

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT REVISITED***

The purpose and plan of the paper

The Ontological Argument for the existence of God has been the target of attack of many eminent philosophers and theologians since it was first propounded by St. Anselm (1033-1109 A. D.) and later restated by Descartes in the seventeenth century. The interest and controversy the Argument aroused during those days have continued through the centuries down to the present time; and as there have been bitter critics of the Argument exposing its fundamental weaknesses, there are others who have tried to interpret and rewrite it in such a manner as to make it immune from the standard criticisms traditionally levelled against it. The purpose of my present paper is to distinguish clearly, which is not usually done, between the four different ways in which it has been sought to be attacked and to determine whether all of them equally succeed in overthrowing the Argument in question.

What is common to the different versions of the Argument is this : A particular definition of God as infinite perfection is given, from which, by the use of certain premises, the conclusion "God exists" is deduced. A distinctive feature of this theistic proof lies in that it equates the formal validity of the Argument with the material truth of its conclusion. Traditionally the validity of an argument is a purely formal characteristic of the relation between its constituent propositions and does not speak anything about the *material truth* of its conclusion. A valid argument can be constructed with any proposition as its conclusion, even if the conclusion is materially false. But the Ontological Argument purports to demonstrate that given the definition of God along

*** In recent times Norman Malcolm has distinguished two different arguments in Anselm's *Proslogion*. See Malcolm's paper "Anselm's Ontological Argument" in *The Philosophical Review* (Ithaca, New York : January 1960). pp. 41-62. My treatment of Anselm is restricted to what Malcolm calls the first argument and I have nothing to say in this essay about what Malcolm calls the second argument.

with some other premises, the proposition 'God exists' necessarily follows them and this conclusion is materially true, meaning that corresponding to the proposition 'God exists' there is a being called God in objective reality. Jerome Shaffer in his celebrated paper "Existence, Predication and the Ontological Argument"¹ beautifully summarises this : "A famous example of an argument which purports to prove the existence of something by showing that its non-existence implies a contradiction is the Ontological Argument, which purports to show that it follows from a particular *concept* of God that such a *being* exists, and therefore that the assertion of the non-existence of God is self-contradictory". (Italics mine). In other words 'God exists' is an analytically necessary proposition the *material truth* of which is solely determined *a priori* by an analysis of the concept of God and nothing but the laws of logic are required to show this.

One of the various ways of attacking the Argument is to show that the definition on the concept of God used in it is ill-formed and logically impossible. The second way consists in casting doubt upon the acceptability of some of the premises from which the conclusion 'God exists' is deduced. An argument, it is alleged, cannot prove its conclusion unless its premises are unconditionally agreed upon or acknowledged to be true by the person to whom it is sought to be demonstrated. This peculiar notion of 'prove' will be detailed out later on in its proper context. The third way of attack finds expression in the famous slogan, very much current in the philosophers' circle, that 'existence is not a predicate'. It tries to bring out the absurdities in predicating the attribute of existence of any logical subject of a statement, including the concept of God. The fourth way is to question the justification of the move of deducing an existential statement from a concept or definition, even if the idea of existence be included in the proposed definition. It tries to show that even granting that the attribute of existence is a part of the defining characteristic of God, the proposition 'God exists' does not necessarily entail that *there is a God* in objective reality. But before discussing in detail these four ways of disposing of the Ontological Argument let us first be clear as to what the Argument actually consists of in its two classical versions — the Anselmic and the Cartesian.

The Anselmic version of the Ontological Argument

St. Anselm (1033-1109 A. D.), Abbot of Bec in Normandy and later Archbishop of Canterbury, is said to have discovered the Argument in a sudden flash of intellectual illumination and he wrote it down in a booklet entitled "Proslogion" composed in the form of a prayer. The Ontological Argument² as presented by Anselm takes its start from the famous definition of God formulated by him in chapter II of the *Proslogion*: God is "something than which nothing greater can be conceived". Stripped off its comparative-negative rendering and stated positively, it means nothing more than that God is the greatest conceivable being.' Anselm claims that God's existence can be demonstrated by developing the implications of this single definition and he proceeds to do it in the following way:

He first tries to show that the notion of God, as elaborated in this definition, exists in everybody's mind or understanding (*esse in intellectu*) as a concept. Even an atheist (represented in the Anselmic argument as the Biblical Fool who "saith in heart, There is no God") has to admit the conceptual existence of God in his mind, because "when he hears this (definition) he understands it, and whatever is understood is in the understanding"³ (*Proslogion*, Ch. II). What the atheist denies is the existence of God in external reality (*in re*) over and above His mental existence as a concept, and the whole burden of Anselm's Argument is directed against the atheist in order to convince him that God's existence is a reality so far as it stands over against the human mind with an actuality of its own. In other words, Anselm's argument operates against what M. J. Charlesworth⁴ calls the 'factual atheist' who accepts the issue of Divine existence as a meaningful question which, however, he answers in the negative, as distinct from what the 'logical atheist' does, the logical atheist' being one who denies that the concept of God is a viable concept in relation to which the question of existence or instantiation can at all be discussed properly.

Having thus established that "something than which nothing greater can be conceived" (i.e., God) exists universally in everybody's mind, including that of an atheist, the next vital question, which is the crux of the Argument, is raised — whether it exists

objectively in external reality (*in re*) as well. The proof that it does is based on the acceptance of the following two premises : (i) If something exists conceptually in somebody's mind, it can be logically thought of as existing in external reality too; and (ii) existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind, i.e., to exist *both* in reality and in the mind is greater than to exist in the mind alone. An equivalent way of putting this latter interesting proposition in our current terminology is : something is greater if it exists in reality, in addition to being conceived of, than if it is merely conceived of — a proposition which was condensed by Descartes into a philosophical maxim, viz., '*existence is a perfection*'.⁵ Now, the term 'greater than' used in this premise is far from pellucid and admits of different interpretations. It is clear that by 'greater' Anselm does not mean spatially larger but only 'more perfect'. He himself glosses 'greater than' as 'better than' in his *Reply* to Gaunilo (137·13—18), and in one of his earlier writings he says, "But I do not mean physically great, as a material object is great, but that which, the greater it is, is the, better or more worthy".⁶ In constructing greatness as moral goodness Anselm was following Augustine⁷ with whose writings he was intimately familiar. But a completely different explanation of greatness is sometimes read into Anselm. It rests on the Neoplatonic notion of 'degrees of being' : on this reading 'A is greater than B' would mean that A has more being than B or A occupies a higher ontological position than B. There are, of course, traces of this Neoplatonic view in Anselm's writings and there are commentators who think that a Neoplatonic reading is required in Anselm's formulation of the Ontological Argument.⁸ How this Neoplatonic interpretation of the notion of 'greater than' can be used in defence of this particular Anselmic premise of the Argument will be discussed later, but let us only note here that this view is not prominent in Anselm.

However, once these premises are acknowledged to be true along with the definition of God given by Anselm, God's existence *in re* follows as an undeniable conclusion. This is because to deny it would, then, be to face a most glaring paradox. To spell out the nature of the paradox let us suppose that God as "that than which nothing greater can be conceived" exists in the mind alone, having no extramental actuality of His own. But this supposition

cannot prevent us from *thinking of God* as existing in reality also, if the contention of the aforesaid first premise is true. This, when combined with the second premise that real existence is always greater than mental existence, commits us to the absurd conclusion that it is possible to think of something greater than that than which no greater can be conceived; and is it not a blatant self-contradiction to think of a 'greater than the greatest' ? To avoid such an absurdity we have to conclude that "that than which no greater can be conceived" (i.e., God) exists not only in the mind but in the external reality as well. In this way, starting from a particular definition of God Anselm proves His existence by the logical method of *reductio ad absurdum*.

Cartesian reformulation of the Argument

René Descartes (1596-1650 A. D.) formulated a proof of God's existence which is almost identical with Anselm's with only some minor variations. Unlike Anselm who defines God "as that than which nothing greater can be conceived" Descartes defines God as a "supremely perfect being" (*un être souverainement parfait*) — an expression which C. D. Broad interprets as equivalent to the phrase "a being which has all the positive powers and qualities to the highest possible degree".⁹ Though the language of Anselm's definition is comparative and that of Descartes' positive, these two definitions are semantically the same. Anselm does not circumscribe his definition by identifying God's nature with this or that particular moral quality. On the contrary, his definition is open-ended in the sense that it can accommodate all the metaphysical or moral attributes, in terms of any one or all of which one may choose to define God. In other words, the definition is formal in character; it provides us only with a *form*, the contents of which are to be filled in according to one's own choice and religious temperament¹⁰. For example, a Vaiṣṇava or Christian God of *love* and a Judaic-Islamic God of *power* would equally fit into the Anselmic definition. It would mean then that God is that love and that power than which no greater love and greater power can be conceived. In this way all the positive powers and qualities would find a place in the being of God, and the Anselmic definition would, in the last analysis, turn out to be synonymous with the Cartesian, despite their different linguistic framings.

However, the main contribution of Descartes to the formulation of the Ontological Argument consists in bringing to the fore and highlighting an assumption which was so far concealed in his Anselm's formulation of it, the assumption, viz., that existence is a quality or attribute or predicate which a given thing may either have or lack. Descartes does not, of course, use the terms 'predicate' and 'attribute'; he uses the term 'perfection' instead and asserts explicitly that "existence is a perfection",¹¹ meaning thereby that it is a desirable attribute which it is more excellent for a thing to have than lack.

Having thus made explicit that existence is a perfection or a desirable attribute, Descartes next proceeds to show that the attribute of existence belongs analytically to the concept (definition) of God such that given the definition of God, His existence follows automatically from it. No other evidence except the logical law of contradiction is required to show this, because the denial of His existence would be self-contradictory if the definition of God is accepted. As has been stated earlier, Descartes defines God as "supremely perfect being". An analysis of this definition reveals that 'existence' must be included among the defining properties of God. Can anything be supremely perfect without having the attribute of existence? Is it not meaningless to say that something is supremely perfect and yet that it does not exist in reality? Thus, an entity must exist first before it can be unlimitedly perfect, and the notion of a supremely-perfect-and-yet-nonexistent-being would only be an unintelligible jargon. This is enough to show that 'existence' must form a part of the defining characteristic of God if He is to be defined as a supremely perfect being. Thus, given the Cartesian definition of God, we can infer His existence, just as given the definition of a triangle as a plain figure bounded by three straight lines, we can infer its property of having three angles. To put the matter in Descartes own words: "it is in truth necessary for me to assert that God exists after having presupposed that He possesses every sort of perfection, since existence is one of these."¹²

A very crucial objection can be raised here. It may be argued that on the Cartesian interpretation the proposition 'God exists' is but a tautology, since the predicate 'exists' is a part of the connotation of the subject concept 'God'. Tautologies, however, only

tell us about our use of language, about the meaning of the terms used, not about what actually is the case. Hence the tautological assertion 'God exists' only explicates the meaning of the term 'God', it tells us that 'existence' is a logical i.e., only a thinkable, aspect of God's being; it can never enlighten us whether there *is* a God in objective reality. To know this we have to step beyond our concept of God and ascertain His 'real existence', as distinct from His 'logical existence' in the understanding, on the basis of some kind of experience. To put it in a metaphorical language, the sphere of concepts and that of real existence are completely foreign to each other, with a sharp border-line drawn between them, and one cannot cross over from the former to the latter without a legitimate passport of 'experience'. Stripped off the metaphor, it means that logical explication of the contents of a concept can never tell us whether the concept in question is instantiated in reality, even if the idea of existence be logically included within it. It must be known on the basis of experience.

To this kind of objection, however, a stubborn Cartesian would reply that though in ordinary cases it is not possible to show that something X really exists in reality by analysing the concept of X in the understanding, the concept of God is to be treated as an exceptionally unique and unparalled case where this is possible. This concept differs from all other concepts in being the idea of absolute perfection in which all the possible conditions of existence are present. Here the nature of the being in the understanding is of such ontological richness as to burst its bonds; its inherent expansive power impels it across the boundary into real existence. To resort to another metaphor used by William P. Alston, "We cannot cross the border without a passport (of experience) which has been approved on the other side, but a rocket can....burst into outer space on the strength of energy developed within the earth's atmosphere. And so it goes".¹³ But the problem involved here is the very heart of the Ontological Argument and the use of these metaphors gets us nowhere to its solution. It needs a more literal assessment of the situation. We shall try to do it in the latter part of our paper. However, this gives us an account, though sketchy, of the Cartesian reformulation of the Ontological Argument which was originally propounded by St. Anselm in the eleventh century. Let us now concentrate on the different ways in which

the Argument — both in its Anselmic and Cartesian versions — have been sought to be attacked.

Is the definition (idea) of God as used in the Argument possible?

According to Leibniz the Ontological Argument presupposes but cannot prove the possibility of the idea of God. It merely gives us a conditional conclusion that if the concept of God is possible then He exists; but the condition of the conclusion, i.e., the possibility of the idea of God, still remains to be proved by further arguments. In Leibniz's own words : "(The Ontological Argument) is not a paralogism, but an imperfect demonstration, which presupposes something that it was still necessary to prove, to give the argument mathematical evidence; namely, it is tacitly supposed that this idea of the all-great or all-perfect Being (i.e., the idea of God) is possible, and implies no contradiction."¹⁴ Thus one has to prove first that the idea of God is *possible*, i. e., not self-contradictory, before one can show by the use of the Ontological Argument that God is an actual or existent being. By the possibility of the idea of God, Leibniz means its conceivability, whether it is in the power of human understanding to conceive such a being. This question is answered in the negative by many eminent critics of the Ontological Argument, both ancient and modern. Thus Gaunilo claimed that Anselm's definition of God was not intelligible to him; and Aquinas, though he professed to understand the definition, was not persuaded that it gave a definition of the term 'God'. The reason usually adduced against the possibility of the idea (definition) of God is as follows : The term 'God', in whatever way it might be used in the Ontological Argument, eventually comes to mean that He is the repository of all the positive qualities and powers. In other words, God is the logical subject of whom all the positive characters can be predicated. But is such a subject possible? Is it possible for all the positive properties to coinhere in a common subject? It is possible if, and only if, all the qualities that are predicated of this common subject are themselves mutually compatible with one another. But a little reflection will show that this is not the case. Quite many of the qualities that are attributed to God appear to be mutually incompatible. For example, can God be just and merciful at the same time? "Justice and mercy...seem to be mutually limiting attributes. A certain

degree of justice can co-exist with a certain degree of mercy; but is unlimited justice compatible with unlimited mercy"?¹⁵ The obvious answer is that it is not. Thus justice and mercy cannot be predicated of God at the same time. In like manner, it can be shown that God's *aseity* usually Englishised as 'self-sufficiency' is incongruous with His supposed attribute of creatorship of the world, because, self-sufficient and perfect as He is, God lacks nothing and is not in need of a created world through which His being is to be sustained. Similarly God's love for His creatures, his sympathy for them in their sufferings, appears to be irreconcilable with His immutability and impassible nature. Thus these mutually incompatible attributes cannot characterise God at the same time, just as a surface cannot be red and blue all over at the same moment. These considerations are sufficient to show that the Cartesian definition of God as a "supremely perfect being" of whom all the positive powers and qualities can be predicated is not a logically viable concept.

Not only the Cartesian but the Anselmic definition of God too turns out to be a meaningless verbiage when considered in the light of the mutual incompatibility of the various positive properties. C. D. Broad gives an interesting argument to demonstrate this. He asks us to suppose "that there were just three positive properties X, Y and Z; that any two of them are compatible with each other; but that the presence of any two excludes the remaining one. Then there would be *three* possible beings, viz., one which combines X and Y, one which combines Y and Z, and one which combines Z and X, *each* of which would be such that nothing extensively superior to it is logically possible. For the only kind of being which would be extensively superior to any of these would be one which had all the three properties, X, Y, and Z; and, by hypothesis, this combination is logically impossible".¹⁶ On the basis of this argument one finds it evident that if the Cartesian definition of God as "the supremely perfect being" be interpreted in the comparative manner of Anselm as "that than which nothing greater (or superior) can be conceived" there would be three such most perfect beings, not a single one. But the Ontological Argument speaks of "the most perfect being" (i.e. God) in the singular, not of "most perfect *beings*" in the plural. The plurality of an entity designated by the superlative terms like 'the

best', 'the most perfect', etc., is a clear contradiction in terms. Thus unless all the positive properties are compatible with each other Anselm's definition of God becomes an unmeaning combination of words like the "greatest integer".¹⁷

From the discussion above we are driven to the conclusion that for the refutation of the Ontological Argument a detailed examination of its internal structure is not necessary; it is to be rejected right at the beginning, because the very idea (definition) of God from which the Argument takes its start is found to be inconceivable or impossible on a preliminary logical scrutiny. "The Ontological Argument is wrecked before ever it leaves port."¹⁸

But how far is the above criticism a sound objection against the Ontological Argument? Leibniz's view on this question is suggestive. He thinks that the Argument can be logically perfected by demonstrating that the idea of God is possible (i.e., not self-contradictory), and he himself proceeds to undertake this task. The only reason that is given in favour of the impossibility of this idea is that quite many of the positive properties attributed to God are found to be incompatible with one another. But a proposition asserting this incompatibility, argues Leibniz, cannot be proved to be true, and hence all the properties should be taken to be compatible *inter se*. The reason offered by him in support of this contention is as follows :

A quality which is simple and positive and expresses its objects without limits is called by Leibniz¹⁹ a perfection. Now, since such qualities are *simple* they cannot be resolved into their component parts. And once we accept the irresolvability of the positive properties, the demonstration of their mutual incompatibility becomes an impossibility. 'A' is *understood* to be incompatible with 'B' when both 'A' and 'B' can be resolved into their component elements and when it can be shown that some elements of 'A' are repugnant to some elements of 'B'. Unless, therefore, all the positive properties are resolvable in this manner, their mutual incompatibility can never be understood by us, or, to use Leibniz's own words, "their nature would not enter into the reasoning."²⁰ By definition, however, they are said to be irresolvable. Hence a proposition asserting the incompatibility of these properties

cannot be logically demonstrated. From this Leibniz concludes that all the positive properties are compatible with one another and can, therefore, be predicated of the same subject, God. And since existence itself is a perfection, such a subject exists.

To the above argument of Leibniz it may be objected because the statement of a certain fact is not amenable to logical demonstration it does not follow that the fact itself does not exist. The mutual incompatibility of red and blue cannot, indeed, be demonstrated because of their irresolvable simplicity, but on that account it cannot be said that they cease to be factually incompatible in the objective world. That red is not compatible with blue is a glaringly obvious fact of the world which is directly experienced by us in our everyday life, and if a statement embodying this direct experience cannot be proved logically it is so much the worse for logic. The fact remains unaltered in nature. Thus Leibniz's demonstration of the indemonstrability of the proposition asserting the incompatibility of any two positive properties does not argue to the position that all the positive properties of the world are universally compatible *inter se*.

It is strange that this simple objection escaped the attention of Leibniz and he did not have a direct answer to it. But a follower of Leibniz might, in defence of that great philosopher, urge that the said objection of the opponent might be true only in regard to the *experienced* incompatibility of the positive properties like red and blue which characterise the objective world; it does not hold good in the case of divine properties like creatorship and love, justice and mercy etc., which are not the objects of direct experience. If a logical demonstration comes in conflict with the dictates of direct veridical experience, it is the latter which is to be retained at the cost of the former. The incompatibility of red and blue thus has to be admitted as a patent fact of the world on the strength of such direct uncontradicted experience, though it is impossible to demonstrate it logically. But divine properties are not open that way to direct observation. Nobody, has ever experienced them, and it is not possible also to have that experience. Nobody experiences God's creative act and His loving nature in the way red and blue are experienced by us. Hence experience cannot testify to the incompatibility of these divine properties. Nor is the logical demonstration able to do it, as has been conclusively

shown by Leibniz himself. We are thus pushed to the inevitable conclusion that all the divine perfections are compatible with each other and can, therefore, be predicated of a common subject, God. Thus the original objection against the Ontological Argument that it is to be rejected at the very outset, starting, as it does, from a logically impossible notion of God, is not valid and does stand proper scrutiny.

Are the premises of the Argument acceptable or acknowledged to be true ?

Another interesting way of disproving the Ontological Argument is to challenge the universal acceptability of some of the premises from which the conclusion 'God exists' is deduced. The thinkers of this persuasion hold that an argument is able to prove its conclusion if it fulfils a three-fold condition:—(i) if the conclusion follows from some premises, (ii) if the premises from which it follows are true and (iii) if the premises are known or *acknowledged to be true*. The third condition is considered to be a very important element of the notion of proof, because even when the first two conditions are fulfilled they do not lead to a valid conclusion unless the third condition too is fulfilled. There might be a valid argument in which true premises lead to a true conclusion, but still it would not prove anything to anybody if no one acknowledges its premises as being true. A successful proof thus presupposes that the truth of the premise must be *cognitively assented* by those *persons* to whom the conclusion and the entire argument are directed. This important condition of proof was brought to our attention by G. E. Moore towards the closing section of his famous lecture "Proof of an External World,"²¹ and this is perhaps the reason why George Mavrodes describes a proof as "person-relative"²²—a phrase which requires some commentary. A proof is the human activity of statement-making and finding a logical connection between these statements. It is true, of course that this notion of proof is not applicable to the cases of mathematical proofs where the elements connected are only formulae, and the relationship between these and the human activity of statement-making seems very remote. But where the elements connected in the proof are *statements*, as in the case of the Ontological Argument and other theistic proofs, the notion of proof as "person-

relative" seems to be more appropriate. Terence Penelhum, in spelling out the implications of Moore's suggestion that *know ledge* of the truth of premises is one of the fundamental pre-requisites of a successful proof, observes: "... a proof is an act performed by making statements which serve as premises and which have to be known to be true for the proof to succeed. Proof in this sense has to be done by someone to someone, although of course in same instances the speaker and the hearer may be the same person.²³ The point here is that logical considerations alone cannot accomplish the purpose of a theistic proof; it ultimately rests upon the *cognitive assent of a person* (otherwise known as faith) to the truth of the premises employed in the proof in question. This can be illustrated by taking the example of what is known as the Causal Argument for the existence of God. This argument urges that either there is an endless and therefore meaningless regress of causes or else the causal series must be finally anchored in an uncaused first cause, which is God. Clearly, the force of this argument depends upon the decisive ruling out of the first alternative, viz., that there is an endless and meaningless regress of causes, so that we shall be driven by the force of logic to the other conclusion, viz., that God exists. But the exclusion of the first alternative is done not by any logical consideration but by an act of faith, faith in the ultimate 'rationality' of existence. As father Copleston says in the course of his debate with Bertrand Russell: "my point is that what we call the world is intrinsically unintelligible, apart from the existence of God".²⁴ That the world is not a sheer inexplicable 'brute fact', but must be ultimately explicable by reference to some reality beyond itself, is an article of faith, the ultimate premise which must be assented to, i.e., acknowledged to be true, if this theistic proof is to succeed at all. But to an atheist like Albert Camus who does not agree with this premise and holds that the universe is "absurd"²⁵ devoid of any ultimate meaning, purpose or rationality of its own, this proof fails miserably. Thus, in the sense of 'prove' in which we seek to prove a certain conclusion to an individual or a group "it is required not only that the conclusion follows from the premises, and not only that the premises from which it follows, are true, but also that they are *acknowledged to be true* by those to whom we are seeking to prove the conclusion."²⁶

If this is what is meant by a theistic proof it might be urged by an opponent that the Ontological Argument cannot prove the existence of God, since it fails to satisfy the third condition of 'proof' viz., the universal acknowledgeability of the truth of the premises employed in the Argument. We have seen earlier that one of the fundamental premises in the Anselmic formulation of the Ontological Argument is this : it is greater or more perfect to exist in reality than to exist in thought alone. A critic of the Argument may choose this particular premise as the bone of contention and refuse to acknowledge its truth. Norman Malcolm puts the matter with clever simplicity : "It makes sense and is true to say that my future house will be a better one if it is insulated than if it is not insulated; but what could it mean to say that it will be a better house if it exists than if it does not? My future child will be a better man if he is honest than if he is not; but who would understand the saying that he will be a better man if he exists than if he does not? Or who understands the saying that if God exists (in reality over against our mind). He is more perfect than if He does not exist? One might say, with some intelligibility, that it would be better (for oneself or for mankind) if God exists than if He does not — but that is a different matter."²⁷

The unacceptability of this Anselmic premise can be further shown on the following grounds. It will be readily rejected by a subjective idealist like a Vijnānavādin Buddhist to whom the objects of the external world exist in human mind as its ideas (*vijnāna*) without having any extramental reality of their own. According to him, the so-called extramental objects which appear to be trans-psyche phenomena are really mental events, i.e., ideas which have been illusorily externalised under the spell of ignorance, and the experience of objects *as existing external to the mind* is a pure delusion (*parikalpita*). So, how can the illusory extramental existence be greater or more perfect than the genuine inner existence in the mind? Moreover, the whole of Buddhist metaphysics centres round the assumption that the outer empirical existence is imperfect or evil (*duhkha*), which is to be got rid of in order that *Nirvana* the *summum bonum* of human life, is attained.

Again, apart from any metaphysical assumption of a particular school, the premise in question can be shown to be un-

acceptable on another, independent, ground. Suppose a man, having conceived in his mind the most hedious evil of the universe—the kind of evil than which no greater evil can be conceived— translates that conceived evil into a physical act in the objective world, will that evil act be more perfect than the evil in his mind? Is a sin which is committed more perfect than one merely conceived? Is a Devil incarnated in reality more perfect than a Devil of our imagination? The obvious answer to all these questions is 'No'. Evil, by definition, is imperfection. So how can a real evil (*in re*) be more perfect than a mental evil (*in intellectu*)? Thus, the Anselmic premise that it is more perfect to exist in reality than to exist in thought alone is untenable at least in the case of evil, and hence it is to be rejected.

It can, of course, be said in defence of Anselm that this criticism by the opponents misses the real point, viz., that Anselm's main concern here is to show the degrees of *being* — its "more" or less. The point, in other words is that the extramental *existence* is more perfect than mental *existence*. But evil, *ex hypothesi* is *non-being* or non-existence. The real issue involved here is being vis-a-vis being, not being vis-a-vis non-being. Despite this defence, however two pertinent questions arise here. They are : (i) On what ground is evil said to be non-being and (ii) what sense is there in Anselm's saying that real existence is more *perfect* than mental existence? Some scholars have attempted to answer these questions from the Neoplatonic principle that the highest good has the most intensely real being, and the diminishing degrees of being are at the same time diminishing degrees of goodness. Though this principle is not explicitly stated by Anselm, it constitutes a pervasive presupposition of his reasoning which reached him from his intimate acquaintance of the works of Augustine, on whom the influence of Neoplatonism is conspicuously prominent. According to Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, the ultimate reality is One which is both absolute being and absolute goodness, so that goodness and being are in their ultimate source identical. And they are likewise identical in our finite world, too, which is an emanation of the One, an 'overflowing' of the divine nature. The ultimate One radiates outwards to produce the universe just as the rays of light stream forth from the sun. The universe is thus an extension by attenuation of what at its source is both Being itself and Good

itself. And as the beams of light gradually exhaust themselves and fade out in to darkness, so do the descending levels of created or emanated beings of the universe embody descending forms of goodness, less and less adequately expressing the fullness of the creative good, until they vanish together into the empty darkness of non-being which is equated with evil. Evil, thus, represents the dead-end of the creative process in which the ultimate reality—the One—has poured out its abundance of being and goodness into innumerable forms of existence until its creativity is exhausted into a stupendous zero. This zero or non-being is called evil by Plotinus. And within this conceptual framework it is self-evident that it is good to have being, since to have being is *ipso facto* to have goodness. On the basis of this Neoplatonic idea of the convertibility of being and goodness Anselm construes his controversial premise of the Ontological Argument that extramental existence is more perfect than mental existence. The expression 'more perfect', means for Anselm, 'more being-ful' or 'more real'. It is a consequence of the equation of being and goodness that a Devil, who is supposed to be absolutely evil, cannot exist; for to be absolutely devoid of goodness would also be to be absolutely devoid of being. It is on the strength of this kind of reasoning that C. K. Grant, in an, interesting article entitled, 'The Ontological Disproof of the Devil'²⁸ concludes that there cannot be an absolutely evil Devil in the universe. Thus, the question posed earlier 'Is a Devil incarnated in reality more perfect than a Devil of our imagination?' is meaningless, because a Devil cannot have any kind of being at all if he is supposed to be absolutely devoid of goodness.

Apart from this, J. H. Hick has given an excellent defence of the Anselmic premise in question from an obvious fact of our life. He writes : "Neoplatonism apart, the premise that it is greater or more perfect to exist in reality than to exist only in thought would seem to represent a necessary presupposition or prejudice of consciously existing beings. For we should presumably not remain voluntarily in existence if we did not in practice accept this premise. Thus whether or not there is any further sense in which this proposition may be said to be true, it is one to which existing free beings will always subscribe. It therefore seems permissible for Anselm to employ it in his argument".²⁹ Thus, the attempt of those critics

who try to overthrow Anselm's Ontological Argument by showing the unacceptability of this premise does not succeed.

Is 'existence' a predicate?

The Ontological Argument has often been criticised on the ground that it mistakenly supposes 'exists' to be a predicate. This view has a respectable lineage : it can be found in the writings of Pierre Gassendi (a contemporary of Descartes), Hume, Kant, Broad, Ayer and Wisdom — to name only some of the eminent thinkers who have discussed the point. The purpose of this section to show that this criticism is substantially valid, though the ways in which it has been presented is faulty and these faults result from overlooking certain basic features of the very concept 'existence'.

Let us begin with Kant who is an influential advocate of the view that 'exists' is no *real* predicate, though grammatically it appears to be one. Kant defines real predicate as something "which is added to the concept of the subject and enlarges it".³⁰ In other words, a real predicate *revises* the concept of the subject by enlarging it. He argues that if 'exists' were a real predicate then in asserting that something exists we would be altering our concept of that something, thereby ending up with a different concept from the one we started with. But, since now we have a new and different concept we will have failed to assert existence of the original subject. Thus if 'exists' were a (real) predicate, "we could not, therefore, say that the exact object of my concept exists".³¹ But since we obviously can say that, we cannot be adding anything to the concept of the subject when we say that the subject exists, and therefore exists' cannot be a real predicate. From this Kant concludes that 'existence' cannot be predicated of God and the Ontological Argument which tries to do it is basically wrong.

We have two critical comments to make here on Kant's view of the nature of a 'real predicate'. They are :

(i) If the argument by which Kant shows that 'exists' is not a real predicate be correct, then nothing could be a real predicate. Suppose I wish to say that something is red, where 'red' is intended as a real predicate. In asserting that the thing is red I would be adding to my concept of the thing and, hence, would be unable to say that the object as originally conceived is red, that "the exact

object of my concept" is red. The argument, therefore, which shows that 'exists' is not real predicate also shows that nothing could be one.

(ii) Kant's denial of 'exists' as a real predicate directly contradicts his another important doctrine that "existential propositions are always synthetic".³² Synthetic judgements, according to Kant, are those which "add to the concept of the subject a predicate which has not been in any way thought in it",³³ and if existential judgements are always synthetic, then 'exists' must be a predicate which adds to the concept of the subject in short, a 'real' predicate as defined above.³⁴

Leaving aside these internal contradictions within the Kantian system, let us try to determine what Kant really intends to say when he denies that 'exists' is a real predicate. This requires that we give an account of Kant's view of predication first, Kant seems to think that when something is predicated of the subject of a judgement, we must be doing one of the two things : either we are extracting the concept of the predicate from the concept of the subject (an analytic judgement) or else we are revising our concept of the subject by adding to it the concept of the predicate (a synthetic judgement). But when I say that so—and—so exists, it appears that I am doing neither of these two things :

I am neither analysing the *concept* of so—and—so nor revising it, but only trying to say something about the *object* conceived of. The following passages from Kant's own writings will testify to this.

"By whatever and by however many predicates we may think of a thing even if we completely determine it — we do not make the least addition to the thing when we further declare that the thing *is*".³⁵ Thus "The proposition 'God is omnipotent', contains two concepts, each of which has its object — God and omnipotence. The small word 'is' adds no new predicate, but only serves to posit the predicate *in its relation* to the subject. If, now, we take the subject (God) with all its predicates (among which is omnipotence) and say 'God is' or 'There is a God' we attach no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject in itself with all its predicates, and indeed posit it as being an *object* that stands in relation to my concept."³⁶

What Kant intends to show in these passages is that the logical function of 'exists' is not to add a further predicate to a concept, but to assert that the concept applies to something in the world. In other words, the word 'exists' merely stands as a symbol, intending no more than that the concept of which it is predicated is instantiated in reality; but a concept can never be so framed as to guarantee its own instantiation; to know that it is instantiated we have to take the help of experience.

The point has been rendered clearer by Bertrand Russell through the analysis of the function of 'exists' which is a part of his theory of description. The upshot of Russell's discussion is that when we say, for example, "Cows exist", or "Unicorns do not exist", we are not speaking about cows and saying of them that they have the attribute of existence, or of unicorns and affirming that they lack this same attribute. We are talking instead about *propositional functions*. That cows exist means that the propositional function 'x is a cow' is sometimes true, that, in other words, the concept of cow has an instance. And that unicorns do not exist means that the propositional function 'x is a unicorn' is never true, i. e., the concept of a unicorn is never instantiated. To put it in Russell's own language : "Existence is essentially a property of propositional function. It means that the propositional function is true in at least one instance. . . . Therefore, you clearly can know existence proposition without knowing any individual that makes them true. Existence—propositions do not say anything about the actual individual but only about the class or function."³⁷

A. J. Ayer, in his attempt to show that existence cannot be an attribute, treats the matter in a somewhat different way. He writes : "when we ascribe an attribute to a thing, we covertly assert that it exists : so that if existence were itself an attribute, it would follow that all positive existential propositions were tautologies, and all negative existential propositions, self-contradictory; and this is not the case."³⁸ John Hospers clarifies Ayer's point by using the example, "Horses are 'herbivorous' means 'If there is (exists) anything that is a horse, then it is herbivorous'. On this analysis, 'Horses exist' would become 'If there exists anything that is a horse, then it exists', which is a flat tautology and is obviously not what the statement means at all. Moreover, I.P.Q.—8

'Horses do not exist' would become 'If horses exist, then horses do not exist', which is an outright self-contradiction, where as the original statement is merely false."³⁹

The effect of these analysis of the logical function of 'exists' upon the Ontological Argument is to rule out its indispensable premise that existence is a predicable attribute. The essence of the Argument, both in its Anselmic and Cartesian forms, is that existence is a predicate such that it makes sense to say that a being which has it is superior to one which does not, and, therefore, that an unsurpassably perfect being must have it, and is thereby proved to exist. But existence is not a predicate in that sense, and any argument which presupposes that it must be an invalid argument.

Does the alleged tautological proposition "God exists" entail that "There is a God"?

A very effective way of overthrowing the Ontological Argument is to show that even if the property of existence be included within the definition of God and the proposition 'God exists' be used tautologically, we cannot deduce from it any proposition like 'There is a God'. The reason adduced in favour of this contention is that the two expressions 'there is' and 'exists' are not necessarily convertible and cannot be interchanged at will. That 'exists' does not always have a 'there is' counterpart is proved by sentences like 'The agents he named under torture were found later not to exist', which cannot be reformulated without 'exist' and with 'there is'. Conversely, of the proposition 'There are times when I feel like screaming', there is no reasonable version that can eliminate 'there is' in favour of 'exist'.⁴⁰ And because 'there is' and 'exists' do not always mean the same thing, "the statement, 'God necessarily exists, but there is no God' is not self-contradictory."⁴¹ Even if it be admitted that the concept of God includes 'existence' as a necessary component of its meaning and the proposition 'God exists' is analytically true, a further question still remains whether any existent meets the specification of this concept. In other words, the tautology 'God exists' leaves open the question whether there is really a God. But what is this further question? How paradoxical it seems to deny that "once one has grasped Anselm's proof of the necessary existence of a being a greater than which

cannot be conceived, no question remains as to whether it exists or not, just as Euclid's demonstration of the existence of an infinity of prime numbers leaves no question on that issue."⁴² But J. Shaffer⁴³ answers that, despite Anselm's proof, the question of the *extension* or applicability of the concept of God to an actual existent being, as distinguished from the *intension* or meaning of this concept, still remains open. The very same existential expression can be used to make a claim both about the intension or meaning of a concept, as well as about its extension or applicability to an existent entity. We cannot tell by the form of the expression how the expression is being used. The expression 'God exists' can be used both intensionally and extensionally. When used intensionally, it is tautological, i.e., it tells us only that being an existent is a logical requirement for being God. But it cannot tell us about the extensionally of this concept, i.e., whether anything exists to which the concept applies. The most the Ontological Argument establishes is the intensional object, God, even if this intensional object has the attribute of existence as an intensional feature. In other words, the *idea of God* implies the *idea of existence*, not existence *in re*. To establish that the concept of God has extension over and above its intensional features requires some *experiential evidence*, and mere unpacking of the implication of this concept cannot do this. We must step beyond the concept of God and on the basis of some kind of experience affirm that some real existent being stands in relation to this concept. The Ontological Argument makes God a concept of a language game, but this, obviously, is not a God of religion. A religious person conceives God as something which has effects on the world and can in some way be experienced. We are thus led to the conclusion that the Ontological Argument, by itself, cannot show the existence of God, in the sense in which a concept is shown to have extension. The concept of God is a concept which *might* have extension. But some further *a posteriori* argument is required to show whether it does or does not.

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NOTES

1. First published in *Mind*, Vol. LXXI, N. S., No. 283, July 1962. Reprinted in *The Many-Faced Argument*, ed. Hick and McGill (London : MacMillan, 1968), p. 226.
2. Anselm himself never used the term ' Ontological Argument ' to name the piece of reasoning demonstrating the existence of God as contained in his *Proslogion*. This name appears to have been given first to the Argument by Kant who used the word ' Ontological ' to designate that thinking which deals only with pure concepts, that is, with the *a priori* forms of the understanding which are devoid of all objective (i. e., sensory) content. However, by ' Ontological Argument ' Kant means a process of reasoning which, having started from an *a priori* concept of God, leads to an existential conclusion that God exists in reality. Today the phrase ' Ontological Argument ' normally carries the Kantian meaning.
3. The meaning of Anselm's phrase " existence in the understanding " (*esse in intellectu*) has been the subject of much discussion. It appears from the majority of his commentators that when Anselm speaks of the concept of God as " something than which nothing greater can be conceived " existing " in the mind, intellect or understanding, " he does not mean this to be taken in any psychological and causal sense, as though it were a subjective idea located ' within ' the mind and somehow ' caused ' by God who is out there. This, indeed, is the sense in which Descartes used the idea of God in a much later date, but this Cartesian use of the idea is to be sharply distinguished from the Anselmic use. For Anselm the ' understanding ' is neither an organ nor a faculty but an act. Thus, to have something " in the understanding " does not mean for him that " this something " is a copy, image, representation or symbol of a real being existing outside the mind and caused by it; it is rather the very being itself. In other words, " to be in the understanding " is only the most general manner of saying that it is an object of an intellectual act of intention. To quote from M. J. Charlesworth : " For something to exist ' in the mind ' simply means for Anselm that it is thinkable, or conceivable, or intelligible, or logically possible; in other words, we know what it would be like for that thing to exist but we do not know whether it actually exists or not. " [*St. Anselm's Proslogion* (Oxford, 1965), p. 63.] To use a modern terminology, the Anselmic concept of God exists " in the understanding " as an ' intentional being ' having some positive mental attitude towards it.
4. *St. Anselm's Proslogian* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 57.
5. Haldane and Ross, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Vol. 1, (Cambridge, 1931), p. 182.
6. *Monologion*, Ch. 2.
7. Cf. Augustine, *de Trinitate*, ed., W. J. Mountain, Corpus Christianorum, series Latina, L (Turnhout : Brepols, 1968), VI 8.

8. Cf. J. H. Hick, *Arguments For the Existence of God* (MacMillan, 1970), p. 73; Charlesworth St. *Anselm's Prosloginn* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 60-3.
9. C. D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy and Psychological Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), p. 178.
10. About this definition Karl Barth observes: "we are dealing with a concept of strict noetic content which Anselm describes here as a concept of God. It does not say *that* God is, or *what* he is, but rather, *in the 'form' of a prohibition* that man can understand, *who he is.*"—A sectional reprint from Barth's *Anselm: Fides quaerens Intellectum*, English transl. by Ian Robertson, in *The Many-Faced Arguments*, ed. Hick and McGill (London: MacMillan, 1968), p. 121.
11. See footnote no. 5.
12. *Ibid.*
13. William P. Alston, "The Ontological Argument Revisited" in *The Philosophical Review* (Ithaca, New York: October 1960), p. 463.
14. B. Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1964), Appendix, p. 286.
15. J. H. Hick, *Arguments For the Existence of God* (MacMillan, 1970), p. 72.
16. C. D. Broad, *Religion, Philosophy and Psychological Research* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953) pp. 178-79.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
19. Leibniz writes: "I call a *perfection* every simple quality which is positive and absolute, and expresses without any limits whatever it does express"—B. Russell, *A Critical Exposition of the Philosophy of Leibniz* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1964), Appendix, p. 287.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 287.
21. G. E. Moore, *Philosophical Papers* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1959), p. 146.
22. George Mavrodes, *Belief in God* (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 40.
23. Terence Penelhum, *Problems of Religious Knowledge* (MacMillan, 1971), p. 30.
24. Russell, *Why I am Not a Christian* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957) p. 151.
25. For a systematic exposition of this 'philosophy of absurdity' see Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, English translation by J. O. Brien (New York, 1955).
26. J. H. Hick, *of. cit.*, p. X.

27. Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Argument" in *The Philosophical Review* (Ithaca, New York : January 1960), p. 43.
28. *Analysis*, XVII (Jan. 1957), pp. 71-2.
29. J. H. Hick, op. cit., p. 74. In his another work, *Evil and the God of Love* (Collins, The Fontana Library, 1968), Hick writes the same thing : "... it is preferable to go on existing than to cease to exist; otherwise living creatures would presumably seek to destroy themselves. Generally speaking, existence seems good to those who have it; and this generalisation covers mankind as well as the lower animals". p. 58.
30. *Critique of Pure Reason*, Trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (MacMillan, 1953), p. 504.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 505.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 504.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
34. See Jerome Shaffer's article " Existence, Predication and the Ontological Argument " as reprinted in *The Many-Faced Argument*, ed. by Hick and McGill (MacMillan, 1968), pp. 228-29.
35. *Critique of Pure Reason*, Trans. N. K. Smith (MacMillan, 1953), p. 505.
36. *Ibid.* pp. 504-5.
37. Bertrand Russell, " The Philosophy of Logical Atomism ", section V, as reprinted in *The Many-Faced Argument*, (1968), pp. 223.
38. A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (Penguin Books, 1978), p. 58.
39. John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J. : Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1953), p. 326.
40. For further discussion on this distinction between the expressions ' there is ' and ' exists ', see Jonathan Barnes, *The Ontological Argument* (MacMillan : St. Martin's Press, 1972), pp. 61-2.
41. J. Shaffer, " Existence, Predication and the Ontological Argument " as reprinted in *The Many-Faced Argument* (1968), p. 239.
42. Norman Malcolm, " Anselm's Ontological Argument " in *The Philosophical Review* (Ithaca, New York : Jan. 1960), p. 52.
43. Jerome Shaffer, Op. cit, pp. 242-45.