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## 14. THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT RECONSIDERED

ODED BALABAN AND ASNAT AVSHALOM

UNIVERSITY OF HAIFA

**ABSTRACT.** The ontological argument--first proposed by St. Anselm and subsequently developed by Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Hegel and Marx--furnishes a key to understanding the relationship between thought and reality. In this article we shall focus on Hegel's attitude towards the ontological argument as set out in his *Science of Logic*, where it appears as a paradigm of the relationship between thought and reality. It should be remarked, moreover, that our choice of the subject was not random and that it was selected for the reason that belief in God is a preeminent social reality, inasmuch as faith in God creates His existence. Therefore, an investigation of the concept of God is an inquiry into the most profound recesses of human consciousness.

The great opponents of the ontological argument, from Hume down to our day--and even Kant--have based their arguments upon the fundamental empiricist assertion that existential judgments are not analytical. In this paper we attempt to defend the ontological argument against its opponents.<sup>1</sup>

### PART I

#### DESCARTES

**S**o that the issue may be better understood, we would do well to begin with an account of Descartes' approach to the argument. In Descartes' method, the argument constitutes a stage in getting out of the *cogito*. For this philosopher the issue is that of considering concepts which have existence only in the mind as being real. In this way, reality that was first reduced to thought is corroborated. Initially, what is beyond doubt consists only in the things conceived of in the mind--indeed, the only reality is that of the *cogito*. The "I think" is the intuition of the spirit's activity; it is the ego's consciousness of itself as a thinking entity. The certitude of the *cogito* depends on self-consciousness. If thought were not attended by self-consciousness--

by the *cogito*--then thought *per se* could not be known, and only its content could be known. The "I think therefore I am a thinking entity" means that I exist as spirit, that only thought and consciousness exist. It is these that have actual, objective reality.<sup>2</sup>

We have said that *cogito sum* means an assertion of the existence of consciousness. Thought has objective reality; it is the only certain thing in any experience. All that may be said with certainty about the ego is that it exists. The way out of the consciousness must be sought within consciousness itself, since there is no other given.

In Descartes' first two *Meditations*, all existence is reduced to the ego. That is to say, without taking account of *what* I am thinking, it is evident that I think. It is only in the third *Meditation* that Descartes considers the question of *what* I think. In the first two *Meditations* thought is treated as *identical* with itself--as a unity, as form. In the third *Meditation*, the question is about content, about *what* I think. Here thought is defined in terms of *difference*; it refers to something other than itself by means of itself.

Starting from thought as form, or as a way of thinking, it is impossible to reach something beyond it, since from this point of view all concepts are identical:

If ideas are taken insofar only as they are certain modes of consciousness, I do not discern any difference or inequality among them, and all seem, in the same manner, to proceed from myself.<sup>3</sup>

The point of departure for getting outside of consciousness must therefore be looked for in the *content* of thought; in particular concepts that are different from one another, or in what Descartes calls "images, of which one represents one thing and another a different thing, [and of which] it is evident that a great diversity obtains among them".<sup>4</sup> Thus, since concepts are "images", they must refer to something outside themselves. Put another way, these concepts are images of difference--as it were, cracks in the wall of consciousness--of which we must avail ourselves in order to step out of consciousness.

There are therefore two aspects of concepts. First, they have an objective existence inasmuch as they are consciousness, and as such are not different from one another. And, second, they are different from one another inasmuch as they are images of things, and so refer to something external to consciousness; and, as images, they are subjective and therefore can reveal nothing about the thing they represent.

So what is needed to get beyond consciousness is a concept as content--one whose existence and the conception of its content are necessarily the same; in other words, a thought that creates reality out of itself, an identity that includes difference. But the fact is that such an idea exceeds the limits of Descartes' thinking. For Descartes, objective reality cannot originate in subjective reality:

. . . not only Being cannot be produced by nothingness, but also . . . the more perfect, that which contains in itself more reality, cannot be the effect of the less perfect and depend upon it.<sup>5</sup>

Thus reality that depends upon the subject is real to a lesser degree than actual reality; and the gap between the subjective and the objective is unbridgeable. Be this as it may, let us now consider the ontological argument as it is set out in Chapter 5 of the *Meditations*. There Descartes states that, first of all,

I discover in myself innumerable ideas of certain things, which cannot be esteemed pure negations, although perhaps they possess no existence beyond my thought, and which are not feigned by me though it may be in my power to think or not to think them, but possess true and unchangeable nature of their own.<sup>6</sup>

These ideas are essences, like the properties of geometrical figures. The concepts of geometrical things can be known only by means of thought, independently of the senses. Further, "the nature of my spirit is such as to compel me to think them as true when they are clearly and distinctly known".<sup>7</sup> To regard these concepts as not being true would be a contradiction, and they are therefore unthinkable. So these essences do not depend on the spirit that thinks them, but rather force themselves upon it, and are in this sense objective. The essences do not of course impart reality to things, but they are necessary. Thus essences may be separated from the unity of consciousness because they have reality of their own in being necessary, although they are not existent things. Consequently there are concepts that have an independent, non-subjective reality: they are *different* from consciousness, and this already represents a going beyond consciousness, albeit only toward abstract and hypothetical necessity, and not as yet toward concrete and independent reality. This outward thrust toward hypothetical necessity is the mediating stage between the "I think", whose reality cannot be denied, and the ontological argument. The sphere of essences has a measure of perfection of its own; it has a necessity that is not conditioned by the necessity of consciousness, but not a reality unconditioned by consciousness. Its actual reality is that of consciousness; but its necessity goes beyond consciousness and is independent of consciousness. This sphere, which is an aspect of thought and independent of it, allows the ontological argument to be pursued to its conclusion, since the argument is based on the *necessary relationship* between the concept and the existence of God. Thus Descartes asserts:

. . . it is not less impossible to conceive a God that is, being supremely perfect, without existence, or without any other perfection, than to conceive a mountain without a valley.<sup>8</sup>

From the point of view of essence, therefore, the concept of God cannot be dissociated from the existence of God--just as the essential concept of a mountain is inseparable from that of a valley. If there is a mountain, then there must be a valley.

For Descartes, the core of the ontological argument is that to assert the existence of God as a hypothetical statement is superfluous and even wrong, since the antecedent ("If there is a *concept* . . .") was already demonstrated when it was shown that the concept *qua* concept--the concept as consciousness or the *cogito*, has actual reality. The concept of mountain, too, has actual reality, but with this difference: the concept of mountain does not imply existence of a valley but only the *concept* of a valley, whereas the concept of God implies the existence of God. The judgment, "There is a concept of God and therefore God exists", is therefore categorical and not hypothetical. It is in this going-out from thought by means of thought that the movement out of the confines of consciousness is completed and the concept becomes real.

### SAINT ANSELM

The ontological argument formulated by Saint Anselm some five centuries earlier is very similar to that of Descartes. Anselm's argument relies on the definition of God as "a being greater than which cannot be conceived" (*esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*),<sup>9</sup> and takes the following form:

To understand this statement means that it is in the mind. But "a being greater than which cannot be conceived" cannot exist only in the intellect; for in conceiving of such a being we are thinking of something greater than the intellect, and thus of something that exists also in reality. Therefore if this perfection is in thought it is also in reality. Moreover, "a being greater than which cannot be conceived" cannot be thought of as nonexistent, since in that case there would be something greater than it--something *which cannot be conceived of as nonexistent*. Thus it follows that God cannot be conceived of as nonexistent.

Mark that in this argument the actual reality of thought is taken for granted<sup>10</sup> as is the objectivity of necessity, or the independence of essences from consciousness.

A point of interest in Anselm's argument is the counter argument he puts into the mouth of the fool who says in his heart that God does not exist. Anselm insists, however, that in saying this the fool would appear to be thinking the unthinkable. According to Anselm, what is on the fool's mind is not God, since God cannot be conceived of as nonexistent. The fool therefore lacks the true concept of God, which must necessarily include God's existence; rather he is using the sign for God in a way that is without meaning--or at least without any meaning known to Anselm. Indeed the latter possibility leads us to consider that the fool may say "God does not exist" without his thought necessarily contradicting something external to a concept of the mind in which he is lacking. That is to say, the confrontation between the affirmation and the negation of God arises from a clash of two kinds of consciousness--one which possesses the concept of God, and another which does not--rather than being a confrontation between an ignorant consciousness and something external to it.

In the Cartesian argument this issues is not dealt with, since the argument is mediated by the objective existence of hypothetical necessity; that is, by the existence of something other than consciousness and independent of it. So the confrontation between the affirmation and negation of God is resolved through the medium of the objectivity of essence.

Leibniz developed the argument of Descartes by considering the issue from the point of view of necessity.<sup>11</sup> According to Leibniz, it is not enough to ground the argument in experience by arguing, as did Descartes, that because something is clearly and distinctly conceived in the mind, it is also necessarily true. In order for the argument to be taken out of the domain of experience so as to make it truly necessary and therefore objective, the process of conceptualization must be demonstrated. The first step is to show that all perfections are in accord with one another and not mutually contradictory. It will then follow that the subject of all the perfections, the most perfect being, is knowable. Therefore this perfect being exists, since existence is one of the perfections.

### KANT'S CRITIQUE OF THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The crucial point in Kant's critique of the ontological argument--that existence is a necessary predicate of the concept of god and therefore God exists--is that existence is not a real predicate and, as regards pure concepts of understanding, it is not a predicate at all.<sup>12</sup> The judgment of existence is not an analytic judgment, since existence is determined by experience and not by concept. For as Kant asserts in the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

Our consciousness of all existence (whether immediately through perception, or mediately through inferences which connect something with perception) belongs exclusively to the unity of experience; any [alleged] existence outside this field, while not indeed such as we can declare to be absolutely impossible, is of the nature of an assumption which we can never be in a position to justify (A601/B629).

Therefore, existence cannot be determined from concept; that is, it cannot be determined *a priori* because the concept must be connected with a perception in order to be thought of as existent, as being included in the context of experience.

Thus the only remaining possibility is that the judgment of existence is synthetic *a posteriori*, since existence is determined in connection with experience. And indeed it is synthetic because the existence of the object is not given with its concept; and the concept must be connected with sensation for the existence of the object to be determined. But this synthesis of the concept with the existence does not add anything to the concept; it does not enlarge it because something which is existent, which is included in the context of experience, is *not different* from that thing as a concept--

as something which is possible (something is possible if it is in agreement with the conditions of experience).

In synthetic *a posteriori* judgment, the predicate-concept is added to the subject-concept on the grounds of experience. The subject-concept is enlarged by means of a concept which belongs to it through experience and which was not included in it beforehand. One part of experience is added to another to enlarge the sum of experience. However, existence is added to another to enlarge the sum of experience. However, existence is not a part of experience nor an abstraction of it, but a rule pertaining to the rules of synthesis. Existence is a pure concept of understanding, a mode of being of the object of knowledge. It does not determine the object but only the manner in which the object is made known. And it does this only if the object is a possible object. In this case existence does not contradict the conditions of experience, but is connected with sensation and is given as part of experience.

Indeed existence is more than mere possibility. As has already been noted, in neither the case of existence nor that of possibility is there an external determination of the object, but only a difference in the status of the object in regard to knowledge. Therefore, existence and possibility are not objective but subjective determinations; they are determined not in relation to an object, but to a subject. In other words, a predicate that is a modal determination, as in the case of possibility and existence, does not belong to the subject, but relates the subject to knowledge--it places the subject within the domain of knowledge.

According to Kant, a predicate that does not belong to the subject is not a quality of the thing; it has no real existence--it is not a real predicate. This relation of the concept to the existence of what is conceived is illustrated by Kant in the relation between a hundred possible thalers as a concept and a hundred real thalers which are part of one's actual assets. There is nothing more in the hundred thalers which I actually possess than in the hundred thalers which I conceive of in my mind.<sup>13</sup> When the existing hundred thalers are considered in isolation, they do not increase their value. Of course, when a hundred thalers are added to my assets, my wealth is increased relatively to what it was when those hundred thalers were merely a concept. This is only because

. . . the object, as it actually exists, is not analytically contained in my concept, but is added to my concept (which is a determination of my state) synthetically; and yet the conceived hundred thalers are not themselves in the least increased through thus acquiring existence outside my concept.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the object of experience, existence and mere possibility can be distinguished by the connection of the concept with sensation. But in the case of the objects of pure understanding, there is no sign which distinguishes possibility from existence. And this is so because a judgment of existence is synthetic. For although existence as a category is a concept of pure understanding, the determination of particular existence originates in experience; and concepts of pure understanding have no



experiential object. Existence outside the sphere of experience cannot be known or verified.

Existence is determined when a concept is put in relation to knowledge and not to another concept. An *a priori* rule of knowledge cannot be applied to a *a priori* knowledge in order to determine whether the rule exists; the rule is merely the condition of such a determination. Existence which is not included in the context of the totality of experience has no meaning. It is only an *ideal* of pure reason. Thus the concept of God as it appears in the ontological argument is a transcendental ideal--merely a possibility that determines its existence out of itself.<sup>15</sup> Therefore existence cannot be used as a predicate to the concept of God, since the idea has no object in experience; and existence, as we have seen, is a synthetic principle of experiential knowledge. No connection can validly be made on an experiential basis between the concepts of "God" and "existence". For this reason Leibniz tries to establish a logical validity for this connection by showing that if no inner contradiction is involved, such a connection represents no more than a possibility.

According to Kant, there are two alternatives with respect to the ontological argument:

1. The concept of God includes existence arbitrarily--that is, not according to synthetic rules of experience. Thus the judgment "God exists" is analytic; and since the concept cannot determine existence, this judgment is a tautology condemned always to be merely an ideal of knowledge.
2. The judgment "God exists" is synthetic *a priori*; it cannot determine existence, but must remain conditioned because the existence of an object can be known only within the context of experience. And since the judgment is conditioned, the annulment of the subject as well as the predicate does not imply a contradiction, as it does in all synthetic *a priori* judgments. But if such is the case, there is no necessary existence, and therefore it cannot be asserted that God exists.

This, then, is the essence of Kant's critique of the ontological argument. The principal assumption from which the Kantian critique derives its validity is the gap between existence and concept. Existence has meaning only within the context of experience, whereas the concept does not; and the gap between them does not allow a transition to be made from one to the other, so that the concept cannot be realized. The mere *fact* of the existence or nonexistence of the object of a concept does not change the concept. And the reverse, as well, is true: the concept has no part in the determination of existence. But though concept and existence do not "impinge on" one another, the gap between them derives from the *identity of their content*. The difference remains external. To be different--to be defined as being in relation to something else--is a privilege of existence that is denied to essence. To relate to knowledge, to be in relation to the totality of experience, is an external difference. Therefore every assertion of the existence of something is essentially a mere projection of consciousness--it is a use of consciousness beyond the domain to which it can legitimately be applied. Thus there is no true "creation" starting from the concept, be-

cause identity and difference remain apart. From the point of view of content, the identity between the concept and its object is *absolute*. But within the scope of modality, possibility is completely opposed to reality: they are *absolutely* different. The difference is entirely external and irrelevant to the content, which is absolutely identical.

### A CRITICAL SUMMARY

The same fundamental assumption of a gap between concept and existence is shared by Kant and the defenders of the ontological argument. However, those who take up the ontological argument are intent on demonstrating a particular case of this gap, which grows increasingly wider from Anselm to Leibniz through Descartes. Regarding this point, modern empiricists, in attacking the argument, are trying to beat down an open door.

For Saint Anselm, to grasp the concept of God "as a being greater than which cannot be conceived", is in itself proof of God's existence. Nevertheless, the inability of the *insipiens* to understand this statement results in the nonexistence of God in the fool's mind.

According to Anselm, to understand the concept of God is sufficient grounds for establishing God's existence. Or, to restate the case in Kantian terms, the annulment of the subject together with the predicate does not imply a contradiction. Therefore, in regard to Anselm, we can say that the existence of God continues to depend on the subject; the apprehension of the existence of God is to a great extent subjective. The transition from concept to existence is less mediated than in later formulations of the argument, so that the gap between the subject and object remains relatively modest.

With Descartes, an objective aspect is introduced--that of necessity independent from consciousness. Yet necessity, even if its existence is conditioned, originates in the *ego*. The necessary relationship between "god" as subject and "existence" as predicate continues to rely on the clarity of thought. What is stressed is the impossibility of conceiving of God as a supremely perfect being and at the same time as non-existent.<sup>16</sup> Hence subjective elements are still in evidence in the Cartesian argument.

Leibniz goes a step further, and is able successfully to establish the objectivity of God by showing that all perfections must be in harmony and so can exist side by side. Necessity thereby becomes objective and separate from consciousness; objective existence does not depend on the subject, and therefore is always knowable. The gap between the concept in the mind and its existence as object is now at its widest. Thus existence which relates to a subject cannot at one and the same time be actual existence, since the subject is finally separated from necessity. The object as an existent entity does not yet depend on the concept in subjective consciousness, but on objective necessity.

Once this juncture has been reached, the distance to Kant's critique is not so very great. There is no need even to demonstrate that such logical necessity does not determine existence. Indeed the defenders of the ontological argument agree on this point. All that remains to be shown is that also in this particular case of the transition from concept to existence, the concept is merely apparent. And it was this that Kant intended in his refutation of the ontological proof; implicitly, therefore, *the refutation of the ontological proof develops out of the ontological argument itself.*

### ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE: SPINOZA

The ontological argument may be considered from a perspective other than that chosen by Kant. Thus, although the gap between subject and object has widened, in the process the concept becomes objective--indeed *concept is made object*. That is to say, as the *difference* between subject and object increases, the *identity* of thought and existence is established.

This aspect of the ontological argument is directed to deducing existence from thought. But there are two difficulties in such a perspective: (1) the positing of the concept as object *before* existence can be deduced from it as an external fact; and (2) the absolute identity between concept and reality which makes it impossible to connect thought and reality. This identity prevents the process of the creation of reality out of consciousness, and of consciousness out of reality (i.e., being *causa sui*), from being truly self-generating.

In this regard, the ontological argument posits a static situation which leaves no room for the transition from consciousness to existence, from subjectivity to objectivity. Such existence is included initially in the concept as identical only with itself, as an ideal which keeps itself as remote as possible from the subject so as to become objective. The most coherent presentation of this ideal is to be found in the philosophy of Spinoza, according to which there is ultimately nothing outside God, nothing beyond essence.

In Spinoza's philosophy every determination of existence is a negation, and so long as it is negation, it has no reality. Spinoza asserts that "every singular thing, or any thing which is finite and has a determined existence, can neither exist nor be determined to produce an effect unless it is determined to exist and produce an effect by another cause . . ." <sup>17</sup> And in the proof of this proposition, he states: "Whatever is determined for existence or action is so determined by God . . ." That is to say, what is real in the finite is not its finiteness, but the infinite--in order words, God. Thus there is no reality but God, and this reality does not depend on its being known or unknown; it is contingent on neither the *ego* nor the concept.

In this ideal version of the ontological argument, as well as in Kant's interpretation, the essential point of the argument is missed--the deduction of existence from the concept, or the transition from thought to reality. From the perspective of the defenders of the ontological argument, the key issue is not the transition from

thought to existence, but the assertion of existence *outside* thought. However, since what is given is solely the thought, they were obliged first to go out of consciousness in order later to be able to assert existence. Their view was that existence is not generated by thought; rather it forces itself upon consciousness. Existence for them was outside thought; however they needed to discover existence in the domain of thought, since nothing else was given. Thus, unintentionally, the argument has perforce to assume a transition to existence from thought.

## PART II

### 1.

#### HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND KANT'S REFUTATION

Hegel's first reference in *The Science of Logic* to the ontological argument and its refutation by Kant is made by him in "Remark 1: The Opposition of Being and Nothing in Ordinary Thinking", where he attempts to surmount an obstacle in the way of understanding abstract Being and Nothing.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, he undertakes to clarify the difference between abstract and determined Being and Nothing, since it is the confusion between them that makes possible the critique of the ontological argument. This confusion, then, is Hegel's point of departure from his consideration in "Remark 1" of the Kantian critique.

According to Kant, there is no difference between concepts referring to possibility and concepts referring to existence, since Being is not determined by the concept. Being is not a concept of something that can be, as it were added to the concept, thereby enlarging it. Being does not belong to the concept. It cannot be a property or a real predicate. Therefore the possible is not different from the real; a hundred possible thalers are in this respect not different from a hundred real thalers. The concept does not change in accordance to whether its object exists or not.

In Hegel's logic, Being becomes Nothing precisely because it is abstracted from any determination, from content. Being is the abstract moment of either things or concepts; as such it is not this or that particular Being, and there it is *not*. And non-Being is not the absence of this or that thing--it merely *is*. This transition from Being to Nothing and from Nothing to Being is the consequence of the abstraction of Being and non-Being from the totality of particular things. Both are therefore nothing--or instances of not-Being.

Apparently, Kant, too, identifies Being with Nothing. However for Kant the identity is not between abstract Being and Nothing, but between the *content* of the concept as Being, and the *content* of the concept as Nothing. And content means determination, actual specification. Such a content is not abstract, and it includes neither abstract Being nor abstract Nothing. It is affirmation, i.e., what is; and negation,

i.e., what it is not. But these are not abstract, and therefore they are not mutually convertible terms. The concept of God, too, is a determination and not abstract; it is not identical with abstract Being and Nothing. For example, in the capacity of Creator, God creates the Other and therefore includes negation. To be determined Being--to be content--means to be in relation to another content. Thus content is determined by another content, and therefore determined Being is dependent on the existence or non-existence of another Being related to it, since it is determined by such relationships.

When Kant asserts that a hundred possible thalers represent the same content as a hundred real ones, he isolates the content of the hundred thalers from all of its relationships, thereby abstracting the hundred thalers and making them identical only with themselves. According to Kant, a concept is related to other concepts only insofar as it is taken as referring to existence; that is to say, not when it is regarded merely as a concept. Certainly one's financial situation is improved or made worse by the gain or loss of a hundred thalers. But this does not cause the hundred thalers themselves to change. They are merely added to the concept of one's patrimony; that is, from the point of view of one who is richer or poorer by a hundred thalers, they are a determination of his financial situation. The determinations "a hundred thalers" and "my financial situation" are separate from one another; they are different concepts. A possible concept is therefore identical with a real content only in consequence of such an abstraction.

For Hegel, on the other hand, to be a concept of something means to be determined. The concept "a hundred thalers" is a determination in regard to the state of my finances. Therefore the lack of a hundred thalers is also a determination of my patrimony. That is to say, the lack of a hundred thalers is not *nothing*--but is *determined nothing*. My patrimony is something that always remains in relation to me. "I as *possessor* of a hundred thalers or as not possessing them, or even I as *imagining* or not imagining them, is of course a different content".<sup>19</sup>

Thus if as a possessor of a hundred thalers, I am a different content from what I am in not possessing them, then the hundred thalers, either present or absent, are determined. They are not abstract but are in relation to my financial situation; and in relation to me they are a different content. Their non-Being is determined--which is to say that it concerns me no less than their being. Their absence or presence makes a great difference to me.

However, for Kant, the hundred thalers are related to me in consequence of their *Being*. But it is precisely because of this that the Being of the hundred thalers is external to the *concept* of a hundred thalers. Being does not belong intrinsically to the concept. It is not a predicate of the concept since, according to Kant, every relationship is external to the related terms and is not essential to them.

Therefore a concept is for Kant an isolated thought, whereas Being means to be in relation to another thing. However, Hegel asserts that a concept as that which is determined, as a content or as a concept of *something*, exists in relation to another

thing. The relation of a concept to something else differs, depending on whether the concept is present or absent. In both cases the concept is in relation to another thing. Moreover it is determined by that other thing both as determined Being and as determined Nothing. What Kant regards as existence--i.e., Being in relation to another thing--Hegel calls determination, because the origin of Being in relation to the Other, is not in abstract Being, not in the abstract moment of the concept, whereas the concept as an abstraction is not related to anything but is purely a self-identity.

According to Hegel, Kant confused the issues. For Kant, Being (existence) means to-be-in-context, to be in relation to something else, whereas content (determination) is self-identity. In Kant's view, the relation of a hundred thalers to my finances is possible only if the hundred thalers really exist; and to exist means in this case to be related to my patrimony, to be in relation to me. On the other hand, a hundred thalers as a determined content are not related to anything.

For his part Hegel argues that hundred thalers are related to my financial position not because of their existence rather than non-existence, but in virtue of their being a concept--namely money. In other words, it is because they are determined that they are in relation to something else and not merely to their own being. Their actuality is therefore added to the concept of a hundred thalers, since their existence puts them in a different relation to my patrimony than does their absence. Existence is thus a predicate since it broadens the concept, so that Kant's argument breaks down at its core.

As we have observed, Kant's claim that Being is not a predicate derives from the confusion between abstract and determined Being and Nothing. Abstract Being and Nothing are identical, whereas determined Being and Nothing are in relation to things other than themselves. In the second instance, there is a clear distinction between something as existent and as non-existent, between the possible and the real.

To point up the abstraction that is implied in the identity between something as possible and as real, Hegel observes that for a person to be indifferent to whether he possesses a hundred thalers or not ("whatever may be their quantitative relation to his fortune"<sup>20</sup>) he must be raised mentally to a condition of abstract universalizability of the sort that Christianity arouses in its believers. In this elevated mental state men nullify themselves before the Nothing, since what is affirmed here is the absence of determination. This state is achieved only by intoxication or in the face of disaster, and represents an extraordinary situation in which differences are indeed annulled.

But it is precisely because everyone knows that it makes a difference whether his patrimony is great or small--or whether he himself is alive or not--that Kant's refutation appears so acceptable. It is precisely because a hundred imaginary thalers are clearly not a hundred real thalers that the transition of concept to reality appears impossible to common sense.

Since the hundred thalers cannot be produced out of one's imagination, Kant identifies them only with their concept. Similarly, the existence of God cannot be de-

duced from its concept. Hegel goes further and asserts that the more something is indetermined, the more it is subjective. Thus imagination is less determined than a true concept and is therefore more subject. An imaginary hundred thalers are related to the person imagining them. But they are related to his real fortune in a weaker and more mediated way--that is to say, they are subjective. So long as they are only imaginary, they cannot become existent, since it is of the very essence of imagination not to exist.

But at this stage in Hegel's considerations, within the framework of his "Objective Logic", the ground has still to be prepared for distinguishing between the subjective and the objective. As in the case of many other distinctions that have not been taken into account, here too the conditions for its being made have not yet been created. Hegel does not as yet even offer a specific definition of determined Being. He merely distinguishes a determined from an abstract being so as to prevent us from mistaking one for the other.

Lastly, in this context Hegel points out that much as there is a difference between concept and being, there is a greater difference between finite things, such as a hundred thalers, and God, who is infinite. That is to say, the example of hundred thalers is inappropriate for the purposes of refuting the ontological argument. Since the definition of finite things is that their concept is different from their being, in their case concept and reality are separable and therefore finite and perishable. But in order to refute the ontological proof there is no need to demonstrate the difference between concept and existence, because this difference was acknowledged by the supporters of the argument. Otherwise they would not have needed to put forward a particular demonstration of the existence of God. For had they thought that concept was not different from existence, they would have taken God's existence for granted. It is the abstract definition of God--that of the ontological proof--which they opposed to finite things, since the concept and being of God are inseparable. Kant's critique does not extend to this definition, since he analyzes the concept of God by way of an instance which is finite. At the conclusion of his observations on this count, Hegel attacks Kant on his own ground:

The genuine criticism of the categories and of reason is just this: to make intellect aware of this difference and to prevent it from applying to God the determinations and relationships of the finite.<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted that the concept of God employed by Hegel in criticizing Kant is not to be confused with Hegel's own conception of God, but is the concept of God pertaining to the ontological argument. This is why Hegel speaks of the "abstract definition of God". For at this stage he is considering the issue within a context in which abstract Being and Nothing are conceived of as concepts that are different from determined Being and Nothing. According to this abstract definition, God is as an Eleatic being that only *is* and does not admit of nothingness within Himself. And what is grasped as opposed to the abstract definition of God is "something", or determined Being. Therefore, on this point, Hegel's critique of Kant is that, in order to

define God according to the ontological argument, Kant invokes God's opposite--namely, determined Being.

## 2.

### HEGEL'S CRITIQUE OF THE DEFINITION OF GOD AS THE SUM TOTAL OF ALL REALITIES

Hegel's second reference to the ontological argument in *The Science of Logic* occurs when he considers the subject of Being *per se*.<sup>22</sup> Here the question which he addresses is the nature of reality. And, in regard to the ontological argument, to the question of what is to be taken as reality if God is the *sum total* of all realities. Hegel argues that, if the sum total is regarded as purely *affirmative* Being, then God must be abstract reality, or abstract Being. And if, on the contrary, the sum total is taken to be purely *negative* Being, God must be the abstract Nothing. Therefore God is the same as either Being or Nothing. In both cases the sum total does not logically lead to a greater determination of God, so that God remains abstract Being or abstract Nothing. Thus what is taken in the ontological argument to be the unique and basic truth (i.e., God, or the reality of all realities) is nothingness. And if this is the case, then there can be no God and nothing can exist.

The crucial point to be made here is that Being as the unity of Being and Nothing, includes becoming and is therefore a unity of Being and determination. In this capacity, Being pertains to the category of *quality*. And quality--insofar as it is Being--is *reality*. At this juncture in his analysis, Hegel stresses the affirmative aspect of Being, and has as yet to address himself to its negative aspect. Thus reality is at this point purely affirmation and excludes negation, limitation, and privation.

Such a definition of God assumes that reality *per se* cannot include negation, since every negation is a subtraction, or removal, i.e., a *non-Being* and unreality. This assumption requires that God be infinite in the "wrong" sense of excluding the finite--wrong because the finite implies limits, which in their turn imply non-Being within reality. Every determination includes negation within itself. But God as the sum total of all realities is not determined, so that the idea of God ceases to have any meaning. Reality is on the contrary determined, for otherwise even the determination of the sum total of all realities could not be asserted. This abstract concept of God excludes the possibility of differentiating among qualities. Everything is mingled in Him, and is thereby deprived of any content and becomes an "empty absolute in which all is one".<sup>23</sup>

But the supporters of the ontological proof, particularly Descartes, treat God as the most perfect being--as the most complete reality, from which other realities are deduced. For Descartes, the ontological argument is a means for getting beyond the ego in order to affirm the existence of an objective world. But the strictly logical outcome of asserting God to be purely positive is to reduce all reality other than God to absolute Nothing. Thus the world, whose reality Descartes doubted from the very on-



set, is necessarily extinguished. Even the ego leads to nothingness, since it is a determination. For if the ego were not a determination, it would itself become God. And were the ego God, then everything which is included in God would pertain to it--in which case there would be no one to think about God. Thus God is indeterminated and therefore nothing. In this case the problem with the ontological proof is not merely that reality cannot be a predicate, as is claimed by Kant, but that God as the abstract entity defined in the proof cannot be the subject of any predicate, or any determination.

On the other hand, if God is treated as being determined, then he includes negation within Himself, and therefore the sum total of all realities is actually the sum total of all negations. For if God includes negation, then He must be *solely* negation in order to be--as the argument assumes--unique and indivisible. As such God is absolute Nothing. Thus the definition of God as the sum total of all realities that does not include contradiction is self-contradictory. As either abstract Being or abstract Nothing--as the reality of all realities--God does not include nothingness in Himself and is therefore also not related to anything. Indeed, Hegel asserts that if essence

is defined as the *sum total of all realities*, then these realities likewise are subordinate to the nature of the determinateness and to the abstractive reflection and this sum total reduces to empty oneness.<sup>24</sup>

However, realities as abstractions and negations cannot be what they are on their own account, but are a consequence of something *external*. Realities are therefore not entities that are in-and-for-themselves, but are related to something else which is outside of them. And this being the case, reality cannot be the sum total of all realities, because these realities are determined by something external to this sum total.

Hegel's conclusion at this stage is that the concept of God must include contradiction in order to have any meaning. However contradiction is not possible in the sphere of Being, since it pertains not to Being but to Essence. Contradiction is self-reflection. This is why it is not until the second book of *The Science of Logic*--i.e., *The Doctrine of Essence*--that Hegel once again refers to God as the sum total of all realities that does not include contradictions.

In *The Doctrine of Essence*, contradiction is the third determination of reflection. It includes the determinations of identity, difference, and opposition--all of which Hegel has treated earlier. The general rule of contradiction is that "everything is inherently contradictory".<sup>25</sup> This is to say,  $A \neq A$  and therefore it is A. Thus contradiction is self-determination, or inner movement. Perceptual movement, for example, is also contradictory--as was assumed in ancient Greek philosophy--since movement does not mean transition in time from one place to another, but means to be and not to be in the same place at the same time. A clear expression of contradiction is the determination of relationships such as Left and Right. Right means only the negation of Left, and Left the negation of Right; that is to say, Right is self-negation--i.e., Left. Thus the contradictory terms are one and the same thing, and this is

their essential nature. When they are treated separately, however, they lose their essence and each is merely a "direction" in general, rather than a unity of Right and Left.

According to the advocates of the ontological proof, God may be defined as the sum total of all realities because these realities do not include contradiction. But it is precisely in this way that God, so defined, is nullified and reduced to Nothing--in which case existence cannot be attributed to God unless it is also identical with Nothing. A condition for the existence of God is his being *causa sui*. But to be *causa sui*, God has to include contradiction. For if God includes contradiction within himself, He can be both cause and effect, and not only an infinite being that is without bounds and indetermined. Such abstract infinite Being cannot be *causa sui* and, as Nothing, requires no cause.

But if the infinite is taken to be the sum total of all realities, in the sense that it is without limits, then it includes within itself difference, which becomes opposition, and which in turn assumes the character of contradiction. God under this guise is absolute infinite motion--that is to say, essence. In this capacity God can serve as the basis for further determinations. And determinations imply finiteness and contingency, both of which entail contradiction. Thus, non-being--the finite--derives from the nature of the absolute, and the absolute arises from non-Being.

### 3.

#### EXISTENCE AND MEDIATION

Hegel's next reference to the ontological argument appears in Section Two of *The Doctrine of Essence*.<sup>26</sup> Here his approach is of a highly complex order, involving not only the ontological argument but other proofs of God's existence as well. Even so, his primary preoccupation is with the ontological argument itself.

Hegel begins by considering what is meant by existence in Kantian philosophy. He then sets out the ontological argument in a way that is valid by Kantian criteria. It should be noted however that Kant was unaware of the possibility of such validity. Hegel contends that the Kantian critique is invalid even on the basis of Kant's own assumptions. It can only be justified in the context of a more advanced form of knowledge. That is to say, existence is indeed not a predicate, but for reasons other than those put forward by Kant.

As was observed earlier, Kant's critique is based on the definition of existence in the context of experience as a whole; or in Hegelian terms, existence is in relation to something other than itself--in other words it is mediated Being. The existence of anything means, according to Kant, that it is contingent on its relationships. A concept, on the other hand, is immediated and independent of its relationships; it is purely self-identity, a mere logical rather than real possibility.

But in the ontological argument, the concept of God is mediated because in it the concept is *proved*, and a proof is mediated knowledge. It is "the consciousness of the proper movement of the object in itself"<sup>27</sup> which is to say that the object is self-mediated. In the ontological proof, God is defined as comprehending all realities, and existence is one of these realities. Therefore God is contained by His universal reality. Thus the logical order of the ontological proof is as follows: (1) God is all the realities; (2) Existence is a reality; (3) therefore God exists.

Reality therefore mediates between God and existence.<sup>28</sup> Only mediation is at issue here: God as essence is mediated. And to be mediated is to be in relation to another thing, to be in a certain context. But the other thing is not the sole agency of mediation. Were this the case, God would annul, since if His existence hinges on another (as Kant understands existence) then God-in-himself would not exist. But God is not mediated by anything else, since the mediating agency (which is reality) is included in God, as is therefore existence. Mediation is thus "absorbed" in God, who is consequently immediated. But as such God is not indivisible and static. His essence is movement. He is self-mediated; and self-mediation consists in movement from one determination to another. God is perpetual change.

Thus God, who at the beginning of the historical development of the ontological argument was conceived of as immediated and indivisible being, is at the end once again treated as immediated though divisible--as mediated *within Himself*.

In the ontological argument existence is mediated. As we have already seen, the idea of mediation emerged as the argument was refined. For Leibniz, the existence and essence of God are mediated by reason of the necessary existence of all the perfections. That is to say, God's essence and existence are mediated by something which is neither existence nor Essence. Leibniz thereby ensures that God, who is the subject of all realities, is also objective--in other words knowable. In the ontological proof, knowledge of existence is possibly only if it is mediated. Belief, on the other hand, is mediated and therefore not regarded as knowledge by adherents of the ontological proof. Such purely immediated knowledge is not the knowledge of *something*, since that something is itself immediated as well.

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel asserts that belief does not, as is ordinarily supposed, contradict knowledge and science.<sup>29</sup> Rather, belief is a mode of knowledge, since the object of belief is known. As the object of belief, God is therefore mediated since He has an existence which is separate from the world He created. He exists in-and-for-Himself. But mere belief as well as mere knowledge are purely abstract--they are solely self-identities. Therefore existence is neither purely mediated nor purely immediated, but is immediated by virtue of the annulment of mediation.

Kant is indeed correct in asserting that existence is not a predicate of essence, but not because existence is as it were mediation and essence is self-identity. Kant's argument on this point is inappropriate. According to Hegel, existence is a mode of the being of essence, and is therefore already inherent in essence--it is a state

of essence. Existence is essence as movement from one determination to another; it is a self-determination or self-mediation of the concept.

As was observed, according to Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, a proof is a self-mediation. It is "the consciousness of the proper movement of the object in itself". This convergence between knowledge and object does not occur in external knowledge, such as in science, where the movement is subjective and not a movement of the object. Thus knowledge of God is knowledge of His movement. It is not external and subjective but is objective, since God's existence cannot be grasped by the senses or the imagination but only by thought.<sup>30</sup> Therefore God is essentially an object of knowledge, and the process of knowledge of God is identical with the movement of the object.

In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, Hegel confines himself to examining the subject sphere. There he is concerned with science of *religion* rather than with theology or the science of God. At issue is *how* God is known and not *what* He is. When we are concerned with the problem of what God is, then the two questions are identical. But in the stage at which the congruence between knowledge and the know is incomplete, then the distinction can still be made.

#### 4.

### THE TRANSITION FROM SUBJECTIVITY TO OBJECTIVITY

Hegel's references in *The Science of Logic* on the ontological argument may be summarized as follows:

In his first reference Hegel took issue with the principal claim put forward by Kant in his refutation, namely that existence is not a true predicate. Kant's argument is based on the identity between the possibility of a thing and its reality. Hegel insists that this argument blurs the distinction between abstract and determined Being by applying the categories of abstract being (the transition to nothingness) to determined Being. This confusion gives rise to a reverse blurring of categories--namely the transition from the finite to the infinite. It shows up in the example of the hundred thalers which Kant used in order to demonstrate by analogy that God is to be defined abstractly as the sum total of all realities. Hegel makes no distinction between determined Being, finite Being, and concept, nor again between existence and being, since these distinctions are not dealt with by Kant, and have no relevance to the level of discussion in that part of *The Science of Logic*.

The second reference to the ontological argument begins where the first left off--namely at the point at which God is defined abstractly as the sum total that does not include contradiction. As

such, God is an abstract Being--i.e., He is Nothing. Here Hegel relies on the first determination of Being, which is quality. Quality, is taken as being non-mediated--it is reality. God is defined as the sum total of all realities. And because the realities, considered in this definition of God do not include contradiction, they cannot be essences.

The third reference to the ontological argument is concerned with the essentiality of the contradiction, as opposed to the common-sense view that treats contradiction as a defect.

Thus Hegel's critique is concerned with pointing up the logical shortcoming in both the Kantian refutation of the ontological proof and the ontological argument defects which are characteristics of the logical stage of the proof itself and of Kant's refutation. At this stage the notions of concept and existence were far from having assumed a crystalized form.

When Hegel considers the argument in connection with existence in general, the proofs of the existence of God are treated by Him as instances of the transition from essence to existence. Hegel shows that on the basis of the Kantian assumption that existence is only mediation and essence--mere self-identity--such a transition is impossible.

According to Hegel, existence is a mode of the being of essence: it is the self-movement of essence from one determination to another. We have observed that in his critique of scientific and religious consciousness Hegel considered both to be one sided. Thus scientific consciousness takes knowledge to be purely mediated, and religious consciousness purely non-mediated. Therefore scientific knowledge cannot assert an object to be existent, since it is merely hypothetical, and religious knowledge is without a known content.

By virtue of the assertion that existence is a mode of the being of essence, both the ontological argument and Kant's refutation are representative of an early stage of consciousness. Existence for Hegel has a meaning that is different from the one assumed in either the ontological proof or Kant's critique.

Up to this point in *The Science of Logic*, Hegel has given no consideration to the core of the ontological argument, which has to do with the transition from subjectivity to existence--a topic that cannot adequately be considered with the concepts employed in the ontological argument and Kant's refutation. Both of the latter belongs to earlier stages in the development of thought. The transition from subjectivity to existence can be considered only after an elucidation of the concept of Concept.<sup>31</sup> An analysis of the transition from the concept to existence (i.e., to objectivity) can be undertaken only following a consideration of the subjectivity of concepts. The very process of integrating the question of the existence of God into the system of concepts contained in Hegel's *Logic* brings home the essence of the argument as a transition from concept to existence, from subjectivity to objectivity. An analysis of the last in

regard to the ontological argument may be found in Hegel's discussion of Objectivity in his *Subjective Logic*.<sup>32</sup>

In the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* Hegel argues that insofar as a concept is thought rather than mere imagination, it does not remain subjective but passes into objectivity, and thus annuls its subjectivity. This transition is possible in respect to Descartes only in regard to the concept of the infinite, which is to say that the finite does not exist. This sort of logic, according to which the finite does not exist outside of itself, results in "Christian humility and modesty to desire through one's abjectness to attain to excellence".<sup>33</sup> Indeed in Christianity the perfection of God has the effect of making the human insignificant. Hegel, on the other hand, interprets the perfection of God to be an affirmation of human value since God is Spirit or thought.<sup>34</sup> And thought undergoes a process of development in which every stage of knowledge contains the grounds for its self-annulment and a transition to a higher stage of knowledge. This is the nature of the human spirit, so long as the human is defined by thought as a process of rising to ever higher stages of self-knowledge until the ultimate stage of "laying hold of the Divine" is attained.<sup>35</sup>

The transition from subjectivity to objectivity is not confined merely to the concept of God, since it is not deduced from the nature of the infinite, but from the nature of concept *per se*. Thus Hegel accepts the aspect of the ontological argument that concerns the transition of a concept from subjectivity to objectivity, but argues that in Kant's system this transition cannot occur since the ego, in its capacity as reason or perception, is absolutely separate from external things. Hegel observes that this is not true even of creatures less developed than man. Animals achieve a unity with the external world of their activity--for example, by satisfying their internal needs by means of external objects.<sup>36</sup> In the process in which the concept is made objective, every action diminishes subjectivity. To imagine a hundred thalers is certainly not to possess them. But in order to possess a hundred thalers one has first to possess a concept of a hundred thalers.<sup>37</sup> This is the case only for a *true* concept, which is the sole instance in which a transition takes place from subjectivity to objectivity. On the other hand false concepts pertain to traditional formal logic and undergo no development, so that they are static self-identities. The relationship of a false concept with what is external neither derive from the concept nor do they constitute it; in short, a false concept touches on neither existence nor objectivity.

However, the concept of concept, which is the issue dealt within the *Subjective Logic*, is not a self-identity but a *subject*. In other words, the concept increasingly determines itself. Substance is Being transformed into a subject--i.e., a concept--which, in contrast to the classical idea of substance, is also active. There are three aspects of this activity, all of which are realized in judgment: the universal, the particular, and the individual. Judgment is the implicit "original division" (*Ur-teil*) of the concept that is made explicit in judgment. The universal, the particular, and the individual are related to one another as subject and predicate by means of the copula, in which all three are in the end united. It is in the copula, which acts as a mediator, that judgment becomes a syllogism. In the syllogism, mediation assumes a function separate from subject and predicate. Thus subject and predicate, which were in opposi-

tion in the absence of mediation, are now joined to form a syllogism. In this process, the concept is not external to content (i.e., to the object), but rather represents the development of the object and changes as a consequence of referring to itself.

The disjunctive syllogism represents the last stage in the development of the syllogism. At this stage the concept is completed and assumes the character of an active universality that generates difference out of itself, and in doing so it goes beyond itself and negates itself. The Being which is the result of the negation of a syllogism--in other words, the result of the annulment of the mediation--is *objectivity*.

The most developed form of objectivity in the Subjective Logic is teleology. Teleological activity carried out by means of the tools ceases to be subjective and becomes objective. And the ultimate goal of this whole process is for consciousness an *idea* in which subjectivity and objectivity manage to become an absolute unity.

In the light of the preceding, we can understand why the ontological argument is considered within the context of the transition of the concept to objectivity. Thus Hegel observes:

. . . though it might seem that the transition from the Notion (*Begriff*)<sup>38</sup> into objectivity is not the same thing as the transition from the Notion of God to his existence, it should be borne in mind on the one hand that the determinate *content*, God, makes no difference in the logical process, and the ontological proof is merely an application of this logical process to the said content. On the other hand however it is essential to bear in mind the remark made above that the subject only obtains determinateness and content in its predicate; until then, no matter what it may be for feeling, intuition and pictorial thinking, for rational cognition it is only a *name*.<sup>39</sup>

He then goes on to say,

The predicates . . . must be grasped as themselves still included within the Notion, hence as something subjective, which so far has not emerged into existence.<sup>40</sup>

Earlier we noted that the ontological proof follows the logical rule of the transition of the concept to objectivity, as does every content. Hegel, however, asserts that only content can undergo a transition from concept to existence. But content can be realized in the predicate, and this realization remains *subjective* since in it the concept does not as yet emerge from itself. Nevertheless, the subjective realization of the subject in the predicate is a *conditio sine qua non* of the transition to objectivity, without which subjectivity is inconceivable. Yet it cannot properly be said that existence is a predicate of God, as is assumed in the ontological proof. Asserting that something passes into existence only in the predicate is the same as saying that exists only nominally.

It seems therefore that there are only two alternatives. Either something is realized in the predicate or it is not. If it is not realized in the predicate, then from the point of view of thought it is merely a name. And if on the other hand it is realized in the predicate, then it remains subjective and does not become objective. This is to say, it is only content--merely a *condition* for becoming objective--and does not represent an actual transition to objectivity.

But a true content must necessarily include objectification since its predicates are a realization of the concept--that is, they are the negation of the concept as mere concept; they constitute the concept. And if the predicates are not constituents of the concept, then what we are dealing with is not a true concept: it is an empty rather than a true form.<sup>41</sup>

In marking his case against Kant, Hegel proposes the following example: If "I am hungry" is to have a real content rather than being only an example of a judgment, then it should be reworded to read, "I am *really* hungry and shall try to satisfy my hunger", so that the "I" is realized in "hungry" and become objective as a consequence of the action of satisfying one's hunger. Hegel's criticism of Kant in this regard therefore consists in showing that a concept passes into objectivity through its realization.<sup>42</sup>

But the argument against the ontological proof was that a name alone cannot pass on into objectivity. This, according to Hegel, is true. It is evident that the concept "I", taken merely as a name, and without reference to its predicates, cannot make the transition into objectivity. This point is expressed even in Descartes' assertion "I think therefore I am". For what am I when I think? Only thought. Similarly, in respect of God, the transition to existence was accomplished by means of the sum total of all realities. But this sum is a void. Therefore the real concept of God is on the contrary attained by taking into account His activity as well:

God, as the living God, and still more as absolute spirit, is known only by his activity, man was early instructed to recognize God in his works; only from these can proceed the determinations, which are called his properties.<sup>43</sup>

That is to say, the world is a predicate of God, and the relationships between God and the world are the relationships between subject and predicate. Thus God is subject insofar as He is not Himself but rather His predicate. But since the predicate is the subject, the latter once again emerges as a double negation: God as the object of belief, is the Creator of the world; however He also exists in and for Himself.<sup>44</sup> As already noted, belief is immediate knowledge. This knowledge is not, however, the knowledge of merely a name, but of a concept. A concept, moreover, has determinations and these become explicit in predicates. Thus, in order to manage the transition from the concept of God to His existence, God must be grasped first in His predicates--in His realizations, His activities; only then can God's existence be deduced from these.



Descartes deduces existence from the ego in the following way: he first recognizes the ego's activity, from which he goes on to deduce its property--namely, to be a thinking thing; and from this he finally deduces its existence. In this process the transition to existence was intrinsic to the concept. On the other hand, the transition to existence in respect of God was made by way of a consideration external to the concept, so that the transition to objectivity was only illusory.

The assumption of both the ontological proof and Kant's refutation is that Being exists only as something external to the concept. However, according to the adherents of the ontological proof, the transition from concept to Being is peculiar to God alone, whereas Kant holds that it is impossible even in this case.

From the summary of Descartes' argument it is clear that even a concept has actual reality. Moreover, without the reality of the concept--without the real existence of consciousness--no transition could take place in Descartes' philosophy from the concept to the existence of God. And if this were the case, no concept could be asserted, not even the concept of God. In order for the ontological proof to be valid, the concept must exist beforehand. In other words consciousness must be real; it must be a mediator between concept and existence. This assumption has a lesser degree of Being and precedes that Being which is called "existence" in the ontological argument. However, this aspect of the proof is not really considered by Hegel.

Nevertheless the ontological argument assumes that the transition from concept to existence is unique to God. The distance between thought and reality can be spanned by means of a being that admits of no difference whatsoever--not even the difference between thought and existence. The Kantian critique becomes easier to accept when existence is taken to be external to thought; all that remains then is to show that existence is, without exception, external to thought--in other words, valid also in the case of God.

The gist of Hegel's critique of the ontological argument is that the proof asserts that the transition of concept to existence is unique to the concept of God, because the concept was taken to be unilateral and as being without existence. Kant was even more extreme in his assertion of the unilaterality of concept and, therefore, of the unilaterality of existence. Kant claimed that existence could only be added to thought, but not deduced from it.

According to Hegel, the transition of concept to existence has to be understood as a process of self-realization--as a transition to objectivity. As was noted, concept is the subject; and what is realized in it by being put in line with the predicate is the object by virtue of its being in relationship with the subject. Thus what was regarded by Descartes as having a lesser degree of reality, because of its being in a relationship to the subject, is granted a greater degree of reality in Hegel's philosophy because it is self-determined. In effect, to be the object of a subject is an intrinsic quality of the subject.

Judgments of existence are neither analytic nor synthetic. Their extreme terms are neither totally similar nor totally different, in such a way that the link between the extreme terms originates outside the concept. Rather what takes place is a movement of development resulting from the subject's relation to itself. The concept changes in accordance with this self-reference. In other words, consciousness is changed by means of its own self-reference. The ontological proof is an application of this transition in thought to reality, which is the matter dealt with by Hegel in *The Science of Logic*.

The importance of the ontological argument in Hegel's *Logic* is that it represents an application of the transition from subjectivity to objectivity. Were the existence of God the feature of principal account, then it would have to be treated as Idea.<sup>45</sup> But in the ontological argument, the concept of God does not assume the status of Idea because the definition of God as "the sum total of all realities that does not include contradiction" makes of God an abstract being that does not pass into objectivity, in the sense of a mode of being of the concept; nor into existence, in the sense of a mode of being of essence. In other words, the Deity that the ontological argument sets out to prove is of no concern to *The Science of Logic*. Hegel is concerned with the ontological argument only in its capacity "as an *application* of the logical course of objectification of the Notion".<sup>46</sup>

But if it is the case, then we have to ask why Hegel should have included in his account of the process of development of concept a consideration of the ontological proof. After all, he might just as well have used a less elaborate example, such as one that would show how subjectivity becomes objective by the satisfaction of a need.<sup>47</sup> The reason is that the concept of God is something which is only thinkable--it is purely Spirit. God is "a subjective movement the elevation of the Spirit to God".<sup>48</sup> The concept of God is Concept that becomes Idea. Moreover, *The Science of Logic* as a whole can be regarded as Hegel's own ontological argument. Hegel's preoccupation with the original ontological proof has to do with its representing the transition of concept to existence, and this is the point at which Hegel's *Logic* and the ontological proof converge.

The critical issue of Kant's refutation of the ontological argument is the negation of the transition from concept to existence. The Kantian approach is therefore rejected by properly defining the place of Kant's refutation: that is to say, Kant's concept is abstract, and an abstract concept does not pass into existence. Indeed, everywhere that the ontological proof and Kant's refutation are mentioned, they are treated as being defective degrees of thought. The original ontological proof is therefore invalid. Common to both is the assumption that concept as a general concept is not necessarily realized--and then obviously not out of itself.

The proof is necessary precisely because there is a gap between concept and existence. Kant's initial assumption is the same, since in his refutation of the proof he explicitly shows that the concept of God is presupposed in it. Thus in *The Science of Logic* the proof and its refutation are considered for the purpose of rejecting them both--until Hegel's reference, in which the proof is raised to a degree of logic and that

makes Kant's refutation appear defective. Thus the status of the ontological argument has been altered. In the argument as originally set out, God is the exception in that the concept of the Deity must necessarily make the transition from itself to existence, whereas the rule is that a concept can make no such transition into existence. In Hegel, however, the concept of God is an application of the rule that the concept necessarily passes from subjectivity to objectivity. In other words, *Hegel's concept of God is subordinated to the same rule that the original proof has turned into an exception.*

Therefore Hegel's three references to the ontological argument may be summed up in the following manner: The original argument asserts that the general state of concepts is that they necessarily include many predicates, but not the predicate of existence. However, the concept of God necessarily includes existence as a predicate, and therefore God exists.

Kant's opinion on the contrary, is that existence in general cannot be predicated, by the very nature of concepts. Therefore even the concept of God cannot include existence. God thus exists only as possibility.

Finally, Hegel argues that concept includes existence. Or to put the matter in Hegelian terms, the concept is necessarily nullified as a subject and becomes objective out of itself, and this is true of the concept of God as well. However, viewed in this way, the concept of God is no longer merely a concept of God but self-consciousness as something real: it is developed concept. Thus from the point of view of Hegel's *Logic*, God is concept. And concept entails self-creation, which in turn entails the transition of subjectivity into objectivity.

## EPILOGUE

### KARL MARX'S OBSERVATION CONCERNING THE ONTOLOGICAL PROOF

The problem of subjectivity becoming objective may be broached from a number of perspectives. Most generally, we may ask how something can at one and the same time be both subjective and objective. And concerning God, we may ponder the question of how God can be both self-conscious and real--both the subject and the object of the self-same subject. And if it is the case that God is the object of Himself, what then is the difference between subjectivity and objectivity?

Marx addresses himself to these issues in a remark concerning the ontological argument in which he includes a critique of Kant's refutation of the proof.<sup>49</sup> Thus he observes:

The proofs of the existence of God are . . . mere *hollow tautologies*: "that which I conceive for myself in a real way (*realiter*), is a real concept for me", something that works on me. In this sense *all gods*, the pagan as well as the Christian ones, have possessed a real existence. Did not the ancient Moloch reign? Was not the Delphic

Apollo a real poser in the life of the Greeks? Kant's critique means nothing in this respect. If somebody imagines that he has a hundred thalers, if this concept is not for him an arbitrary, subjective one, if he believes in it, then these hundred imagined thalers have for him the same value as a hundred real ones. For instance, he will incur debts on the strength of his imagination, *his imagination will work, in the same way as all humanity has incurred debts on its gods*. The contrary is true. Kant's example might have enforced the ontological proof. Real thalers have the same existence that the imagined gods have. Has a real thaler any existence except in the imagination, if only in the general or rather common imagination of man? Bring paper money into a country where this use of paper is unknown, and everyone will laugh at your subjective imagination. Come with your gods into a country where other gods are worshipped, and you will be shown to suffer from fantasies and abstractions. And justly so. He who would have brought a Wendic god to the ancient Greeks would have found the proof of this god's non-existence. Indeed, for the Greeks he did not exist. *This which a particular country is for particular alien gods, the country of reason is for God in general, a region in which he ceases to exist.*

Marx is attempting to establish the sense in which the ontological proof is valid, and how it includes the transition of subjectivity to objectivity. From his commentary it is clear that a real image or representation, a concept that incorporates the transition into existence, has two essential characteristics. First it is shared by other minds; and second, it is effectively real being common to all subjects in a given society and therefore is not liable to contradiction. This inner coherence of the concept already places it in the domain of reality. Among the ancient Greeks a Wendic God would be a concept involving a real contradiction. Such a God would not be believed and would therefore be unreal--he would have no social reality. A representation is not something real merely as representation--that is, as a concept or thought or knowledge *per se*--but because it requires reality, action, a social order. The representation as something real is the sort of knowledge that creates reality. And this reality is not only a predicate of that knowledge but is also its object, so that subjectivity is made objective.

Like Hegel, Marx takes issue with Kant's assumption that a concept is identical with itself. As something identical with itself, a concept is not even a real representation but only a empty logical form, and being defective it cannot assume an existence. Kant's refutation is nonsensical, according to Marx, because it does not deal with real concepts. Kant's claims that a concept is not something real presupposes an unbridgeable gap between thought and reality. However, Marx asserts together with Hegel, that God is self-consciousness which makes itself real--it is the object of itself and is therefore self-creating. And since subject's referral to itself consists in more than merely knowledge of an object, but is also self-creative, knowledge must in this case change the object so that it is none other than the subject itself.<sup>50</sup>

In referring to the ontological proof as a tautology, Marx is not considering the logical form of the original argument, as did Kant in asserting that the ontological proof is an analytical judgment. Rather, Marx is speaking of his own particular version of the argument--to wit, that a real concept is not merely subjective but is also necessarily objective. 'Subjective' connotes arbitrariness which is to say that the concept does not act upon the subject, does not create reality, and is not shared with other minds. In other words, an arbitrary concept is self-contradictory and can no more to exist than a Wendic god in ancient Greece. Arbitrary concepts that do not become real cannot be found outside philosophical discussions. Kant's illustration of the hundred thalers is an example in kind. This is the reason that the ontological proof is a tautology. It is in the very nature of real concepts that they be *realized*. However, arbitrary concepts such of those of Kant do not include existence, and thus they are hollow and include nothing.<sup>51</sup>

In asserting at the conclusion of his remark that "a particular country is for particular alien gods, the country of reason is for God in general, a region in which he ceases to exist", Marx is saying that, from the point of view of Reason, God does not exist. God is in this instance a subjective representation of image, since Reason reveals the origin of God to be consciousness. To the religious mind, God exists outside consciousness, and to the extent that the believer must not even try to understand the essence or manner of what he believes in.<sup>52</sup>

Following the passage just cited, Marx goes on to say:

As to the second alternative, that such proofs are *proofs of the existence of essential human self consciousness, logical explanations of it*, take for example the ontological proof. Which being is immediate when made the subject of thought? Self-consciousness . . . Taken in this sense all proofs of the existence of God are proof of his *non-existence*. They are *refutations* of all concepts of a God. The true proofs should have the opposite character.<sup>53</sup>

And finally, in regard to the true form of the ontological proof, Marx observes:

Because there is no thought, there is God. But what does that say, except that, *for whom the world appears without reason, hence who is without reason himself, for him God exists? Or lack of reason is the existence of God.*<sup>54</sup>

This is a reference to Hegel's critique, in which the concept of God is identified with self-consciousness. Or, in Marxian terms, the ontological proof is in Hegel's system a proof of self-consciousness. But if this is so, Marx continues, it is also proof of God's inexistence. For a real consciousness of God affects the conscious subject; and if God is known as self-consciousness--as is the case in Hegel, according to Marx's interpretation--then this consciousness cannot be a real consciousness of God, but is rather consciousness of his unreality.

This is why Marx humorously proposes that the true form of the ontological proof might be deduced from the existence of God starting from the inexistence of thought, rather than starting from the existence of thought, as in the original argument: God's existence signifies the absence of reason.

Thus, as in Hegel, so in Marx's philosophy God is, from the point of view of reason, self-consciousness. However, the difference is that God is for Marx an alternative to self-consciousness--a realized self-consciousness that is not conscious of itself, a self-consciousness that lacks reason.<sup>55</sup> Otherwise a believer in God would know that he believes in himself, thus making belief in God impossible since it would be annulled together with its object. Hegel has reason supersede belief; in doing so, he did not negate God but only altered God's status to that of Idea. This is however a contradiction, since God exists and is real by virtue of the activity of those who have believed in Him throughout history. Self-consciousness, on the other hand, nullifies God together with the activity of the believers in whom He assumes reality. Thus self-consciousness reverts to the real subject, which is also the object of itself. The subject cannot therefore be self-conscious and at the same time believe in God. □

#### ENDNOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> Those who take the modern analytical approach argue that an ontological reference is needed in order to determine the meaning of concepts; and that if there are no such reference for God, He does not exist. See, for example, Gary Bedell, "Is Existence an Essential Predicate?", *Idealistic Studies*, VII, 2 (May 1977), 192-7.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of objective reality is taken here in its later meaning, as "being-in-itself", and not as related to the subject. For Descartes, however, objective reality meant the opposite. As in Medieval tradition, objective reality was regarded by Descartes to mean being related to the subject. In later times this came to be called "subjective reality". On the other hand, the concept of "formal reality" in Descartes is today called "actual", "efficient" or "objective" reality, as opposed to subjective reality. Therefore, in this paper, what Descartes terms "formal reality" will be called objective reality. And what Descartes termed "objective reality" will be called subjective reality, or the reality in the consciousness that pertains to the process of thinking. Only when Descartes' own words are quoted will his own nomenclature be used.

<sup>3</sup> René Descartes, *Les Meditations Metaphysiques*, ed. by Ch. Adam and P. Tannery, Paris: 1964, 31.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 76-77.

7 *Ibid.*, 78.

8 *Ibid.*, 79.

9 S. Anselmi, *Proslogion*2, in *Opera Omnia*, Stuttgart: 1968, Vol. 1, 101.

10 This assumption is not considered in any of the recent attempts to defend Anselm's argument. These address themselves to the content of the argument without the mediation of Descartes' hypothetical necessity, and without taking into account the centrality of the actual existence of thought to the case being made by Anselm. See Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments", *The Nature of Necessity*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974, 197-221.

11 G.W. Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, ed. by C.J. Gerhardt, Vol. 7, 261-62.

12 A "real predicate" is a predicate which is either included in the concept (i.e., a predicate of the analytic judgment) or a predicate added as a result of experience (i.e., a predicate of synthetic judgment). If a statement is neither analytic (i.e., if it does not explain) nor synthetic (i.e., if it does not enlarge knowledge), it cannot be regarded as a predicate.

13 Cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A599/B627.

14 *Ibid.*

15 However transcendental must be distinguished from ideal; transcendental is the rule, whereas *ideal* refers only to the domain of possibility.

16 Cf. Descartes, *Meditations*, 52.

17 Spinoza, *Ethics*, prop. XXVII, part 1, trans. by E. Curley, Princeton: 1985.

18 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. of A.V. Miller (London: 1969), Vol. 1, bk. 1, sec. 1, ch. 1, 83.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*, 89.

21 *Ibid.*, 90.

22 "Remark: Quality and Negation", *Ibid.*, ch. 2, ¶b, 111.

23 G.W.F. Hegel, *Op. Cit.*, 113.

24 *Ibid.*, 389/90.

- 25 "Remark 3: The Law of Contradiction", *Ibid.*, ¶C, Ch. 2, Section 1, Book 2, 439.
- 26 "Existence", *Ibid.*, section 2, Book 2, 481.
- 27 Hegel, "Second Lecture", *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, (London: 1895), 165.
- 28 The ontological proof as a syllogism is not considered here since we are dealing only with existence, which is a mode of being of essence. The proper place for dealing with syllogism would be a discussion of concept, which is not the mode of being of existence but of objectivity.
- 29 Third Lecture, *Ibid.*, 174/179.
- 30 *Ibid.*, First Lecture, 155.
- 31 The expression "concept of Concept" is valid since the whole of *Science of Logic* consists in a discussion of concepts. The issue addressed is that of the process of self-consciousness. Thus the discussion of Being is actually a treatment of the *concept* of Being; that a magnitude is a consideration of the *concept* of magnitude, and so on.
- 32 "Objectivity", *Ibid.*, Section 2, Vol. II, 705/710.
- 33 Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. by E.S. Haldane and F.H. Simpson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), Vol. III, 454/455.
- 34 Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 165.
- 35 Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. III, 455.
- 36 *Ibid.*
- 37 *Ibid.*, 454.
- 38 We have however preferred to translate *Begriff* as "concept" rather than as "notion" since "concept" derives etymologically from Latin *conceptus*, whose root is *capio*, meaning "to take". Similarly, *Begiff* comes from the verb *Begreifen* which means "to grasp".
- 39 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 706.
- 40 *Ibid.*



41 It may be that logical suppositions are exceptions. In "*Let us suppose that I have a hundred real thalers*", reality is not asserted from the very beginning as a logical supposition.

42 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 454.

43 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, 706.

44 Cf. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 176.

45 At the end of his discussion of the argument, Hegel asserts that "if the Notion is to be presented as the Notion of God, it is to be apprehended as it is when taken up into the Idea". *The Science of Logic*, 707.

46 *Ibid.*, 707.

47 See G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 454.

48 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, 165.

49 Karl Marx, *Difference Between the Democritean and Epicurean Philosophy of Nature*, Mark & Engels Collected Works, New York 1975, trans. Richard Dixon, V. 1, 104.

50 Unlike Hegel, Marx asserts that consciousness is not an object but only a by-product of purposeful activity. However, this cannot be deduced from the quoted passage, and a discussion of this point would take us beyond the limits of the present discussion.

51 In a recent discussion of the ontological argument, David Haight defended the proof by asserting that logical truths presuppose ontological considerations: See David F. Haight, "Is Existence an Essential Predicate?" *Idealistic Studies*, VII, 2 (1977), 192-97; and by the same author, "Back to Intentional Entities and Essences", *The New Scholasticism*, LX, 2, (1981), 178-90. Marx, on the contrary, argues that the very nature of real concepts is to become real: thought bestows ontological status on its content, particularly in the case of social existence. According to Haight, ontology rests on epistemological foundations, whereas for Marx it is the result of a way of thinking that has no consciousness of its being self-consciousness.

52 Pursuing the same line of thought, Hegel reveals his own critical attitude toward Christianity, the consequence of whose doctrine he sums up as being: "We are good for nothing, and because we are good for nothing, we are good for nothing, and wish to be good for nothing"; G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, 454.

53 K. Marx, *Differences Between*, 104/5.

54 *Ibid.*, 105.

55 The "consciousness of self-consciousness" can be taken as the definition of reason.