinations of a thing that are “unqualified grounds of the rest.” Now, because essentials are restricted precisely to unqualified grounds (*simpliciter talis*), they do not include even attributes, let alone possible modes. By essence or internal possibility, Baumgarten thus emphatically means neither possibility as such nor Leibnizian complete concepts. Rather, in his view essence and existence together equal the content of the whole being, irrespective of its actuality.

The precise meaning of this last statement is important to recognize, because of its connection with Kant’s criticism of the “*complementum possibilitatis*” doctrine, which we will examine later. For as long as it is a question of Wolff’s vague claim that existence is the complement of possibility, it seems reasonable to suppose that part of that complement may well be actuality (in Baumgarten’s sense). And if it is then claimed that the complement of possibility is a reality, then Kant would be justified in calling foul, since actuality or being-sufficiently-determined cannot itself be a reality in this sense. Baumgarten, however, astutely avoids this error by restricting existence entirely to content, and sharply separating this from actuality as sufficient determination with respect to this content. So, for him, the complement of possibility simply cannot be or include actuality.

Finally, we might wonder why Baumgarten has chosen to qualify this second part of his definition by saying “insofar as essence is considered only as a collection of determinations (§40).” Although this is undoubtedly a correct translation,¹¹ it is indeed

¹¹ Cf. Stang (2016, 57). First of all, “*haec*” can only refer to either “*essentiae*” or “*possibilitatis interna*.” Since “essence” and “internal possibility” are synonyms, the substitution of one or the other for “*haec*” does not matter. Second of all, this translation is confirmed by the reference to §40, which itself refers to §39, where essence is defined to be a collection of determinations.

unclear why Baumgarten has chosen to add this qualification. The likely answer lies in the possible complications arising from the fact that attributes are sufficiently grounded in the essence. Hence, if essence were considered not as a mere collection of most primitive determinations, but also in view of what follows from it necessarily, then the complement, and so also existence, could only consist of modes. But as we will see below, the existence of at least one being must lie in its attributes alone; for it can have no modes at all.

III

That existence per se is not a mode; that the existence of a contingent being is a mode; what the ground of the actuality of this mode is. To this point the definition of existence has been completely general. We have seen that it may consist of either attributes alone, or of attributes and modes, depending upon the kind of being in question. So, despite claims made in the literature, for Baumgarten existence *per se* is not a mode. But some beings do have modes, in which case their existence itself will contain at least one mode along with any attributes grounded in its essence. Furthermore, since modes are not sufficiently grounded in the essence, it follows that in this case existence (as the collection of affections including modes), too, will not be sufficiently grounded in the essence. But this is the very definition of what it is to be a mode. Hence, existence itself, still considered as a mere collection of attributes and modes, will in this case itself be a mode. That whose existence is a mode, however, is a contingent and not a necessary being (§109). Therefore, “a contingent being can be defined as a being whose existence is a mode” (§134). We can hence conclude: Although existence for Baumgarten is not *per se* a mode, he agrees with Wolff when the latter writes that “the existence of a contingent being is nothing other than its mode” (“*Existentia entis contingentis nonnisi modus ejus est*”) (WO, §316).¹²

Some commentators have mistakenly taken Baumgarten’s use of the term “mode” to indicate that for him the existence of finite beings must be something separate from all their other affections, some kind of special and otherwise contentless mode, which, when added, makes a being with all its other determinations spring into actuality.¹³ Leaving aside for the moment that this suggestion elides the crucial distinction between existence and actuality, it can be seen from our previous analysis that this view has no basis whatsoever in Baumgarten’s text. There is nothing at all that precludes one mode from being composed of other attributes and modes. A collection is a whole or one, and the collection of internal determinations is one part that, like the further parts from which it is composed, is itself insufficiently grounded in the essence. Considered

¹² For a fuller treatment of Wolff’s views, see Michaelis (1937). An alternative view is found in Abaci (forthcoming).

¹³ Abaci holds this view (Abaci forthcoming), while Stang (2016) and Kannisto (2016, esp. n. 23) provide exceptions to it.

as such a “one,” which Baumgarten terms a being’s specific “existence,” this collection can sensibly be regarded as an affection or an internal mode. It is in exactly this same manner that numbers function; being four is nothing more than being four ones; there is no need to add a fifth. Yet four is just as much a “number” as are each of the ones composing it. In the same way, existence adds nothing to all the determinations that a thing may have; it rather just is these determinations taken as a whole or collection.

So, on Baumgarten’s view, the existence of every contingent being is a mode, namely the collection of its attributes and the modes insufficiently grounded in its own essence. Existence is not a special contentless mode, but rather has its content specified by the specific attributes and modes composing it. Moreover, this mode, like every other, may or may not belong to the being in question. To actually belong to the being, and hence for this being itself to be actual (see the definition of actuality above), the existence of a contingent being must be determined by something other than and outside of its internal determinations (§308). But the agent of such determination, and hence of the being’s actuality, is a cause. So a contingent being’s actuality, that is, the determination of its existence, must be caused by one or more beings external to it. If it inhabits a world of several substances, then in one respect, the proximal cause of the determination of a being’s existence will lie in its nexus with all the other members of its world. However, as Baumgarten further argues, the existence of the world is composed of the existences of all of its parts. Since these are modes, the existence of the entire world will itself be a mode (§361). Hence, the determination of this existence, that is, the actuality of the world itself, must rest on an extramundane cause. And this means that the remote and ultimate cause of every contingent being’s existence will also, in another respect, lie in what will later prove to be the necessary and divine being.

To summarize our conclusions to this point, we can now see that, for Baumgarten, existence is not a cosmological or relational concept, even if we restrict ourselves to merely contingent beings. It is rather a *possible* internal determination or mode and so also does not consist in being part of a world. Actuality, or the *determination* of this existence, is, however, *ab alio*, and if part of that *alius* lies in a nexus of other contingent things, then existence will indeed have a partially cosmological ground. However, the world itself, as a contingent being, is also necessarily *ab alio*, and so the determination of its existence, and hence its actuality, will ultimately rest on the action of an extramundane cause.

IV

Baumgarten’s definition of existence is univocal;¹⁴ the difference between the divine essence and its existence; Baumgarten’s ontological argument. It might seem that with a

¹⁴ Tommasi (2012) provides an insightful discussion of Wolff’s and Baumgarten’s employment of the scholastic doctrine of analogy in their natural theologies (see BM, §826–7). Although Baumgarten certainly could have used this in his account of divine existence, he evidently does not.

clear understanding of Baumgarten's concepts of existence and actuality in hand, we could now turn immediately to an interpretation and appraisal of his version of the ontological argument. Kant, at least, seems to think so, since he usually illustrates his refutation with examples of the existence of regular objects like German thalers or Julius Caesar. But our foregoing examination should already give us reason to suspect the issue is not so simple. The species of existence we have been analyzing so far has clearly been such as can only apply to finite and contingent beings. After all, if existence is in this case a mode, then it must be a mode of something; and whatever has modes, is a contingent being by definition. God, however, is a necessary being, and hence can have no modes: "All internal determinations of a necessary being are absolutely necessary... There are no modes in a necessary being" (BM, §110–11; see also §825).

It is in view of this fact that Baumgarten has wisely crafted his original definition of existence in §55 so as to apply also to the case where a being has no modes, only attributes. In this special case, the existence of the being will of course still consist in the collection of its affections, but this collection will be populated only by all the determinations that follow necessarily from the essence. Now, unlike modes, attributes are never merely possible determinations of a being, which may or may not belong to it; as sufficiently grounded in the essence alone, attributes are always in fact determined as belonging to the being. Hence, attributes are always actual, and if the existence of a being consists entirely of attributes, it follows that its existence too will be necessarily determined, and hence the being itself will be actual. Therefore, if a necessary being is possible, then it is actual, because it can be determined in only one way and so is determined in that way.

Ian Proops has recently suggested that Baumgarten's definition of existence stands in obvious contradiction with his employment of an ontological argument. He believes it to be Baumgarten's view that "existence is something external to... those concepts that represent essential properties and necessary accidents" (Proops 2015, 14), which, if true, would mean that existence cannot be contained in the concept of the most real being as the ontological argument (at least on Proops' reading) contends. We can now see why this is incorrect. Even if we restrict ourselves to contingent beings, it is false that existence lies outside of both its essence and its attributes ("necessary accidents").¹⁵ The first part, of course, is correct with regard to both contingent and necessary beings: Existence, as a "collection of affections," necessarily lies outside of the essence of a being; it is just the complement of that essence. By definition, then, existence can never be the part of a being's essence, not even in the case of the necessary being. However, existence itself always includes a being's attributes, even in the case of merely contingent beings. So existence is not outside of the attributes; in contingent beings it consists of the collection of attributes and modes, while in a necessary being it consists of the

¹⁵ Stang (2016, 61n. 57) astutely points out Proops' error, but then claims that Baumgarten instead takes existence to be contained in the essence of the necessary being, with which I cannot agree. Abaci similarly claims that in God existence is an essential determination (Abaci forthcoming).

collection of attributes alone. Here it must again be stressed that, although attributes are sufficiently determined by a being's essence, by definition they are not part of it (see BM, §39). As we will soon see more fully, it is also a mischaracterization of Baumgarten's view to say that he takes the ontological argument to show that existence is contained in the essence of the most perfect being.

We are now approaching the vicinity of Baumgarten's version of the ontological argument, although the argument above for the actuality of a necessary being is not yet it. To make our way further in that direction, we must first understand a bit better how Baumgarten himself understands the distinction between God's essence and his attributes. Indeed, it is one of Kant's more serious failings that he does not address some of the subtler aspects of Baumgarten's views on God relevant to the ontological argument. The chief of these is the doctrine that God possesses infinitely many different essences. The underlying idea is that the absolute unity and determinacy of God's nature must infinitely exceed any and every attempt to grasp it within a finite intellect. An important consequence of this, on Baumgarten's view, is that any concept or property of God must be regarded, at least in principle, as an entirely sufficient ground for deriving all of his possible concepts or properties. Now, since the essence of a being is precisely the first or unqualified determinations of a being that contain the grounds for the rest (BM, §39), it follows that any concept or property of God can truly be regarded as his essence, while all the other concepts are regarded instead as his attributes or perfections. As Baumgarten writes, "the first concepts of God are infinite, and any of these, when chosen to be the essence, is nevertheless the unique essence of God" (BM, §816).

One important result of this is that when we do choose a particular concept to be the essence of God, and thereby choose to treat the other concepts as his attributes, this must be based entirely on a subjective preference (BM, §817). The truth of the matter is that infinitely many different theological doctrines are possible in themselves, each built on a different concept of God, and each of which could provide a distinct inroad to the comprehension of the divine being.¹⁶ If we look at the matter from a genuinely Baumgartian point of view, therefore, there must even be a possible theology in which actuality itself is the unique essence of God, and in which, therefore, no ontological argument would be either possible or necessary.

However, Baumgarten himself suggests that it is preferable to choose the concept from which it is easiest and most illuminating to derive the chief properties of the divine being. It seems that the peculiar nature of our finite minds makes it such that some theologies prove unsuitable or incapable of providing us with the kind of insight we require. Following Descartes, Baumgarten chooses to base his own theology on the concept of God as the most perfect being, and it is hence from this concept that his ontological argument departs. Here is the argument in outline:

- (1) (Def.) "The most perfect being is that to which belongs the highest and greatest perfection among beings" (BM, §803).

¹⁶ This important doctrine is preserved in Eberhard (2016, esp. 2 and 12–13).

- (2) (Def.) Perfections are the determinations of the divine being (BM, §804).
- (3) Hence, the perfections in the divine being are the greatest possible.
- (4) (Def.) A true positive determination is a reality (BM, §36).
- (5) Hence, reality is a perfection of the most perfect being, and indeed the reality of this being is the greatest possible (BM, §806; from (4) and (3)).
- (6) (Def.) Realities are purely positive determinations, which therefore contain no negations.
- (7) Contradiction only arises where what is posited by one thing is negated by the other.
- (8) Hence, it is impossible for realities as such to contradict one another.
- (9) Hence, all realities are compossible in a being.
- (10) Hence, the reality of the most perfect being consists of the totality of all realities (*omnitudo realitatis*); or, otherwise stated, the most perfect being is determined in such a way that it has all possible realities for its perfections.
- (11) Existence, or the collection of affections compossible in a being, is itself a possible affection and hence a possible positive determination.
- (12) The existence of a being is a reality (BM, §810, from (4) and (11)).
- (13) Therefore, the most perfect being possesses an existence, i.e. it is sufficiently determined with regard to its unique existence (BM, §810).
- (14) A being that is determined with regard to its existence is actual (BM, §54).
- (15) Therefore, the most perfect being is actual.
- (16) (Def.) God is the most perfect being.
- (17) Therefore, God is actual (BM, §811).

Although I have supplied a few subsidiary steps and definitions from elsewhere in the *Metaphysics*, the above is basically a literal sketch of the argument made in §803–11. As presented, Baumgarten's argument mimics the outward form of a familiar portion of the Cartesian ontological argument: God is the most perfect being; existence is a perfection; therefore, God exists. But it differs not only through the Leibnizian supplement found in steps (6) to (9), but also in two further essential ways:

First, Baumgarten's claim that existence is a perfection does not rest on the idea that existence consists of a reality separate from all of God's other affections. As we have amply seen, it consists rather in the collection of these affections and nothing besides. Indeed, if Baumgarten's definition of existence is correct, then it makes absolutely no sense to suggest that we can conceive of a being that would be determined with regard to all affections other than existence. For Baumgarten, the real meaning of the claim that existence is a reality is just that the collection of a thing's affections is itself a reality. This has the virtue of being perfectly consistent with the scholastic doctrine, also maintained by Wolff (in some places) and Baumgarten, that "reality" refers to the content or "whatness" (*quiddity*) of something, not to its "thatness" or actuality.

Second, although none of the reconstructions of Baumgarten's argument in the secondary literature have attended to this fact, the distinction between existence and actuality plays an absolutely fundamental role. Baumgarten's goal in the argument is not simply to show that the most perfect being possesses the determination "existence" (there is no such general determination; rather, each existence is a specific set of affections), but that the most perfect being is *sufficiently determined* with regard to all its predicates and hence with respect to its specific existence. This "being-sufficiently-determined" is itself not existence but actuality. This means that the real core of the argument lies in the claim that the essence "the most real being" is entirely sufficient to determine all of its possible affections, that, in effect, each of its affections, and so also its existence, is an attribute.

With this in mind, we can now extract the unique inner form of Baumgarten's ontological argument. It begins from a more or less arbitrarily chosen essence of God as the "most perfect being" and seeks to show that this essence provides a completely sufficient ground for determining all of this being's other affections (this is the basic meaning of (10)). Then, since all of its other affections constitute its existence, it follows that the chosen essence of this being, that is, of God, *sufficiently determines* his existence. And since any being that is *sufficiently determined* with regard to its existence is *actual*, it follows from the chosen essence of God that he is actual. It should be noted here that, although Baumgarten's argument relies on the thesis that existence is a reality or real predicate, to use Kant's terminology, it does not rely on the thesis that *actuality* is a reality or real predicate. Actuality, as we have seen, is not itself a certain content, but rather the being-sufficiently-determined by a certain content, namely, a distinct existence. It should also be noted that, despite the reconstructions of some commentators, Baumgarten's argument does not invoke the concept of absolutely necessary existence. That "the existence of God is absolutely necessary" is only first proven and elaborated in §823–6. And in agreement with Baumgarten's unique concept of existence, its central meaning consists in the claim that God's existence (i.e. the unique collection of his compossible affections) is determinable only in one way, such that its being determined differently would imply a contradiction. It is therefore not equivalent to the claim that God's actuality is absolutely necessary (which is found nowhere in the *Metaphysics*), but is rather intended to be a claim about the modality of all the divine perfections, namely, that their being determined otherwise would imply a contradiction. Of course, if the existence of a most perfect being can be determined in only one way, and thus is absolutely necessary, it follows that its existence is determined, and thus that its actuality is equally necessary. But this is not a conclusion Baumgarten chooses to draw explicitly.

V

The differences between Baumgarten's and Wolff's ontological arguments. Before turning to Kant's pre-Critical attack on the ontological argument it will be highly instructive to

briefly compare the above with the version of the ontological argument found in Wolff's writings. Unlike Baumgarten, Wolff explicitly treats existence and actuality as synonyms, meaning by both simply the "complement of possibility" (*complementum possibilitatis*) (WO, §174). He arrives at this definition from the following consideration, which is also not found in Baumgarten: Because we can conceive of something as possible that does not for that reason exist (WO, §171), possibility is insufficient to determine existence (WO, §172). Hence, something else must be added in order to determine existence (WO, §172). Therefore, existence (nominally defined) is the complement of possibility (WO, §174). From his language and the example Wolff employs in §171, it is clear that, again unlike Baumgarten, he takes "possibility" in this context to mean possibility in general, and not merely essence.

Unsurprisingly, when we turn to Wolff's version of the ontological argument these differences lead to an entirely different formulation from what we found in the *Metaphysics*. Baumgarten, as we have seen, made no use of the concept of absolutely necessary existence in his argument. Wolff, by contrast, proves God's absolutely necessary existence first so that he can draw from it a central premise for his ontological argument. Thus in the first volume of his *Theologia naturalis*, he argues from the existence of the human soul as a thing possessing an extrinsic sufficient cause, and the insufficiency of an unending chain of similarly insufficient beings, to the existence of a being that must contain the sufficient ground of the existence of other things as well as of itself, and hence must possess absolutely necessary existence (WTN1, §24). In the second volume of the same work, Wolff then sets up the ontological argument in the more or less typical Leibnizian way, arguing for the possibility of a being possessing all realities, defining God as the most perfect being, then proposing that absolutely necessary existence is a reality, followed by the conclusion that God has absolutely necessary existence. However, his proof of the key premise that absolutely necessary existence is a reality proceeds in a way entirely different from what we found in Baumgarten. In this context, Wolff does not define reality as he once did in his *Ontology* (WO, §243), namely as a content (*quicquid est vel esse posse concipitur*) or "whatness" (*quidditas*), or what Baumgarten would call a positive true determination, but rather as "whatever is understood to truly be in something, rather than merely appearing to be in something through our confused perceptions" (WTN2, §5). Wolff then recalls that, since he has already proven that God is truly a being with absolutely necessary existence, it follows that absolutely necessary existence is a reality (WTN2, §20). Whence it follows that the most perfect being, as the being possessing all realities, also possesses absolutely necessary existence.

Whatever else one might say about this curious line of reasoning, it is evident that it shares next to nothing with Baumgarten's ontological argument. The two arguments have not only different premises, but also different conclusions (namely, absolutely necessary existence, on the one hand, and actuality on the other). Evidently, Baumgarten's conception of existence and the distinction he draws between it and

actuality are true innovations and (I would argue) also considerable improvements over what is found in Wolff.¹⁷

VI

Kant's pre-Critical attack on the ontological argument. There is indeed something curious about Kant's rejection of the ontological argument in the pre-Critical period. On the one hand, it does not appear to be rooted in a general prejudice against rationalistic arguments for God's existence, since at this time Kant defends one of his own invention. Yet, on the other, it also does not appear to be rooted in purely philosophical grounds, since he attempts to refute it by various and mutually contradictory arguments.

In the *New Elucidation* of 1755, which contains Kant's first attack on the ontological argument, he relies entirely on a version of Caterus's objection. While admitting that existence is indeed entailed by the concept of an *omnitudo realitatis*, he argues that unless it be proven that the concept of God is a true one, "the existence of that being is also only an existence in ideas" (PPC, AA 1:394). But as a reflection most likely penned in the early 1760s makes clear, Kant soon came to see that Caterus's objection has at least two irremediable problems. First, the objection would seem to undermine all arguments meant to establish that a being possesses a particular predicate; for "in such a way we would have to say of all predicates that belong to a possible thing: they would not belong to it in fact, but rather only in the thought of it" (Refl, AA 17:240, no. 3706). Second, and more deeply, it commits the profound mistake of not recognizing that the foundation of the truth of our thoughts rests on the objective content and connections of concepts in themselves. Kant notes in this regard that the fact that the interior angles of a triangle are equal to that of two right angles is true no matter whether a triangle exists or anyone ever thinks about it; genuine truths have their basis in objective essences in themselves. So if it is true that the essence of a being necessarily entails existence, then this is because it necessarily entails existence, not because we have thought it in this way. Put differently, if it were shown that the essence of God only entailed existence in the idea, this would be tantamount to its not entailing existence at all. Based on such considerations, Kant concludes in the same note that if existence were a predicate, then "certainly there could be proposed no proof that would be more concise and comprehensible for demonstrating the existence of God than the Cartesian" (Refl, AA 17:240, no. 3706). Kant thus accepts all of the argument aside from the premise that existence is a predicate. In particular, he himself later provides a supposed proof of one of its key premises, namely that God "contains supreme reality" (EMB, AA 2:85).

This explains why in the *Only Possible Argument*, Kant drops Caterus's objection in favor of an attack on the thesis that existence is a real predicate, which is itself supposedly

¹⁷ The difference here noted is astutely pointed out in Eberhard (2016, 12–13), where it is simply taken to mean that Wolff and Baumgarten have chosen to base their theologies on different essences of God.

based on a special analysis of the concept of existence. In accordance with the same metaphysical method he describes in the *Inquiry Concerning the Distinctness of the Principles of Natural Theology and Morality*, Kant states that his "procedure will be like that of someone who is searching for a definition and who first of all assures himself of what can be said with certainty, either affirmatively or negatively, about the object of the definition" (EMB, AA 2:71). As the *Inquiry* makes clear, the essence of this method lies in foregoing definitions at the start of our investigations and subsequently following the rule: "by means of certain inner experience, that is to say, by means of an immediate and self-evident inner consciousness, seek out those characteristic marks which are certainly to be found in the concept of any general property" (UDG, AA 2:286). "By this method alone," Kant explains, "I hope to arrive at the enlightenment [regarding the concept of existence] which I have vainly sought in others" (EMB, AA 2:71).

The first indubitably certain mark of existence Kant adduces is naturally that it "is not a predicate or a determination of a thing" (EMB, AA 2:72). But by what "immediate and self-evident inner consciousness" does Kant propose to establish this negative mark? "Take any subject you please," he writes,

for example, Julius Caesar. Draw up a list of all the predicates which may be thought to belong to him, not excepting even those of space and time. You will quickly see that he can either exist with all these determinations, or not exist at all. (EMB, AA 2:72)

This at least sounds like an appeal to some kind of "immediate consciousness," but it is very far from establishing the mark in question. To be sure, one can easily think of a being possessing many properties that may or may not exist. But to establish the point that existence is not a predicate, it is not sufficient to think merely of many properties; one would have instead to be able to think of all the properties (and indeed as sufficiently determined) in a singular thing while still thinking of it as either existing or not. But, obviously, no human being can possibly represent even a single being with all of its infinitely many determinations, including even space and time. Who then is to say that the representation of a completely determinate individual is not the same as the representation of something as existing? And what would be the distinguishing characteristic between these two supposedly different representations?

One might think that Kant could simply appeal to ordinary experience in order to more easily establish his point. Later in the *Only Possible Argument*, for instance, he remarks that when we say that something exists, what we are really saying is that we have experienced something with certain properties. For instance, when we say "narwhals exist," what we are really saying is that we have experience of a thing with narwhal predicates (EMB, AA 2:72-3). But this argument, too, would be entirely inadequate to the task at hand, which is likely why Kant does not rely on it for support. What Kant wants to establish after all is that existence is not a real predicate. But this does not at all follow from the undeniable fact that we are (perhaps always) only able to establish that something exists by virtue of experience. This would only follow if it were the case that all genuine predicates of a thing must be sufficiently determined by its

essence. But no one maintains this. Baumgarten in particular would readily admit that the actuality of any specific contingent thing can only be known by virtue of experience.

Kant seems aware of these difficulties, because he immediately switches from talk of human representation to that of divine representation. "The Being who gave existence to the world," Kant now explains,

and to our hero within that world could know every one of these predicates without exception, and yet still be able to regard him as a merely possible thing which, in the absence of that Being's decision to create him, would not exist. Who can deny that millions of things which do not actually exist are merely possible from the point of view of all the predicates they would contain if they were to exist. Or who can deny that in the representation which the Supreme Being has of them there is not a single determination missing, although existence is not among them, for the Supreme Being cognizes them only as possible things. It cannot happen, therefore, that if they were to exist they would contain an extra predicate; for, in the case of the possibility of a thing in its complete determination, no predicate can be missing. (EMB, AA 2:72)

The implied logic is clear enough: If in all cases a thing can in fact be represented with all of the determinations it would have were it to exist, and yet remain merely possible, then the existence can never be a real predicate. However, Kant suggests no reason at all for why we should think the premises to be true in all cases, and certainly not for the special case of divine existence. To constitute an objection to the ontological argument Kant would have to assume that divine existence functions in the same way as the existence of contingent beings, of which Caesar is an example. But Kant himself denies precisely this in defense of his own conception of existence, stating:

All other things [i.e. other than God] which exist could also not exist. The experience of contingent things cannot, therefore, furnish us with an effective argument by means of which we can apprehend the existence of that Being, of which it is impossible that it should not be. (EMB, AA 2:162)

Hence, even if successful, Kant's thought experiment would not establish that the existence of the divine being is not a real predicate. And, what is more, it is extremely hard to see how Kant is able to avoid this conclusion himself. After all, he claims his own proof "can be conducted entirely *a priori*," hence is genetic (EMB, AA 2:91), and so is not based upon our inability to cancel it in our own thought, but on its intrinsic impossibility of being cancelled in thought as such. In this sense, it would seem that its existence is contained in the very concept of it. Moreover, Kant states that his own proof rests on showing that "inner possibility, the essence of things" is that the "cancellation of which eliminates all that can be thought," and "in this, therefore, consists the distinctive *characteristic mark* of the existence of the essence of all beings" (EMB, AA 2:162-3; emphasis added). But what can a "distinctive characteristic mark" be, other than a real predicate? Even if we follow Kant in saying the phrase "God is an existent being" must always be understood to mean "Something existent is God," and that the latter consists in the absolute positing of the subject, the analogy with contingent beings

immediately breaks down; for the latter are posited absolutely based on experience and their connection with other things (God's creative act, for instance), whereas the former is posited by nothing but itself. Thus, if God's existence is the absolute positing of him as a subject, and does not consist in simply being necessary *for us* to posit such a being, then it must rest on an internal connection between the concept of God as the ground of possibility and existence. And what proponent of the ontological proof would want to claim more or less than this? On the other hand, if Kant indeed takes existence as such to be a predicate of our concepts, namely, that they are instantiated, then at best he can prove no more than that we necessarily predicate existence of our concept of God (as the ground of possibility), not that God necessarily exists. But it seems fairly clear that Kant believes his proof to provide insight into the real ground for the necessity of God himself: "Thus, our knowledge of the existence of this being is derived from what really constitutes the absolute necessity of that same being. This knowledge is thus acquired in a genuinely genetic fashion" (EMB, AA 2:91).

These, however, are perhaps small matters compared to the complete lack of an explanation as to how such far reaching assertions about the nature of divine cognition can be justified, let alone by the strict method Kant has just proposed for his own investigations.¹⁸ Does Kant then have a better argument? Well, not for the key claim that existence is not a predicate; he merely repeats the one above multiple times while insisting it is decisive. Against the ontological argument itself, Kant proposes by the way only one further objection, a version of Gaunilo's, which is so facile that it need not worry Baumgarten or anyone else.¹⁹

One final matter deserves our attention. Toni Kannisto has recently put forward the thesis that Kant's claim that existence is not a predicate can only be justified through an appeal to his positive account of being as absolute positing (Kannisto 2016, 293).²⁰ In one important, but very general respect, I think this line of thinking is on the right track; Kant almost certainly wants to find a knock-down argument against the traditional account of existence, whatever that might be, in order to bolster his own positive account, which I believe he developed because he found that it led to a more appealing view of God's relation to creation, which is really the central topic of the *Only Possible Argument* (namely of an all-sufficient being to the complete, dynamic expression of his perfection in nature).²¹ But with respect to the question of justification,

¹⁸ I find it curious that no commentator (so far as I am aware) has attempted to read Kant's *Only Possible Argument* in the context of his conception of philosophical method at the time, and in particular that few have thoroughly questioned the basis of his claims about existence. It very often seems as if Baumgarten and others are to be held to account for whatever objection Kant might think up in opposition to them, with no burden on his part to show the objection is in fact well grounded.

¹⁹ An argument such as that given in Plantinga (1974, 91) is close to what Wolff or Baumgarten would likely have proposed.

²⁰ In all fairness, Kannisto makes this claim in reference not only to Kant's pre-Critical work but also to the case made in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. And in this respect he may be right that Kant has a stronger argument.

²¹ What I mean by this can be better understood from Fugate (2016, 24–30, 88–95, and 398–400). For a deeper analysis of the context and structure of Kant's rethinking of God as the ground of all possibility and the teleological structure of creation, see Fugate (2014).

we must not let Kant himself off the hook so easily. According to the *Only Possible Argument*, the thesis that existence is not a predicate is supposed to be established through an immediate certainty, just as this is outlined in the *Inquiry*. It also precedes and motivates Kant's presentation of his positive theory, and he makes no subsequent attempt to derive it from that theory. We must agree then with Nick Stang that in the *Only Possible Argument*, Kant fails to refute the claim that existence is a real predicate (Stang 2016, 73).

VII

Kant's supposed refutation and Baumgarten's ontological argument. Recent commentators disagree about the extent to which Kant's attack in the *Only Possible Argument* is directed specifically at Baumgarten.²² It seems to me that it is not, or at least that if it is, then Kant does a rather poor job of addressing the questions that this would raise. For one, Kant shows not the slightest awareness of Baumgarten's distinction between existence and actuality, and this makes many of his statements—if taken as directed at Baumgarten—nearly impossible to comprehend. If Kant thinks this distinction invalid, then we should expect some explanation as to why. After all, does it not clarify the structure of the ontological argument considerably by enshrining the distinction Kant is so eager to highlight between whatness and thatness, or between content and actuality?

In articulating his claim that existence is not a predicate, Kant nearly always takes "existence" to mean what Baumgarten would call "actuality." Hence, in Baumgarten's language Kant's claim would be that actuality is not a real predicate, which is something that Baumgarten would heartily agree to. As we have seen, for him actuality is not an affection and so is not a determination or real predicate; it is rather the being-sufficiently-determined of a being with respect to the collection of its affections, that is, its non-essential internal determinations. In other words, actuality is just the *positing* of the being with all of its predicates (as Kant would say) or the *positing* (determining) of it with regard to its existence (as Baumgarten would prefer). Actuality is not a content, but an act of determining with respect to a certain content. A being is actual, then, not because of a special predicate "existence" that belongs to it (there is no such general predicate, after all, since every existence is a unique collection), but because a specific and unique existence is *posited* or *sufficiently determined* as belonging to it. God, in particular, is actual, because it is impossible for him to be *undetermined*; his very essence as the most perfect being provides a sufficient ground for his complete determination. So, taken in this way, Kant's objection does not directly contradict Baumgarten, although his subsequent interpretation of existence (i.e. Baumgartian "actuality") may differ in significant ways.

²² Proops (2015), for instance, believes Baumgarten to be incidental to Kant's arguments, whereas Stang (2016) takes Baumgarten to be perhaps their main target.

If, however, we ignore Kant's tendency to use "existence" for Baumgartian "actuality," and take him to be making his claim in Baumgarten's own language, then the matter stands only a little differently. To be sure, if existence (in Baumgarten's sense) is, in fact, not a real predicate, then his version of the ontological argument would surely fail. However, in this case Kant's key argument would prove to miss its mark rather badly. As we have seen above, Kant simply asserts that it is self-evident that a being can be represented *as determined* in regard to all its affections and yet also as still merely possible and so as not "existing." But for Baumgarten this would be to represent not only the existence of this being (*per definition*, in fact), but insofar as we are representing it also as fully and so sufficiently determined, our representation of it would be of something actual. It is important here to recognize that for Baumgarten, if we are talking about a contingent thing, then it would be impossible to represent that being as so determined without also representing it in (actual) relation to some other being(s) that has (have) actually determined (caused) it to be in this way. To argue against Baumgarten on this point, Kant would therefore have to explain how a merely possible, contingent being can be represented as fully and hence sufficiently determined, or as actually having certain determinations rather than others, without also representing it as actually having been caused to have such determinations in a causal nexus (even if only with the divine being).²³ Kant seems to have forgotten that even Leibnizian complete concepts of merely possible beings are only conditionally determined, and thus not actually determined; for these depend upon a divine decree, which itself is merely possible (Leibniz 1956, 511). It is highly doubtful that anyone in fact, let alone Baumgarten, has proposed that beings can be fully and thus sufficiently determined (not merely possibly determined) and yet remain merely possible. Kant's real disagreement with Baumgarten thus seems to turn not on whether existence is or is not a real predicate, but rather on whether being completely and sufficiently determined is anything other than being actual. Kant, however, offers no argument against this quite different claim in the *Only Possible Argument*.

Hence, when Kant states that "*Baumgarten* introduces the concept of thoroughgoing internal determination, and maintains that it is this which is more in existence than in

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mere possibility, for it completes that which is left indeterminate by the predicates inhering in or issuing from the essence," and then claims that he has refuted this view by the example of a merely possible but fully determinate Julius Caesar, he is committing a threefold error. First, as we saw earlier, Baumgarten "maintained" no such thing. Second, existence for Baumgarten does not "complete that which is left indeterminate by the predicates inhering in or issuing from the essence," because these latter are part of existence as well. Third, and most importantly, Kant is employing a concept of determination that is not only incompatible with Baumgarten's whole way of thought, but is highly dubious in itself. Who, after all, would want to maintain that there is sense in talking about a merely possible Julius Caesar that is sufficiently determined to have (and therefore *actually* have) a specific hair color, when he is not even sufficiently determined to be actual himself (whether this be in Baumgarten's sense of actual or in Kant's sense of posted absolutely, it matters not)? Remarkably, Kant seems to believe that we can simply think up the representation of a fully and so sufficiently determined contingent being in the total absence of anything sufficiently determining it to be (actually!) so determined.

VIII

In this chapter I have not attempted to prove that Baumgarten's conception of existence is correct, that Kant's conception is false, or that Baumgarten's version of the ontological argument is sound. Due to limitations of space, I have not even been able to fully explain why I think Baumgarten's account of existence constitutes a major advancement over those of his predecessors. Least of all have I been able to explain how I see the results above as shedding light on what is the true center of Kant's thought at the time he was writing the *Only Possible Argument*. Yet we have already made significant headway in this direction in recognizing two things: first, that Kant's opposition to Baumgarten is really programmatic, rather than based on knock-down arguments; and second, that the philosophically interesting difference between the two thinkers lies not in their differing accounts of existence, so much as it does in their differing understandings of what it means for a being to be *sufficiently determined* with respect to its predicates (i.e. to be actual, in Baumgarten's sense). Explication of the full significance of these results, however, must await another occasion. The aim of this chapter has simply been to place future assessments of Baumgarten's relation to Kant on a more solid foundation than they have had hitherto by clarifying some of the basic concepts in his *Metaphysics* and, most of all, by showing that his thought is not subject to many of the supposedly disqualifying criticisms leveled against it by Kant and by many subsequent commentators. Taking Baumgarten and the tradition he represents more seriously, I believe, can only help us in better understanding and probing the true nature of Kant's remarkable achievements.²⁴

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If, however, we ignore Kant's tendency to use "existence" for Baumgartian "actuality," and take him to be making his claim in Baumgarten's own language, then the matter stands only a little differently. To be sure, if existence (in Baumgarten's sense) is, in fact, not a real predicate, then his version of the ontological argument would surely fail. However, in this case Kant's key argument would prove to miss its mark rather badly. As we have seen above, Kant simply asserts that it is self-evident that a being can be represented *as determined* in regard to all its affections and yet also as still merely possible and so as not "existing." But for Baumgarten this would be to represent not only the existence of this being (*per definition*, in fact), but insofar as we are representing it also as fully and so sufficiently determined, our representation of it would be of something actual. It is important here to recognize that for Baumgarten, if we are talking about a contingent thing, then it would be impossible to represent that being as so determined without also representing it in (actual) relation to some other being(s) that has (have) actually determined (caused) it to be in this way. To argue against Baumgarten on this point, Kant would therefore have to explain how a merely possible, contingent being can be represented as fully and hence sufficiently determined, or as actually having certain determinations rather than others, without also representing it as actually having been caused to have such determinations in a causal nexus (even if only with the divine being).²³ Kant seems to have forgotten that even Leibnizian complete concepts of merely possible beings are only conditionally determined, and thus not actually determined; for these depend upon a divine decree, which itself is merely possible (Leibniz 1956, 511). It is highly doubtful that anyone in fact, let alone Baumgarten, has proposed that beings can be fully and thus sufficiently determined (not merely possibly determined) and yet remain merely possible. Kant's real disagreement with Baumgarten thus seems to turn not on whether existence is or is not a real predicate, but rather on whether being completely and sufficiently determined is anything other than being actual. Kant, however, offers no argument against this quite different claim in the *Only Possible Argument*.

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