GOD AND NECESSITY

An Evaluation of the Concept of Necessity as applied to Divine Essence and Existence

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PREFACE

This thesis seeks to evaluate the use of the concept "necessity" in the Christian doctrine of God. The concept is used frequently in discussions of God's existence. Traditional theism differentiates between God and the world with specific reference to this notion. God exists necessarily: the world, contingently. Not only is "necessity" used by classical theism in relation to the divine existence, but to God's nature as well. The doctrine of the immutability of God excludes all contingency from his nature.

I first became interested in this subject by reading Anselm's little work, the Proslogium. Reading the original source convinced me that the ontological argument was not being given its due in contemporary philosophy. A re-reading of Kant convinced me that, whatever Kant had refuted, it wasn't Anselm's argument.

My interest in Anselm led me to two studies of the ontological argument which seemed to give Anselm the credit he deserved: Charles Hartshorne's The Logic of Perfection and Karl Barth's Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum. It was the former work that raised my interest in the

concept of necessity itself and the modal issues involved in the doctrine of God. This led me in turn to learn symbolic logic in general and modal logic in particular. The fruits of this study are embodied in Chapter One of this thesis. At the same time, the contributions of Hartshorne and Barth convinced me that a study of the ontological argument would not be just a rehash of dead issues.

This study begins with an examination of the concept of necessity. Several meanings of "necessity" are distinguished and two types of necessity, the "logical" and the "factual" are examined in more detail. The central philosophical issue involved in the problem of God's necessity is examined in Chapter Two: Is necessary existence a valid concept? The question of the logical necessity of God's existence is discussed in Chapter Three, with particular reference to the ontological argument. Taken together, Chapter Two and Chapter Three constitute the central argument of the thesis. In the former, I maintain that the traditional critique of "necessary existence" fails to prove its point. Chapter Three seeks to show that there is an important sense in which God's existence

must be understood as logically necessary. The final chapter is a brief discussion of necessity in the divine nature.

In addition to my advisor, Professor J.C. McLelland, two people have given of their time to discuss my thesis with me. Professor A. Gombay of the Department of Philosophy read Chapter One and checked my use of modal logic. Professor D.D. Evans, formerly of the Faculty of Divinity, criticized the first two chapters in detail. I have not always followed their advice but my discussions with them have helped me to clarify my own thinking on a number of points.

The major conclusion of this thesis, that the existence of God is necessary, is anticipated by my earlier, rather uncritical study of the theology of Paul Tillich in my B.D. thesis. While I no longer regard myself as a "Tillichian", I still regard Tillich's understanding of the problem of God's existence as essentially correct. I have sought to make my dependence on Tillich explicit in this study. There may be points at which my debt to him has gone unrecognized, even by myself. If so, I acknowledge it here.

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Chapter One

THE LOGIC OF NECESSITY

At the outset, let us distinguish four kinds of necessity: logical, factual, hypothetical and psychological. Statements of psychological necessity assert something about the relation or attitude of an individual or group of individuals to some state of affairs. "I can't imagine a child not liking ice-cream" equals "It is (psychologically) necessary for me to think of a child as liking ice-cream." Hypothetical necessity posits a state of affairs which is prerequisite to some other state of affairs. "Water is necessary for life." Both psychological and hypothetical necessity are relative, the former to one's mental processes, the latter to a given state of affairs. It is not necessary that a child should like ice-cream. I just find it necessary to think that way. Water is not necessary in itself, but it is necessary if there is to be biological life.

Factual and logical necessity, on the other hand, do not depend on something external for their necessity. They are, in this sense, absolute. By

factual necessity is meant a state of affairs which could not be otherwise, irrespective of whether its necessity is verifiable. Assume, for example, that 'water' is defined ostensively. Then it might be said that it is necessary that water is composed of hydrogen and oxygen. This is not logical necessity for, by our assumption, the composition of water was not included in our definition. We might be prepared, logically and psychologically, to find water that was not so composed. But it could be the case that water can be composed only of hydrogen and oxygen. If this is true, we are dealing with a matter of factual necessity.

By logical necessity is meant whatever is verifiable by logical considerations alone. This definition is meant to leave open the important question of the nature of logic: Is logic simply the rules governing the use of language or does it also govern the 'facts' of reality? (For example, does the world obey the law of the excluded middle or do we simply have to speak of it in this way?) If the world does obey the laws of logic, then logical necessity is a

special case of factual necessity.

In any case, the law of the excluded middle is an example of logical necessity. It is (logically) necessary that the book on my desk either is or is not a copy of Principia Mathematica.

Since the time of Locke, necessity has been understood by philosophers almost exclusively in its logical sense. This is not surprising in the light of the preoccupation of modern philosophy with the problems of epistemology. Epistemological certainty is most closely approximated by logical necessity. In recent years, modal logic (the study of propositions asserted under the 'modes' of necessity, possibility, etc.) has received increasing attention from logicians. Consequently, we shall examine some of the basic concepts and issues which are involved in current discussions of logical necessity in order to get some insight into its nature.

The standard treatment of modern modal logic is that of C.I.Lewis.[1] In order to avoid certain

1. C.I.Lewis and C.H.Langford, Symbolic Logic (2nd ed.; New York: Dover, 1959).

peculiarities of material implication, Lewis proposes what he calls "the system of strict implication." Material implication is dependent exclusively on the truth values of the propositions it relates. A proposition of the form "p implies q" is false if and only if the antecedent is true and the consequent false, but true in any other combination of truth values. Since no connection between antecedent and consequent is required in a valid statement of material implication, it is obvious that material implication does not correspond with the usage of the word "implies" in ordinary language. For example, the statement "If the moon is made of green cheese, then grass is green" is a valid material implication.

As a closer approximation to the common usage of the word "implies", Lewis proposes a new logical operation which he calls "strict implication". To say "p strictly implies q" is to say "q is deducible from p."

Strict implication involves the notion of possibility and, therefore, the notion of necessity. Possibility can be defined in terms of strict implication,[2]

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2. ibid, p.159.

but Lewis proceeds the other way and defines strict implication in terms of possibility.

In order to follow the development of Lewis' modal systems, it is more convenient to make use of a symbolic language than to rely completely on the word language. Let us introduce a few symbols:[3]

1) Lower case letters (p,q,r,...) for propositions.

2) "N" for negation. "Np" represents "It is false that p."

3) "A" for logical disjunction. "Apq" represents "Either p or q (or both)."

4) "K" for logical conjunction. "Kpq" represents "Both p and q."

5) "C'" for strict implication. "C'pq" represents "p implies q."

6) "E'" for strict equivalence. "E'pq" represents "p is logically equivalent to q."

7) "M" for possibility. "Mp" for "p is possible."

8) "L" for necessity. "Lp" represents "p is necessary".

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3. The symbolism used in this thesis is not that of Lewis. It is known as the Polish notation and is chosen for ease of transcription.

9) "Q" for contingency. "Qp" represents "p is contingent."

Lewis takes N, K, and M as undefined. He then introduces three definitions. Logical disjunction (Apq) is defined as NKNpNq (Not both not-p and not-q). Strict implication (C'pq) is defined as NMKpNq (Not possibly both p and not-q). Strict equivalence (E'pq) is defined as KC'pqC'qp (Both p implies q and q implies p).

Given one modality (in the case of Lewis, possibility) and the operation "N", all other modalities can be defined. Necessity (L) is defined as NMN (not-possibly-not) and impossibility as the negation of possibility (NM). Contingency is more complex. Qp is definable as KMpMNp (Both p is possible and not-p is possible).

It will be noted that the opposite of "contingent" is not "necessary". Rather it is "non-contingent". NQp is equivalent to ALpNMp (Either p is necessary or impossible). From this it can be seen that any proposition is either necessary or contingent or impossible.

The details of Lewis' axiomization of his modal systems are not of particular interest here. For the basic systems, the axioms are a set of unproved instances

of strict implication. Since it is easily shown that strict implication is equivalent to logically necessary material implication, we may say that Lewis' axioms are self-evidently necessary propositions. (For example, "It is necessary that, if both p and q are true, then p is true.")

What is of interest is the fact that Lewis finds it necessary to develop five distinct modal systems. The reason for this lies in a basic indecision among logicians concerning modality. As Prior says, "The subject is so obscure that there are many quite short formula involving modal operators which we do not know whether to regard as always true or not."[4] The logician, in this situation, is free to decide what he wishes to regard as true, and to operate within that system.

Lewis' first system (S1) contains only axioms of strict implication. Thus the axioms as such are not of particular significance to our inquiry. However, the following modal propositions, which are provable in S1, are of interest:[5]

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4. A.N.Prior, Formal Logic (2nd ed; Oxford, 1962), p.198.

5. op. cit., pp.163f. Numbers given are those of Lewis.

18.4 C'pMp (What is true is possible.)

18.41 C'NMpNp (What is impossible is false.)

18.42 C'Lpp (What is necessary is true.)

From the specifically modal propositions of S1 and S2 we can draw several conclusions about the nature of modalities. In S1 we can distinguish between "positive" and "negative" modes. The former include necessity and possibility with "truth" as their middle-term. The latter are possible falsity and impossibility with "falsity" as their middle-term.

S1 also lays down the basis of the "strength" of the various modes. One can proceed, by deduction, from necessity to truth and from truth to possibility. But the procession is not reversible. On the negative side, one can proceed from impossibility to falsity and from falsity to possible falsity. Again, the procession is not reversible. And it is not possible to proceed deductively from a positive mode to a negative one or vice-versa. Thus we can construct two series of propositional types, arranged according to what we might call their "modal strength": (a) necessary propositions, true propositions and possible propositions;

(b) impossible propositions, false propositions and possibly false propositions.

S2 contains S1 and has one additional postulate: C'(MKpq)Mp (If p-and-q is possible, then p is possible.) Some of the more important propositions which result from this axiom are:

19.14 C'(MKpq)(KMpMq) (If a conjunction of propositions is possible, both members of the conjunction are possible.)

19.19 C'(ALpLq)(LApq) (If both members of a disjunction are necessary, the disjunction is necessary.)

These relations are not reversible. This can be seen if Np is substituted for q in these formulae. Similar formulae which are reversible (and may therefore be given as equivalences) are:

19.81 E'(KLpLq)(LKpq) (If a conjunction is necessary, so are both of its component propositions, and vice-versa.)

19.82 E'(AMpMq)(MApq) (The disjunction of two possible propositions is itself possible, and vice-versa.)

The four foregoing propositions are probably

of more interest mathematically than logically. They show the limits of the "factorability" of modalities in conjunctions and disjunctions and display some analogy to similar operations in algebra. Of more interest to us is the effect that a single modal proposition has on conjunctions or disjunctions of propositions. These are given in S2 as:

19.33 C'Lp(LApq) (A disjunction which contains a necessity is itself necessary.)

19.3 C'Mp(MApq) (A disjunction which contains a possibility is itself possible.)

19.2 C'MNp(MNKpq) (If a conjunction contains an element that is possibly false, then the conjunction is possibly false.)

19.16 C'NMpNMKpq (If a conjunction contains an impossible proposition, then the conjunction is impossible.)

On the basis of S2 we can lay down another criterion of "strength": The stronger mode governs a disjunction; the weaker mode, a conjunction. If we do this, we can arrange the modes in a single series which includes contingency: necessity, truth, possibility,

contingency, possible falsity, falsity, impossibility. This series could be compared with a number series running from plus three to minus three with contingency representing zero.

S3 is of little interest here. It contains S2 and an additional postulate of strict implication. S4 and S5 are of considerable interest. They contain S3 plus the consequences of their purely modal axioms.

The axiom which is added to S1 to give S4 (and from which all the theorems of S2 and S3 can be deduced) is C'LpLLp (If a proposition is necessary it is necessarily necessary.) The additional postulate required for S5 is C'MpLMp (If a proposition is possible it is necessarily possible.) The feature involved in these latter axioms is called iteration. As Prior comments,

> In S5, all iterated modalities are equivalent to non-iterated ones, always to the modality immediately preceeding the modally qualified proposition. Thus MMp, LMp, MMMp, MLMp, LMMp, LLMp, etc., are all equivalent to Mp; LLp, MLp, LLLp, MLLp, etc., all to Lp.[6]

The question of which system is to be accepted is a complex one. There are no <u>a priori</u> principles by which the question can be decided with finality. Two

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6. op.cit., pp.200-1.

types of answers have been given.

Prior shows that a system equivalent to S5 can be developed using the assertoric calculus (e.g. the system of Principia Mathematica) and adding four simple rules governing the use of modalities. He argues for S5 on the ground of simplicity.

> The fact that the distinctive theses of S5 are obtainable in a system of this sort is, I think, something of an argument in their favour, for they appear now, not as ad hoc additions to the more obvious modal laws, but as by-products of the simplest way of systematizing the latter. When we see that modal logic can be systematized in this way, it is the exclusion rather than the introduction of the S5 theses which takes on an ad hoc air - the systems in which they are not derivable are, by comparison, clumsy.[7]

The other type of consideration which is used to decide the question is followed by Lewis and Carnap. Lewis developed his modal system to provide a logical structure for the concept of deducibility. It is to this purpose that Lewis appeals. He feels that the "stricter" the relation of implication is made, the better.

> Those interested in the merely mathematical properties of such systems of symbolic logic tend to prefer the more comprehensive and less "strict" systems, such as S5 and Material Implication. The interests of logical study

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7. ibid, p.205.

would probably be best served by an exactly opposite tendency.[8]

Carnap[9] uses a similar consideration, but comes to the opposite conclusion. He suggests that the questions at issue between the various systems can be decided by a clear definition of the concept "necessity". In a sense, Carnap pre-empts the issue by assuming that "necessity" must be interpreted in its logical form. He defines necessity as true by virtue of the semantical rules of a logical system. Possibility is defined in terms of necessity. It then follows that all modal statements are logically determined. Since 'Lp' is true if and only if 'p' is true by virtue of the semantical rules of the system, it follows that 'Lp' is true by virtue of these same rules. Therefore LLp is also true. Similar considerations apply to statements of possibility. Since modalities can be iterated in this fashion, Carnap has opted for S5.

All other things being equal, systematic simplicity is an important consideration. But this begs the question of the interpretation of the concept

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8. op.cit., p.502.

9. Rudolph Carnap, Meaning and Necessity (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956) pp. 173ff.

"necessity". It may be, that for some interpretations of the concept, S1 is the most adequate system, while for others, S5 is called for.

At the same time, the coherence of each system is quite independent of its application. Thus, while Lewis constructs the systems with strict implication in mind, it does not follow that the utility of the systems is limited to this purpose. If the axioms and rules of a system can be given one application (even if it was constructed with a second application in mind) then the system as a whole can be said to hold for the first application.

For example, suppose that the number system and the ideas of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division were devised for the specific purpose of counting apples. It does not follow that the utility of the system is limited to apples. Once devised, the system may be used for working with oranges, books and may even be extended to deal with linear, square and cubic measurements as well.

We have a similar situation here. The modal system may well be constructed to express the idea of logical necessity. But it may be possible to apply the

system to propositions which use the word necessity in a non-logical sense. And it may also be possible to decide which system holds on the basis of the desired explication of the concept.

The symbols 'L' and 'M' may be seen as two variables which can be related by the formula "L equals NMN." This has two consequences for the problem of application. First, if one of the concepts is given a definite meaning, the other is thereby determined. The formula does not work if one meaning (e.g. factual) is given to the concept "necessity" and another (e.g. logical) to "possibility". Secondly, the two concepts may be seen as inverse variables. If "possibility" is broadly defined, "necessity" is strictly defined, and vice-versa.

If necessity is understood in its logical sense, we have a strict form of necessity and a broad definition of possibility. If logical possibility is defined as "not self-contradictory", a proposition is necessary if and only if its denial is self-contradictory.

We must, therefore, follow Carnap in choosing S5 as the valid system for logical necessity. Matters of contradiction are logically determined. Therefore, if a

proposition is not self-contradictory, it is a contradiction to say that it is. That is, if a proposition is possible, it is necessarily possible. But this is the characteristic axiom of S5.

Factual necessity is taken most seriously in Thomistic philosophy. But it is not rigidly distinguished from logical necessity. This is largely due to the underlying realism of Aristotelian thought. The essence of a thing is not simply a matter of definition. It is something that lies "in" a thing but is quite independent of how we might happen to choose to define that thing. Consequently, logical necessity can be a special case of factual necessity. It would arise from definitions which reflected the factual essence of that which is defined.

The Thomistic position can be seen clearly in the argument of Aquinas against the view that the proposition "God exists" is self-evident.

> A thing can be self-evident in either of two ways; on the one hand, self-evident in itself, though not to us, on the other self-evident in itself and to us. A proposition is self-evident because the predicate is included in the essence of the subject, as 'Man is an animal', for animal is contained in the essence of man. If, therefore, the essence of

> the predicate and subject be known to all, the proposition will be self-evident to all; ... If, however, there are some to whom the essence of the predicate and subject is unknown, the proposition will be self-evident in itself, but not to those who do not know the meaning of the predicate and subject of the proposition.[10]

The distinction which Thomas draws is between a necessity which is knowable and one that is not. Necessity, in Thomism, is factual. But it is described in terms which much contemporary philosophy would prefer to apply to the purely logical, viz. analycity. Thomism assumes that the world obeys the laws of logic. Logical necessity is exemplified in the external world.

A necessary fact would be a state of affairs that could not possibly not be. If we leave the question of the verifiability of a thing's factual necessity open, we can approach the Thomistic position without making the assumptions of Aristotelian realism.

In Thomistic thought, "contingent" is defined as "possibly not".[11] Necessity is seen as the antithesis of contingency. It is described in negative terms, starting from some assumed characteristics of contingency.

This leads to an important difficulty. The

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10. St.Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I^{a}, Q.II, A.1.

11. cf. Jacques Maritain, An Introduction to Logic, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937), p.113.

contingent in the Thomist sense, includes the impossible. When a Thomist negates the contingent (the "possibly not") to arrive at the necessary, his move is logically correct. But in choosing the characteristics of the contingent, he looks to the existing contingent in a way which implicitly excludes the impossible. That is to say, the characteristics of contingency which he chooses are actually those of a sub-class of the contingent, viz. the "not-impossible".

There are three aspects of contingency which are given an important place in the Thomistic discussion of necessity. A contingent thing can be prevented from being; it is dependent on factors outside itself for its existence; it is temporally finite.

Maritain defines necessity in terms of its "unpreventability". "A thing is necessary when it cannot be prevented."[12] It is clear from the context that Maritain understands this definition to be equivalent to saying that a thing is necessary when it cannot not be. Furthermore it is clear that Maritain

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12. Jacques Maritain, "Reflections on Necessity and Contingency", Essays in Thomism, ed. Robert E. Brennan, O.P. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942), p.27.

understands "unpreventability" as a definition and not simply as a characteristic of necessity. Both of these assumptions must be questioned.

Similarly necessity is sometimes defined as aseity or self-dependence. "Self-dependence" and "unpreventability" can be shown to be equivalent. They are different ways of looking at the same concept. For if something is unpreventable, it is not dependent on any factors outside itself whose existence or non-existence could prevent its own existence - and vice-versa.

Both "unpreventability" and "self-dependence" are unsatisfactory definitions of necessity. We can agree that every necessary thing is unpreventable or self-dependent. But it does not follow that every unpreventable or self-dependent thing is necessary. The most we can say is that unpreventability and aseity are necessary conditions of necessity. They are not sufficient conditions.

If there are no reasons for something's non-being, it does not follow that there <u>are</u> reasons for its being. If a thing is not dependent on something external, it does not follow that it <u>is</u> dependent on something else (i.e. itself). And even if the concept of a thing

involves its self-dependence, it does not follow that it cannot fail to be. In short neither of these definitions are sufficient to fulfill the requirements of a necessary fact. At best they can be only characteristics of a necessary fact. Or, if they are definitions, they define a property "necessary existence" which may or may not be exemplified.

The negation of the temporal finitude of contingency to arrive at a definition of necessity involves the same problems. Being not finite is either to be infinite or not to be at all. There is also a suspicion that temporal finitude is not an essential characteristic of contingency. As Hick[13] points out, something contingent can exist indefinitely if the forces that could prevent it, in fact do not. This being the case, the value of temporal infinitude as a definition of necessity is further undermined.

The question of the applicability of the Lewis modal systems to factual necessity is complicated by a number of factors. The axioms of S1 are, as we noted earlier, examples of strict implication. They are

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13. John H. Hick, "Necessary Being", Scottish Journal of Theology, Vol. Fourteen (1961), p.358.

exemplifications of logical necessity from which some properties of the modal categories may be derived. Unless we make the assumption that the properties of logical necessity exemplified by the axioms are also shared by factual necessity, we cannot even start.

In fact, if factual necessity is defined in terms of the impossibility of non-being, the modal theses of S1 and S2 present little difficulty. It seems reasonable to make the same distinctions between the modes and to set them in the same relation to each other. By analogy with logical conjunction, we can say that the modality of a complex fact would be the same as the modality of its "weakest" constituent.

If factual necessity is defined as "unpreventability", "self-dependence", etc., the Lewis modal systems are quite inapplicable. For one of the laws of S1 (C'Lpp) does not hold. A thing's "necessary-existence" is not a guarantee of its existence.

The distinctive theses of S4 and S5 would seem to be inapplicable to the idea of factual necessity. We were able to justify the iteration of logical modes from the fact that the same considerations were valid in modalizing a modal proposition as in modalizing a simple

proposition. With necessary facts, the situation is different. By our assumptions, the modality of a fact is quite independent of the modality of our knowledge of the fact. We do not know the conditions under which a fact is modalized and cannot, therefore, come to any conclusions about the iteration of factual modalities. It would be advisable, therefore, not to allow these theses to stand as laws of factual necessity.

The question of whether there are necessary facts need not detain us here. Our purpose has been to lay down criterion for what a necessary fact might be. We will be interested, in the course of this thesis, in only one necessary fact: God.

Whether we distinguish between hypothetical necessity and factual necessity depends on whether we admit temporal infinitude as a characteristic of necessity. Must a necessary event be always happening? If there is water, it is necessarily composed of hydrogen and oxygen. But there need not be water. Can the hypothetical statement be called a necessary fact? Only if temporal infinitude is not a condition of factual necessity.

Psychological necessity presents its own problems. This can be seen by examing the following statements:

(a) I cannot imagine a placid baby.

(b) I cannot imagine an event that does not have a cause.

(c) I cannot imagine a man who is not mortal.

In the first case we have a statement about a mental attitude of the speaker towards babies. In the second case, a proposition which might be understood as an instance of factual necessity is held to be psychologically necessary. In the final case, a logically necessary proposition is given in a psychological form.

The common feature of all three statements lies in the fact that they do not assert anything about babies, events or men. They assert something about the mental state of the subject.

It might be thought that psychological necessity is the broadest form of the category - including factual and logical necessity within its scope. Why, for example, do we give the truths of logic the status of necessity? In logic we seem to frame our rules and our axioms so that what we want to be true, will be true. Thus the necessity of the laws that we deduce in our systems is based on an arbitrary decision on our part. If our system proves a law which we do not <u>want</u> to be necessary,

we cast doubt on our system.[14] Under these conditions it appears that our logic derives its necessity from propositions which are admitted on the strength of their psychological necessity. Similar considerations can be seen in Kant's insistence that causality must be synthetic a priori since it is, to Kant, intuitively necessary.

But other considerations argue against this view of psychological necessity. Factual necessity (if it is not a vacuous category) is derived from the nature of things and is quite independent of our knowledge of it. Therefore it is possible that there exist necessary facts about which it is not psychologically necessary to regard them as true.

Similarly it is possible that the statement "I cannot imagine that A" is true and "I cannot imagine that B" is false, even if 'A' and 'B' are logically equivalent. 'A' and 'not-B' may be mutually contradictory, but it is possible that I have not thought through the issues and do not see the contradiction. "I cannot imagine that A" does not entail "I cannot imagine that B" unless "I cannot imagine that A does not entail B" is true. But

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14. cf. Lewis, op.cit., p.496. Lewis rejects S3 because it contains a law that he regards as doubtful.

this may or may not be the case even if "A entails B" is true. Thus the same considerations apply to statements of psychological necessity as to belief sentences.[15] In fact, statements of psychological necessity can be seen as particularly strong assertions of belief.

Each of the types of necessity that we have examined has applications in relation to the doctrine of God. The ontological argument is usually interpreted as implying that God's existence is logically necessary. Thomism, while rejecting the ontological argument, attributes a kind of factual necessity to the divine existence. When God is used to explain the otherwise inexplicable, he is accorded a hypothetical necessity. Finally, in such statements as "No one can really be an atheist," the divine existence is held to be a psychological necessity.

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15. cf. Carnap, op.cit., pp.53ff.

Chapter Two

EXISTENCE AND NECESSITY

Since the time of Hume and Kant, innumerable philosophers have pronounced the ontological argument for the existence of God to be dead, buried, and consigned to oblivion. The cause of death is said to be the predication of existence. The death certificate was issued by Hume and Kant who showed the illness to be fatal. Ergo, the patient, must be dead.

It is important to distinguish two forms of this central criticism of the ontological argument. The first we can call the "Kantian" criticism. Existence is not a predicate. This criticism is anticipated by Hume, but it is in Kant that we find its classical formulation. The second criticism may or may not be based on the first. This is a step which Hume takes but Kant does not: Necessary existence is a contradiction in terms.

As we shall see in Chapter Three, some contemporary philosophers, notably Norman Malcolm and Charles Hartshorne, have pointed to the existence of two ontological arguments in Anselm's Proslogium. The first argument is held to be vulnerable to the Kantian

criticism but the second, which depends on a difference between "necessary" and "contingent" existence, is declared by these philosophers to be free from the thrust of Kant's argument. Only the Humean criticism is relevant to Anselm's "second" argument.

The Humean and Kantian criticisms of the ontological argument are central issues in any discussion of God's necessity. The purpose of this chapter will be to examine the Kantian and Humean arguments in detail and to ask if the criticisms are well founded.

I. David Hume

David Hume does not address himself to the ontological argument per se. In the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Demea puts forward an argument equivalent to the Third Way of Thomas Aquinas. From the contingency of the world, Demea argues to "a necessarily existent Being who carries the reason of his existence in himself, and who cannot be supposed not to exist, without an express contradiction."[1]

It is not Philo, the sceptic, who replies to

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1. David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Part IX.

Demea. It is Cleanthes, a confessed theist, who offers the rebuttal. His answer is short and to the point.

> Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive an non-existent. There is no being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. Consequently, there is no being whose existence is demonstrable.

From this Cleanthes concludes that "the words ... necessary existence have no meaning or, which is the same thing, none that is consistent."[2]

Hume's point rests on the assumption that the non-existence of every entity is always conceivable. He implicitly equates conceivability with logical possibility. Consequently, there is no entity whose non-existence is impossible. Necessary existence is a vacuous concept.

There are several points in Hume's critique that need comment. The first is his axiom that the non-existence of any entity is always conceivable. How, we may ask of Hume, may the non-existence of an entity be conceived?

The answer which it seems Hume must give is "It can't". For elsewhere, Hume denies that there is any

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2. ibid, Part IX.

idea of existence distinct from the ideas of things.

> To reflect on anything simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other. ... Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent.[3]

In what sense then, can we conceive of something as non-existent? If to conceive of something is to conceive of it as existing, to conceive of something as not existing is a contradiction in terms. It would follow that if anything is possible (i.e. conceivable), it exists necessarily.

Clearly, this result is not Hume's intention. In fact, in denying that the thought of a thing is any different than the thought of the same thing as existing, Hume is anticipating Kant. But it points to a central difficulty in Hume's philosophy: his psychologistic view of the nature of logic. In Hume the idea of logical possibility or consistency is equated with the psychological idea of conceivability.

Hume may be correct in maintaining that the statement "x does not exist" is always consistent, whatever "x" may be. But this position is not consistent with his identification of consistency and conceivability and his

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3. David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, Book I, Part II, Section VI.

further identification of the conception of an entity with the conception of the same entity as existing.

In Cleanthes' rebuttal of Demea, another confusion is made. Demea, as we noted above, does not put forward the ontological argument. Rather he advocates the same argument that Kant distinguishes as the cosmological argument. It asserts that contingent being is not self-explanatory. If anything exists contingently it implies the existence of something which exists necessarily (i.e., which is self-explanatory).

The idea of necessity which is involved in the cosmological argument is not a purely logical one. The argument contrasts contingency and aseity and asserts the dependence of the former on the latter. If any notion of logical necessity is involved, it is of the nature of Aquinas' "self-evident in itself but not to us."

Hume fails to make this distinction. Both Demea and Cleanthes let the confusion go unnoticed. Demea first establishes a necessary being on the ground of the insufficiency of the contingent. Then, as if this is not enough, he declares the non-existence of this being to be self-contradictory. Cleanthes argues for the impossibility of a <u>logically</u> necessary being. He later advances

arguments which are relevant against the cosmological argument. But his initial reaction is to assume that the necessity which is being discussed is logical. He shows no awareness that Demea is using two arguments.

But let us return to Hume's central criticism of the argument. The weight of the whole critique falls on Hume's assertion that statements of non-existence are never inconsistent. This assertion is not supported. It is simply put in several different ways. The question of the grounds of such an assertion is never dealt with. To Hume, it is self-evident. But is it? Is the statement inductive or deductive? Hume doesn't face the question. But the answer is vital to the validity of his criticism of the notion of a necessary being.

It would seem that Hume understands his criticism to be deductive. "Necessary existence" is a self-contradiction. But if we press Hume here we come to what is basically an inductive judgment. Presumably existential propositions are seen by him as a sub-class of propositions expressing "matters of fact". As is well-known, Hume holds that matters of fact are discovered by experience and not a priori.[4] But this contention is based on an

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4. cf. David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Section IV, Part I.

inductive generalization from his own experience. He knows of no matter of fact apart from experience and concludes that none can be known a priori. When this is applied as a criticism of the ontological argument, it begs the question. For the ontological argument claims to have found an exception to the rule.

It might be objected that "matters of fact" is equivalent to "experiential knowledge" by definition. But in this case, the identification of existential propositions as expressions of matters of fact becomes the inductive generalization.

Of course, the statement that all existential propositions express matters of fact may be asserted as a further definition. But unless we are willing to let reality be delimited by definition, room still remains for a priori expressions of this reality - even though the word "existence" is not used in this context. Our difficulty still remains.

II. Immanuel Kant

When we turn to the critique of Immanuel Kant, we are dealing with a more explicit rebuttal of the ontological argument. Kant is quite familiar with the difference

between the ontological argument and the Third Way of Thomas Aquinas. He criticizes each argument separately and explicitly.

The basis of Kant's objection to the argument is virtually identical to that of Hume. All existential judgments are synthetic a posteriori. His various arguments are elaborations of this single theme.

Let us distinguish the three important charges which Kant brings against the ontological argument: (1) Any existential proposition can be denied without contradiction. (2) The ontological argument proves existence only by assuming it. (3) Existence is not a predicate. We shall look at each of these objections in turn.

Any existential proposition can be denied without contradiction.[5] As an example, Kant takes a proposition which he admits as an archetype of any analytical proposition. "Every triangle has three angles." Kant admits that, in this proposition, the subject cannot be affirmed and the predicate rejected without contradiction. His next move is to interpret this proposition to mean, "If

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5. cf. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), pp.501-503.

a triangle exists, it has three angles." He uses this interpretation to maintain that the ontological argument, in holding the proposition "God exists" to be analytic, is reduced to the trivial assertion "If God exists, he exists." Kant goes on to say that no contradiction results if both the subject and predicate are removed.

Kant's reduction of the categorical proposition to a hypothetical existential proposition is unfortunate. It simply does not come to terms with what the ontological argument asserts. The proposition "All A is B" is certainly equivalent to "If A, then B." But to insert the word "exists" after "A" is a bit presumptuous. In Kant's example of the triangle, the insertion makes no significant difference. In the ontological argument it makes all the difference in the world.

A categorical assertion such as "All triangles have three angles" is ambiguous. It says nothing about what kind of entity a triangle is. Is it a concept, an existing thing, or what? The validity of the categorical is not dependent on the answer to this question. Certainly the statement implies that, if a triangle exists it has three angles. But it also implies that if a

triangle is conceived it must be conceived as having three angles.

If we take the later interpretation of the categorical proposition, the ontological argument can be let off the hook. To conceive of the subject is not to accord it existence. The existential judgment is a separate one. In the ontological argument this separate judgment is represented by the predicate of the statement "God exists." All that is accorded to the subject is what Anselm calls "conceptual existence." That is, the subject is assumed to be understood. Whether or not a triangle exists, it cannot be understood unless it is understood as having three angles.

Kant's argument that, in an analytic judgment, no contradiction results when both subject and predicate are removed, must be further examined.

Kant is not explicit about the meaning of the word "removal" in this context. If we are to take his example of the triangle seriously, he would seem to be saying that to remove the subject is to deny it existence. But this move is subject to two criticisms.

In the first place, what could it possibly mean

to "remove" the subject and predicate in Kant's example? Would not the proposition that results read, "If no triangle exists, a triangle does not have three angles"? Is it true that the triangularity of triangles is contingent on their existence? It seems rather doubtful.

In the second place, the argument is not a refutation of the ontological argument. It is a simple refusal to listen to it. If to remove the subject means to deny it existence, then the ontological argument is asserting that, in this case, to remove the subject is to be involved in contradiction.

The word "removal" can, however, be given another sense. To remove the subject can simply mean to deny its intelligibility, to refuse to consider it. If the subject is removed in this sense, the argument cannot proceed. But again, this is no refutation of the ontological argument. It is simply a refusal to play the game.

The ontological argument proves existence only by assuming it. This is the second Kantian argument that we will consider. Kant charges that the ontological argument is nothing but a "mere tautology". He asks:

Is the proposition that this or that thing ...

> exists, an analytic or a synthetic proposition? If it is analytic, the assertion of the existence of the thing adds nothing to the thought of the thing; but in that case either the thought, which is in us, is the thing itself, or we have presupposed an existence ... and have then, on that pretext, inferred its existence from its internal possibility- which is nothing but a miserable tautology.[6]

Kant asks his question in abstract, which is unfortunate. His question assumes at the outset that propositions of the form 'x exists' are either all analytic or all synthetic. This is analogous to asking whether propositions of the form 'x has three angles' are analytic or synthetic. The answer, of course, depends on what 'x' is. If 'x' is 'a triangle', the proposition is analytic. If 'x' is 'the diagram on page 324 of my geometry book', it is synthetic. The same consideration applies to Kant's question. Unless we can determine a priori that no existential proposition is analytic, the question cannot be given a simple answer.

It is difficult to see what force, if any, Kant's disdain of tautology has in this particular case. Certainly, in an analytic judgment, the predicate is assumed in the subject. The idea of three angles adds

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6. ibid, p.504.

nothing to the idea of the triangle. But this does not make the proposition "All triangles have three angles" a vacuous one. At the very least, the proposition asserts that the concept "triangle" cannot be understood unless the concept "having three angles" is also understood. Thus the charge of "miserable tautology" is little more than name calling in relationship to the ontological argument. Of course existence is assumed in the subject! The force of the ontological argument lies precisely in its insistence that the concept "God" cannot be understood unless he is understood as existing.

Existence is not a predicate. The argument which is most often cited as administering the death blow to the ontological argument is Kant's dictum that existence adds nothing to a concept. Kant does not deny categorically that existence is a predicate. "Anything we please can be made to serve as a logical predicate."[7] He does deny that existence is a "real" predicate; one that is capable of enlarging the concept of a thing.

Here we would seem to run into a difficulty similar to one which we found in Hume. If existence "adds nothing" to a concept, how could existential

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7. ibid, p.504.

judgments possibly be synthetic, as Kant wishes to insist? What do synthetic a posteriori existential propositions assert if existence adds nothing to a concept? What is it about existential judgments that we are told by experience? On this question, Kant gives us more explicit direction than did Hume.

> If ... we take the subject (God) with all its predicates ..., 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. The content of both must be one and the same.[8]

He puts the same thing in other words in his famous example of the hundred thalers.

> The real contains no more than the merely possible. A hundred real thalers do not contain the least coin more than a hundred possible thalers.

Of course they don't! Neither do a hundred silver dollars contain a penny more than a hundred possible dollars - but there is a conceptual difference. Furthermore, my financial position is not affected at all by whether my money is paper or silver but, as Kant says, "My financial position is ... affected very differently by

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8. ibid, p.505.

a hundred real thalers than it is by the mere concept of them."

This may be a sop which is thrown to the ontological argument, but it is the only sop it needs. Kant is unable to carry through his objection. Existence does make a difference. The difference may only be one of "status" and not of "concept" - this is not the issue. What is required to make the ontological argument work is that the difference be relevant to the question of perfection. Is it "more perfect" ("greater", etc.) to exist or not to exist? Kant wants to say that it is a misuse of language to even ask the question. But his point has not been made.

To recapitulate: There are two distinct arguments which are brought against the ontological argument by Kant and Hume. The first, which is shared by Hume and Kant, is that existential propositions can always be denied without contradiction. The second, which is anticipated by Hume but only applied to the ontological argument by Kant, is the denial that existence adds anything to a concept. From the first argument, Hume goes on to draw the conclusion that "necessary existence" is a contradiction in

terms. Kant does not make this move from either of the arguments.

We have found that the arguments of Kant and Hume are not decisive against the ontological argument. This may be the case for one of two reasons. It may be that Hume and Kant are correct but that they have not been able to express their argument in a completely convincing form. If this is so we should hope to find an improved statement of the argument in the writings of a more recent philosopher. The alternative is that the case cannot be made; that the philosophical stance of the ontological argument is consistent. If this is true, the proclamations of the "burial" of the ontological arguments are, at best, a little premature. Let us explore the former alternative first.

III. Norman Malcolm

Norman Malcolm, in his defense of Anselm's "second" argument, sides with Kant on this question. He attempts to restate the Kantian criticism. He asks:

> My future child will be a better man if he is honest than if he is not; but who would understand the saying that if God exists 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.[9]

In order to illustrate his point, Malcolm gives an example of a king who asks two councilors, A and B, to draw up descriptions of the most perfect chancellor they can conceive. A's list differs from B's in one respect only. A includes "existence" as one attribute which a perfect chancellor should possess. B omits the word. Malcolm concludes:

> Any person who satisfied A's description would necessarily satisfy B's description and vice-versa! This is to say that A and B did not produce descriptions that differed in any way but rather one and the same description of necessary and desirable qualities in a chancellor. A only made a show of putting down a desirable quality that B had failed to include.[10]

Almost in the same breath, Malcolm makes an interesting admission.

> It would be desirable to have a rigorous refutation of the doctrine but I have not been able to provide one. I am compelled to leave the matter at the more or less intuitive level ...

The "more or less intuitive level" is not good

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9. Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments", The Philosophical Review, Vol.LXIX (1960), p.43.

10. ibid, p.44.

enough. For Malcolm is making a mistake which is common to many who comment on this point. In Malcolm's case the mistake may be a little more transparent than in most.

Suppose we confronted Councilor A and Councilor B with the discrepancy in their descriptions of the perfect chancellor. Councilor B, presumably, would justify his omission on the grounds that anybody who fitted his description would automatically exist, that it would be impossible for the king to employ a non-existent chancellor. Councilor A, on the other hand, might reply that an imaginary chancellor is an imperfect chancellor and that "existence" must be included in the description. No matter how obvious it may be, if "existence" is not included the description is incomplete.

In short, Malcolm is only able to say that any person who fulfills B's description also fulfills A's because "any person" is assumed to exist. As Quine might put it, Malcolm is using language which makes ontological assumptions. B assumes what A makes explicit. But the example does nothing to decide the question. It fails completely to demonstrate that existence is not a perfection. Neither is it very convincing on the "more or less intuitive level."

IV. Terence Penelhum

Another attempt to restate the Kantian argument is that of Terence Penelhum. Penelhum argues against the possibility of existential statements being analytic.

> The standard, and correct, objection to this is that which Kant raised, viz. that to assert the existence of something is quite different from asserting what sort of thing it is, and to know that either assertion is true is not to know that the other is. If someone came in unannounced and said, "It's blue!" we should not have much idea what he was talking about, but we would automatically know it was a visible physical object and not a philosophical theory or Act of Parliament. But if he had come in and said "It exists!" we should know nothing about what sort of thing it was. Existence cannot vary in quantity or intensity, belong to some members of a class and not others, or be interrupted and then resumed. ... From all this it follows that existence cannot be held to be a quality which a perfect being would have to have, since it is not a quality at all.[11]

In the context of his article, Penelhum places great weight on this short argument. Not only does it bear his rejection of the ontological argument. It is the basis for his rejection of a self-explanatory being in any sense of the term. It warrants close examination.

Penelhum's example of the individual who cries

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11. Terence Penelhum, "Divine Necessity", Mind, New Series, Vol.69, pp.179-80.

"It's blue!" or "It exists!" is very interesting. It is true that blueness is a much better clue to the identification of something than is existence. But there are two questions which should be answered before we take the leap which Penelhum wishes us to make.

First, has Penelhum made the same mistake as Malcolm? From the cry "It exists!", Penelhum says, "we should know nothing about what sort of thing it was." But we do know it is a thing, i.e. something that exists. Presumably, in this sentence, "thing" is an existence-assuming term. Might we not also say that, from the cry "It's blue!", we should know nothing about what sort of "blueness" it was?

Secondly, if Penelhum does not make this mistake, is his claim true? From the cry "It's blue!" we know that "It" is something to which the word "blue" is appropriate. Do we not know the same from the cry "It exists!"? We can be certain, for example, that square circles are not being denoted by the cry.

In short, we must ask whether the obvious differences between blueness and existence really shows that "existence is not a predicate". The extension of the

class "existing things" is far greater than the extension of the class "blue things". Consequently the term "existence" is not limited in what it might denote to the extent that a term like "blue" is limited. In other words, "blue" tells us more, indeed much more, about something than does the word "exists". But this is not to say that existence is not a predicate. It is just to say that the significance of the predicate "existence" is rather limited. Penelhum has not adequately dealt with this possibility.

Finally, Penelhum's denial to "existence" of such things as quantity, intensity, etc. is rather vague. In the first place, one can think of exceptions to some of these. For example, someone who adhered to a platonic philosophical position might be inclined to dispute the assertion that existence cannot vary in intensity. Existence does belong to some members of the class of "possible things" and not to others. There may be something wrong with these counter examples, but Penelhum's statement of his case is too vague to refute them.

In the second place, Penelhum fails to show how these remarks lead to his conclusion. He infers that a

quality must "vary in quantity or intensity, belong to some members of a class and not others, or be interrupted and then resumed". Would it be too much if we asked why? Is each of these conditions necessary or is each sufficient for something to rank as a quality? Or are we again on the "more or less intuitive level"? In any case, Penelhum has not laid a sufficient basis for his conclusion: "Existence cannot be held to be a quality which a perfect being would have to have, since it is not a quality at all."

It would be easy to multiply examples of such arguments. But this would serve no useful purpose. Arguments against the predictability of existence function well on the intuitive level, but when they are pressed beyond this level, they seem to break down. We will discuss the significance of this later.

V. Existence and Denotation

First let us look at one example of a type of discussion which is currently being carried on concerning the meaning of the term "exists".[12] These discussions have the

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12. cf. also Willard Van Orman Quine, "On What There Is", From A Logical Point of View, (New York: Harper, 1963), pp.1-19.
P.T.Geach, A.J.Ayer, W.V.Quine, "Symposium: On What There Is", Freedom, Language and Reality, Aristoelian Society, Supplementary Volume XXV, 1951, pp. 123-160.

virtue of not being directed explicitly at the ontological argument and are, in this sense, "neutral ground".

The example we will discuss is by Holger Sørensen[13], a Danish philosopher. Sørensen starts by citing four sentences: (1) "Anderson is red haired"; (2) "Anderson is not red haired"; (3) "Anderson exists"; (4) "Anderson does not exist". In the first example, a property is simply predicated of the subject. In (2) the property is denied to the subject. Sørensen comments:

> Anderson, however, is the bearer of other properties. If Anderson were not the bearer of any properties at all, Anderson would not be. He would neither be red-haired nor non-red-haired, he would not even be bald.[14]

In (3), as Sørensen interprets it, we predicate a property "existence" to a subject, as in (1). On this interpretation (4) would seem to imply that a property "existence" is being denied to a subject, as in (2). It is here that the peculiarities of the concept "existence" show themselves. Sørensen asks:

> Who is it that is not the bearer of the property of being? Or simply: Who is it that is not?

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13. H.S.Sørensen, "An Analysis of 'To Be' and 'To Be True'", Analysis, Vol. 19, pp. 121-131.

14. ibid, p.122.

> It is the person Anderson that is not. Somehow, however, Anderson must be; for if Anderson were not, it would be impossible to predicate anything of him, even non-being. In order not to be Anderson must be. We cannot predicate anything of something unless that something is, as the bearer of predicates, or, which is the same thing, as the subject of discourse ...[15]

Sørensen rejects the idea of subsistence (existence as the subject of discourse) because it solves nothing. What would it mean to say "Anderson does not subsist"? Who is it that does not subsist?

Sørensen argues that the difficulty stems from an incorrect analysis of the word "existence".

> An analysis of "exist" is correct if, and only if, it leads to this result: "A does not exist" must, after the analysis, be as clear ... as the statement is as it stands.[16]

Sørensen solves his problem by denying that, in the sentence "Anderson exists", the word "exists" is a predicate of somebody called Anderson. Rather it is a predicate of the sign "Anderson" which signifies the person Anderson. Thus to say "Anderson exists" is to say "The sign 'Anderson' denotes." It follows that "Anderson does not exist" is equivalent to "'Anderson' does not denote."

Now this would seem to push the "existence is not a

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15. ibid, pp. 122-23.
16. ibid, p.124.

predicate" line about as far as it will go. And it would seem to follow that "necessary existence" is a meaningless conjunction of terms. Other critics of "necessary existence" have often spoken as if "existence" was something that is possessed by an entity, even though it is not "a predicate". Sørensen denies that "existence" has anything to do with what a thing "possesses". It has to do with signs and whether or not signs denote.

We may doubt if Sørensen's analysis is entirely adequate. His analysis of "Anderson does not exist" is a little oversimplified. Presumably, when this form of language is used, it is used in a context. Take for example this statement: "Captain Ahab does not exist." Who does not exist? An individual described in Moby Dick with attributes A, B, C and D does not exist. There is no individual in reality answering the description. Or, the individual described in Moby Dick lacks the "property" of real existence. He may be described in the novel as really existing, or his real existence may be assumed in the narrative, but the description is false. That is one reason why we call Moby Dick "fiction".

Sørensen's answer is, of course, that to deny

Captain Ahab existence we must assume existence. But this is not true. I make exactly the same existential assumption when I say "Captain Ahab did not have red hair" as when I say "Captain Ahab does not exist". In each case "Captain Ahab" denotes a character in fiction. He has "fictional existence" if you like. Sørensen has moved too quickly to dispose of the notion of subsistence.

Sørensen's analysis breaks down in cases, such as above, where some sort of qualified existence can be ascribed to a subject. Thus, while we wish to say "Captain Ahab does not exist", it is not true that "The sign 'Captain Ahab' does not denote." On the contrary, 'Captain Ahab' denotes a fictional character. Must we then say that this fictional character exists?

Even if Sørensen's analysis were correct, it does not dispose of the question of necessary existence. It simply changes the question. We must then ask "Is it possible for a term to necessarily denote?". And we don't have to look far for an answer. For surely a term like "the universe" is one that cannot fail to denote. By definition, the universe is the totality of existing things. Whether the word "God" fits in this category remains to be seen.

VI. Conclusion

To recapitulate: We have examined the criticisms of Kant and Hume and have surveyed some of the recent restatements of their arguments. We have found no case in which the argument is decisive.

But we must also admit that we have not shown the position from which these criticisms stem to be inconsistent. We have not attempted a strict refutation of the Humean-Kantian position. We have simply sought to show that this position has not done what its proponents claim for it. It has not "buried" the ontological argument.

We have not sought to show that existence is not a predicate except in the case of God. This may be true, but it is not the point we have sought to make. We have simply sought to show that the assertion that "existence is not a predicate" can better be described as a dogma than as a well-established philosophical principle, and that "necessary existence" has not been shown to be "either meaningless or self-contradictory."

With the lack of further evidence or insight into the problem, we must draw the following conclusion: "Existence is a perfection" is an axiom of the ontological

argument. This axiom may be consistently denied (as it is in the Humean-Kantian criticisms). However, the denial of the axiom is not itself demonstrable. The denial, or some equivalent assertion, is an axiom for a philosophical position in which the ontological argument is not valid.

Let us assume for the moment, that there is no argument over any other move in the ontological argument except this one. What does the position which we have taken commit us to? Is the ontological argument valid or isn't it?

The ontological argument is valid if existence is a perfection. It is not if existence is not a perfection. Whether existence is a perfection is a question that is undecided and possibly undecidable. The question is one of ontological assumptions. In a Kantian or Humean ontology, the ontological argument is invalid. In other ontologies (e.g. Platonic realism) it is valid. In other words, in some philosophical positions the existence of God is a necessity.

The status of the ontological argument is thus analogous to that of Euclidean geometry. The fifth postulate of Euclid's system, which has to do with parallel

lines, has been attacked throughout the history of Geometry as being neither self-evident nor demonstrable from the other postulates. But, by denying the validity of the fifth postulate, mathematicians have been able to construct what are known as non-Euclidean geometries.

The analogy between the ontological argument and Euclidean geometry holds in this respect. Neither is true "in all possible worlds". To this extent both fail to achieve deductive certainty. But both contain axioms, which, taken as true, complete the proof.

In Chapter One, we accepted as a modal law C'MLpLp (If something is possibly necessary, it is necessary). Now it appears as if we are saying that it is possible that God's existence is necessary. If so, have we decided the issue already in favour of the ontological argument?

We have not. We accepted the laws of S5 concerning iterated modalities on the basis that the logical possibility of a proposition was logically determined. But we have not succeeded in demonstrating the consistency of the notion "necessary existence". It is demonstrable consistency that is required to make the laws of S5 work. We have simply shown that the notion has not been proven inconsistent.

We have examined in some detail the criticism that the concept "existence" is not amenable to the use which is made of it in the ontological argument. We have done this on the assumption that what the ontological argument claims and how it makes these claims is quite straightforward and understood by all. In the next chapter we shall turn our attention to this argument itself, and, particularly in its Anselmian form, see what in fact it does involve.

Chapter III

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND GOD'S EXISTENCE

In this chapter, we will study the ontological argument itself, with only passing reference to the criticism which was discussed in the last chapter. We will look at the classical forms which the argument has taken in the writings of Anselm, Descartes and Spinoza. We will then study the comments of three philosophers (Charles Hartshorne, Norman Malcolm, Albert Cock) and one theologian (Karl Barth) who, within the last fifty years, have had occasion to defend the argument in one form or another. Finally we will attempt to draw our own conclusions.

A. The Primary Sources

1. Anselm

Anselm's argument is found in his Proslogium. In the preface to this little work, Anselm explains his task. He explains that an earlier work, the Monologium, in which he had attempted to provide a brief, closely reasoned "Summa" of Christian doctrine. contained one

important inadequacy. He says:

> Considering that this book was knit together by the linking of many arguments, I began to ask myself whether there might be found a single argument which would require no other for its proof than itself alone; and alone would suffice to demonstrate that God truly exists, ... and whatever we believe regarding the divine Being.[1]

We have, then, "a single argument" on which Anselm wishes to base, not only the existence of God, but the entire Christian doctrine of God. The ontological argument, as it is commonly understood, forms only a part of this wider picture.

The Proslogium takes the form of a meditation in which God is addressed. The conclusion of the argument is therefore assumed in the very form that the argument takes. The argument does not pretend to prove what is undetermined. Rather it seeks to "understand" what is previously "believed". It is, in Anselm's words, "faith seeking understanding."

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1. St.Anselm, Proslogium, Preface. (All quotations from the Proslogium and Monologium are from S. Deane's translation, St.Anselm: Basic Writings (2nd ed., Lasalle: Open Court, 1962).

Nevertheless, Anselm starts from a point which he believes to be unprejudiced; at which he assumes the unbeliever and the believer can agree.

> We believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Or is there no such nature, since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God? (Psalm xiv. I) But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak - a being than which nothing greater can be conceived - understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist.[2]

This "point of contact" between believer and unbeliever, the definition of God as "a being than which nothing greater can be conceived" is also the "single argument" from which Anselm will attempt to establish the existence and nature of God.

He starts by making an important distinction: "It is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists."[3] Thus Anselm rejects the Humean-Kantian argument that to think of something is to think of it as existing. The existential judgment is, for Anselm, a distinct act of the understanding. The fool, Anselm holds, has no difficulty according conceptual existence to God. Thus God "exists"

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2. ibid, Chapter II.
3. ibid, Chapter II.

in the understanding - even for the fool. The question is - does God exist apart from the understanding? Is his existence more than just an idea? As Anselm puts it, does He exist "in reality"?

Anselm's answer is typical of the use which he makes of his "single argument" throughout his work.

> Assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater. Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and exists both in the understanding and in reality.[4]

A few points should be noted here. Anselm is not saying, strictly speaking, that a God who exists is greater than one who does not exist. The distinction that he draws is between an imaginary God and a real God. It is the latter that Anselm holds to be "greater".

Now this move is obviously the central one in Anselm's argument. Its validity depends, among other things, on the use Anselm makes of the word "greater". In the Proslogium, the word is not explained. But an

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4. ibid, Chapter II.

explanation is given in his earlier work, the Monologium. Speaking of God as that being who is supremely great, he says:

> 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, - wisdom, for instance.[5]

In other words, to say that one thing is greater than another is basically to make a value judgment.

Further light is shed on the nature of Anselm's formula elsewhere in the Monologium when Anselm discusses his methodology of divine predication. Here he anticipates his ontological argument. He starts by making a general comment concerning "relative" predicates when applied to God.

> As to relative expressions ... no one can doubt that no such expression describes what is essential to that in regard to which it is relatively employed. Hence, if any relative predication is made regarding the supreme Nature, it is not significant of its substance.[6]

Among "relative" predicates, Anselm includes such terms as "highest", "greater", "better", etc. ... Such predicates are purely comparative. They set a

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5. St. Anselm, Monologium, Chapter II.

6. ibid, Chapter XV.

thing in relation to something else. They say nothing about what a thing is in itself. As Anselm puts it:

> If none of those things ever existed, in relation to which it is called supreme or greater, it would not be conceived as either supreme or greater, yet it would not, therefore, be less good, or suffer detriment to its essential greatness in any degree.

Anselm turns to another type of predicate. These are predicates which are amenable to having value. In some cases, Anselm argues, it can be said of a predicate that it is better "to be it" than "not to be it". In other cases, the reverse is true. To be wise is better than not to be wise. Not to be selfish is better than to be selfish. In other cases, no value judgment can be made independently of a context. Is it better to be gold or not to be gold? It depends. Is the subject of this predicate a man or a coin?

From these considerations, Anselm formulates a general rule governing divine predication.

> As it is impious to suppose that the substance of the supreme Nature is anything, than which what is not it is in any way better, it must be true that this substance is whatever is, in general, better than what is not it. For, it alone is that, than which there is nothing better at all, and which is better than all things, which are not what it is.[7]

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7. ibid, Chapter XV.

Anselm's position here is closely paralleled[8] in the use he makes in the Proslogium of his formula "greater than which no being can be thought." But it is more than just a parallel. Anselm's statements in the Monologium are important for the interpretation of the formula of the Proslogium.

In the first place, we are given some insight into the way that the value judgment, which is involved in the word "greater", operates. This needs no further comment. But, more important, we are given an insight into the status of the formula itself.

The word "greater" does not describe the essence of God. It is a relative term. This consideration is decisive for clearing up an ambiguity in Anselm's formulation of his argument. Anselm defines God as "a being greater than which no being can be conceived." And, if this definition is understood, Anselm claims that God "exists in the understanding."

Now some critics (e.g. Guanilo, Aquinas, Kant) have suggested that it is impossible to conceive of such a being. Their criticism is correct insofar as one cannot picture an

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8. cf. St. Anselm, Proslogium, Chapter V.

individual in his essence who would qualify as that being "greater than which no being can be conceived."

This criticism does not come to terms with what Anselm is saying. His formula is not a description of the essence of God. It cannot be, because the word "greater" does not describe. Rather it is a formula by which prospective descriptions may be tested. As a definition of God it is purely formal and devoid of content. To understand the formula (which is what Anselm demands of the fool) is not to conceive of the essential being of God. This is further evident from Chapter XV of the Proslogium, which we quote in full.

> Therefore, O Lord, thou art not only that than which a greater cannot be conceived, but thou art a being greater than can be conceived. For, since it can be conceived that there is such a being, if thou art not this very being, a greater than thou can be conceived. But this is impossible.

We have followed Anselm's argument and commented upon it as it is presented in Chapter II of the Proslogium. In Chapter III, the argument takes a new twist. Anselm argues that a being whose non-existence is inconceivable is conceivable.. Such a being "is greater than one whose non-existence is conceivable". Ergo, God's non-existence is inconceivable. It is this argument which Hartshorne and Malcolm call

Anselm's "second" ontological argument.

Chapter IV of the Proslogium is important, but confusing. Anslem asks how, in the light of his argument, the fool could deny the existence of God. He says that there are two ways of conceiving.

> In one sense, an object is conceived, when the word signifying it is conceived; and in another, when the very entity, which the object is, is understood.

Anselm argues that "In the former sense ... God can be conceived not to exist; but in the latter, not at all."

It is difficult to understand what Anselm means here. We have claimed that to understand Anselm's formula was not to conceive "the very entity which the object is." But here Anselm seems to contradict our interpretation. We will stick by this interpretation, but we must admit that here Anselm gives a basis for the type of criticism of the argument which Aquinas makes.

Anselm's point is put better in the next paragraph:

> No one who understands what God is can conceive that God does not exist; although he says these words in his heart, either without any, or with some foreign, signification.

The fool's difficulty, then, is not so much that he does not conceive "the very entity" (whatever that may mean), but that

he does not understand how the words in the formula are used. We will return to this point when we discuss the contribution of Karl Barth to the study of the argument.

2. Descartes

Let us now turn to the Cartesian form of the ontological argument. Descartes starts from the assumption that analytical propositions are possible and that they are true by virtue of their clarity. That the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles, is involved in the very notion of a triangle. Similarly, argues Descartes, God's essence involves his existence.

> It is not less absurd to think of God (that is, a supremely perfect being) lacking existence (that is, lacking a certain perfection), than to think of a hill without a valley.[9]

Descartes immediately considers an important objection. Thought imposes no necessity on things. Is it possible that this objection invalidates his argument? "No", says Descartes.

> From my inability to think of God as non-existent, it follows that existence is

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9. Rene Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Fifth Meditation, tr. Elizabeth Anscombe and P.T. Geach, (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1954), p.103.

> inseparable from God and thus he really does exist. It is not that my thought makes this so, or imposes any necessity on anything; on the contrary, the necessity of the fact itself ... is what determines me to think this way.[10]

We will remember that Kant criticizes the ontological argument on the grounds that there is no contradiction in an analytical proposition if both subject and predicate are "removed". We found that this was a coherent objection only if by "to remove" is meant "not to consider". Descartes makes essentially the same concession.

> There is indeed no necessity for me ever to happen upon any thought of God; but whenever I choose to think of the First and Supreme Being, ... I must necessarily ascribe to him all perfections ;;; This necessity clearly insures that, when later I observe that existence is a perfection, I am justified in concluding that the First and Supreme Being exists.

This concludes Descartes' argument as it is found in the Meditations. He presents it again in the Discourses (Part Four), but without any significant changes. In the Objections and Replies, however, Descartes does give us quite a bit of new material relating to the ontological argument.

In the first set of objections, Descartes is reminded that Aquinas had already considered the ontological

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10. ibid, p.104.

argument and had found it lacking. The objector repeats St. Thomas' paraphrase of Anselm and gives the reply of Aquinas verbatim.

Descartes refuses to admit the equivalence of the Anselmian argument (or, rather, the Thomistic paraphrase of the argument) to his own. He understands the former to be saying that to understand the word "God" is to understand that God exists. His reply is remarkable and we wonder how seriously it is meant to be taken. "Because a word implies something, that is no reason for it to be true."

Descartes contrasts this view with his own.

> That which we clearly and distinctly understand to belong to the true and immutable nature of anything ... can be truly affirmed of that thing; but, after we have with sufficient accuracy investigated the nature of God, we clearly and distinctly understand that to exist belongs to His true and immutable nature; therefore we can with truth affirm of God that he exists.[11]

Descartes admits that there may be difficulty with the minor premise of his argument, viz. that existence belongs to God's nature. Descartes cites two difficulties, but only the first of these is significant to our study.

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11. Rene Descartes, "A Reply by the Author to the First Set of Objections", The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Vol. II, (New York: Dover, 1955), p.19.

> We are so much accustomed to distinguish existence from essence in the case of other things that we do not with sufficient readiness notice how existence belongs to the essence of God in a greater degree than is the case in other things.

Descartes answers the difficulty by distinguishing possible and necessary existence. Any concept contains possible existence if it is "clearly and distinctly" conceived. Necessary existence is contained only in the idea of God:

> Even though other things are indeed conceived only as existing, yet it does not thence follow that they do exist, but only that they may exist, because we do not conceive that there is any necessity for actual existence being conjoined with their other properties; but because we understand that actual existence is necessarily and at all times linked to God's other attributes, it follows certainly that God exists.[12]

Now this argument needs comment. Descartes is not yet doing what Anselm does in Chapter III of the Proslogium. He is not saying that "necessary existence" as opposed to "possible existence" is something that a perfect Being would have to have. Rather he is arguing thus: The clearly conceivable is the possible. To say "I can conceive x" is to say "It is possible that x exists." But ordinarily, one can go no farther. Thus, "possible existence" is contained

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12. ibid, p.20.

in every concept. But to conceive of a Perfect Being is to conceive of it as really existing. Since existence is a perfection, it is an attribute which is inseparable from the nature of God. On these grounds alone we say that "It is necessary that God exists" or that the idea of God contains "necessary existence". What Descartes is saying is that the existence of any concept is "necessarily possible", while that of God is "necessarily actual".

The question now is: Does Descartes go beyond this? Does he propound an argument equivalent to Anselm's "second" argument? The evidence for saying he does is found in his reply to the second set of objections. He formulates a set of definitions and axioms in the manner of Spinoza and formulates the ontological argument anew in Proposition I. He concludes that God exists because necessary existence is contained in the concept of God. This follows from Axiom IX which states:

> Existence is contained in the idea or concept of everything, because we can conceive nothing except as existent, with this difference, that possible or contingent existence is contained in the concept of a limited thing, but necessary and perfect existence in the concept of a supremely perfect being.[13]

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13. ibid, p.57.

Now it is indisputable that Descartes' language is becoming more and more "modalized". But it is not at all clear that he has reached the point of having a "second" ontological argument. His formulation is capable of several interpretations.

Two considerations argue against the "second argument" interpretation. In the first place, the modal statements concerning the existence which is contained in the respective concepts can be asserted de dicto but not de re. From the fact that the existence included in a concept is contingent one may infer the statement "It is contingent that x exists". But one may not infer the statement "x contingently exists". The latter statement implies the real existence of a concept in a way that Descartes does not intend. In short, Descartes is not contrasting two different kinds of existence but one kind that is known under two different modes.

Secondly, Descartes says of Proposition I, "This is the syllogism of which I made use ... in replying to the sixth objection." But if we look at the reply to the sixth objection we find no mention of "necessary existence". It

is simply the old argument that existence belongs to the nature of God.[14]

3. Spinoza

Spinoza's ontological argument is found in his Ethics in Part I, Proposition IX. The first formulation of the proof takes only three sentences. However, the short proof presupposes the definitions, axioms, and propositions which precede it. It cannot be reconstructed in so short a form.

The argument is based on Spinoza's notion of "substance". Substance is that which is self-dependent or self-explanatory; that which is in itself and is conceived through itself. In addition to the definition of substance, an axiom is introduced to the argument: "The knowledge of an effect depends on and involves the knowledge of a cause." (Axiom IV)[15]

Since substance is known through itself, it cannot have a cause outside itself. For if it was an effect of an external cause it would involve the knowledge of its cause. Spinoza concludes:

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14. ibid, p.45.

15. All quotations from Spinoza's Ethics are from the translation of R.H.M.Elwes, The Chief Works of Benedict Spinoza, Vol.II, (New York: Dover, 1955).

> It must, therefore, be its own cause - that is, its essence necessarily involves existence, or existence belongs to its nature. (Proposition VII)

Spinoza defines God as "substance, consisting of infinite attributes of which each expresses eternal and infinite essentiality." (Proposition XI) It follows from Proposition VII that God necessarily exists.

Spinoza presents another a priori proof of the same proposition which helps to clarify some of the moves he has made in the first formulation. Everything must have a cause or reason. If something exists, there must be a reason. If something does not exist, "a cause must be granted which prevents it from existing, or annuls its existence." The cause of a thing's existence or non-existence must be either internal or external. For example, the cause of the non-existence of a square circle is its internal impossibility.

Now no cause can be given for the non-existence of God. The only thing that could prevent God's existence would be another substance. Such a substance could not be

of the same nature as God. It could have nothing in common with God. For Spinoza has previously demonstrated (Proposition V) that no two substances can have anything in common. But such a substance would be unable to cause or to prevent the existence of God. Therefore, God necessarily exists.

Having examined the arguments of Anselm, Descartes and Spinoza, let us make some general comments about them before we proceed to examine the contemporary discussion of the argument.

In the first place, we can see that the proof of Spinoza is radically different from those of Anselm and Descartes. Spinoza's proof is deceptive in its complexity. Basically he defines substance in terms of its aseity and concludes that it cannot not exist. It is as simple as that. The one important embellishment that he makes in the argument is his axiom that every state of affairs must have a cause. From this it follows that an empty universe is impossible. There must, at the very least, be a cause of the nothingness. Both Anselm and Descartes, on the other hand, start from the idea of the perfection of God and argue that his perfection involves his existence.

The proofs differ widely in the attitude which they take towards God at their starting point. Anselm is passionately committed to faith in God before the proof is even attempted. Descartes, on the other hand, starts from a position of methodological doubt. He is not unconcerned. He too is passionately committed. But his commitment is not to God - at least, not by that name. His commitment is to the search for certainty. Spinoza is formally uncommitted to anything. God emerges as the natural deduction from definitions and axioms. Of course, the formulation of the postulates may well have issued from a passionate concern. But it is virtually impossible to penetrate the cold, formal propositions to the concern from which they spring.

Finally, the intention of the arguments is different. Here we must place Anselm on one side of the fence and Descartes and Spinoza on the other. The intent of Anselm is to discover the inner logic of his faith. The existence and essence of God form the totality of his subject. In Descartes and Spinoza, God forms only a part of the content of their systems. Probably the best way to summarize this difference is to call Anselm's intention "theological" and that of Descartes and Spinoza "philosophical".

Let us now turn from the sources of the argument to examine some of the recent discussion surrounding it.

B. Some Contemporary Comments

4. Charles Hartshorne

Charles Hartshorne, a metaphysician of the "Process School" of philosophy, has recently published a number of articles in which he defends the ontological argument. His defence, however, imposes what Hartshorne considers to be important qualifications on the traditional form of the argument.

Hartshorne seems to have been the first philosopher to interpret Chapter III of the Proslogium as a "second" ontological argument.[16] He argues for the existence of the same two forms of the argument in Descartes.[17] We have already noted the evidence for two forms of the argument in Anselm and Descartes. The first depends on the difference between real and conceptual existence. The second distinguishes necessary and contingent existence. Hartshorne considers the first form to be invalid but the second to be basically correct.

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16. Charles Hartshorne and W.L. Reese, Philosophers Speak of God (Phoenix Edition, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp.96f.

17. ibid, pp. 134f.

We should note that Hartshorne's exegesis of Descartes leaves much to be desired. He seizes on the fact that Descartes distinguishes between the existence of God and that of other things by the words "necessary" and "contingent" respectively. This is taken as evidence for a second form of the argument. But, as we saw in our examination of Descartes, the distinction is used simply to refer back to the original (first form) of the argument.

Hartshorne rejects the first form of the argument on grounds which accept the Kantian criticism in a modified form. Hartshorne holds that the Kantian dictum, "Existence is not a predicate", is a rule which admits of exceptions. Such exceptions are permissible only if there is a "higher rule" to which appeal can be made. In the first form of the argument, Hartshorne holds, the rule has simply been disregarded. It does not and cannot justify its procedure in the face of the Kantian criticism.[18]

Nevertheless, Hartshorne assails the critics of the argument on two grounds. In the first place, he claims, they have not bothered to read Anselm before they have

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18. Charles Hartshorne, "What Did Anselm Discover?", Union Seminary Review, Vol. XVII (1962), pp.213ff.

proceeded to refute him with ease. In the second place, they have not paid sufficient attention to the logical peculiarities of the idea of perfection.

The peculiarity to which Hartshorne calls attention is the relation of perfection to existence. Perfection, he claims, cannot be exemplified contingently. This, says Hartshorne, is the essence of Anselm's discovery.

In addition to citing the argument of the Proslogium, Hartshorne provides a few examples of his own, both philosophical and religious, to support his contention that perfection cannot exist contingently. His argument from the religious requirements of the idea of divinity is typical of his approach. Hartshorne follows Tillich and Findlay[19] in defining divinity as that which is worthy of worship. Still following Tillich[20], he interprets worship in terms of the Great Commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all thine heart, and with all they soul, and with all thy might." (Deuteronomy 6:5)

Hartshorne argues that this commandment demands of the believer that all of his being (interest, devotion,

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19. J.N. Findlay, "Can God's Existence Be Disproved?", New Essays in Philosophical Theology, ed. A. Flew and A. Macintyre, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1955), p.48.

20. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. I, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), pp.11-15.

energy) be centered on God. He comments:

> It follows that if there be anything additional to God, it must receive zero attention! Yet we are to love ourselves and our fellows. A contradiction? Yes, save upon one assumption, that there cannot be anything "additional to God." Rather, all actuality must be included in His actuality, and all possibility in His potential actuality.[21]

But if this is true, Hartshorne argues, it is impossible that God's existence should be contingent. The "possible non-existence of God" is something that cannot be included in the reality of God. If this is a possible object of interest, the religious commandment is self-contradictory.

> Thus, since all thought expresses interest in its objects, a "contingently-existing God", or "a being whose non-existence is not contradictory and which is yet worthy of worship", involves a contradiction.[22]

Let us look at Hartshorne's own reconstruction of the ontological argument. It involves three basic steps.

(1) God cannot exist contingently. Perfection is either necessary or impossible.

(2) God's existence is possible (i.e. not impossible).

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21. Charles Hartshorne, The Logic of Perfection, (Lasalle: Open Court, 1962), pp. 40-41.

22. ibid, p.41.

(3) God necessarily exists.

We have already indicated how Hartshorne establishes the first point. It is the second step, however, upon which the proof really rests. J.N. Findlay, for example, agrees with the first step but concludes from it that God's existence is impossible. Hartshorne realizes that the proof is most vulnerable at this point and concentrates his discussion here.

In the first place, Hartshorne claims that Anselm's argument fails precisely in the fact that the notion of perfection it presents is self-contradictory, hence impossible. He points to an ambiguity in Anselm's formula.

> It may mean (a) no individual greater than God is conceivable, or (b) not even God Himself in any conceivable state could be greater than He actually is. Those who, as Anselm himself did, take the meaning as in (b) say that the very idea of alternative possible states of an individual is inapplicable to deity; but those who take the meaning as in (a) accept the distinction between divine individual and divine states.[23]

Hartshorne argues that Anselm's position, which is the position of classical metaphysics in general, leads to what Hartshorne considers to be the inconsistent notion of

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23. ibid, p.35.

God as actus purus. Hartshorne's difficulty with Anselm is really relevant to the question of the necessity of the divine essence. As such, we will deal with it in the next chapter.

But, in concentrating on this ambiguity in the Anselmian formula, Hartshorne fails to notice the ambiguity that we dealt with above: The formula does not describe the divine essence. Rather it is a rule by which possible descriptions of divinity may be judged.

For this reason, Hartshorne's charge of inconsistency against Anselm is itself ambiguous. He never seems certain that his criticism really applies to Anselm's proof of God's existence per se. Actually, Hartshorne has no quarrel with the consistency of Anselm's formula in relation to the divine existence. His difficulty is in the way that Anselm later applies his formula to the divine essence.

Hartshorne's own defence of the possibility of God's existence is, as he himself admits, "intuitive". Certain considerations, including the other traditional proofs for the existence of God, argue for God's possibility. He finds arguments for God's impossibility, at the very

least, unconvincing. He concludes that the balance of the evidence argues for the possibility of God's existence.

The structure of Hartshorne's argument has an important hearing on a minor issue in the study of the ontological argument. Some commentators have assumed[24] that the fact that the argument is dependent on the possibility of God implies that it must have recourse to the modal laws of S5. Hartshorne himself uses iterated modalities in his formalization of his argument[25]. But this feature of his argument may be criticized on two counts. First, it is unnecessary. Hartshorne's premise is "God cannot exist contingently". He symbolizes this premise as C'qLq (If God is, he is necessary). To go from this premise to his conclusion he needs the axioms of S5 to show that the alternative to Lq is LNq. But, as we shall see, Hartshorne could avoid S5 by another symbolization of his premise. Secondly, Hartshorne uses S5 with insufficient attention to the conditions under which its axioms may be considered valid.

Hartshorne's argument, as we have reconstructed it, does not need the axioms of S5. This can be shown as follows: Hartshorne's premise, "God cannot exist contingently", can more adequately be translated into the symbolic language as

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24. cf. A.N. Prior, Formal Logic, p.201.

25. Charles Hartshorne, op. cit., p.50f.

NKMqMNq.[26] This is strictly equivalent to ALqLNq (Either God is necessary or he is impossible). Converting the disjunction to a statement of implication we get CNLNqLq. Since NLN is the definition of M, we have CMqLq. The antecedent is asserted by Hartshorne as an intuitive axiom. This being granted we can detach the consequent, Lq. By S1 we have C'Lqq and again we can detach the consequent to arrive at Hartshorne's conclusion "q" (equals "God exists"). No reference to S5 has been necessary.

There is one final feature of Hartshorne's discussion of the argument that is important for our inquiry. This is the formulation of the argument which Hartshorne calls "The Argument from Universal Existential Tolerance." Hartshorne starts from a particular feature of contingency: its exclusiveness. For any contingent state, its occurence is incompatible with some other possible state. To exist contingently is to prevent something else, otherwise possible, from existing. Perfection, Hartshorne argues, does not share this feature of contingency.

> I hold that the existence of perfection is compatible with any other sort of existence whatever. The perfect shows its superiority precisely in this, that it can maintain itself

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26. cf. above, p.6.

> regardless of what else does, or does not, maintain itself. It can tolerate or endure any state of affairs whatsoever.[27]

In short, Hartshorne argues that the existence of perfection is compatible with all possible worlds, a feature which is shared by logically necessary truths.

Hartshorne is quite aware that he has walked right into the positivist trap. This is his intention. The existence of perfection <u>is</u> empirically unverifiable. But this is a feature which is shared both by necessary and by meaningless propositions.

> The choice is not between theism and atheism, but only between theism and positivism. "God" is without a coherent meaning, or divinity exists necessarily.[28]

We will have cause to return to this point in our conclusion. It is central to the problem of the logical necessity of God's existence.

Our discussion of Hartshorne's contribution to the study of the ontological argument is not complete. But much of what he has to say is directed to the question of necessity in God's essence. We will return to Hartshorne's argument in the next chapter.

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27. Charles Hartshorne, op.cit., p.68.

28. ibid, p.70.

5. Norman Malcolm

Like Hartshorne, Malcolm distinguishes between the two forms of the ontological argument in the Proslogium. We have previously examined Malcolm's rejection of the first form. Malcolm argues that, while existence is not a perfection, necessary existence is.

Malcolm contrasts necessary and contingent existence. A contingent thing is dependent, both for its beginning-to-exist and for its continuing-to-exist, on other things. But God, even in the most naive view, cannot be thought of as being contingent in this sense. He can be conceived neither as being created nor as dependent for his continued existence on something external. Malcolm appeals to "common language" to support the relevance of this distinction to the ontological argument.

> There is a definite connection in common language between the notions of dependency and inferiority, and independence and superiority. To say that something which was dependent on nothing whatever was superior to ("greater than") anything that was dependent in any way upon anything is quite in keeping with the everyday use of the terms "superior" and "greater".[29]

Malcolm continues his argument from the notion of

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29. Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments", p.47.

The unlimited nature of God. "If God is conceived to be an absolutely unlimited being He must be conceived to be unlimited in regard to His existence as well as His operation." As God cannot be dependent, nor can his existence be prevented. The preventability of God's existence would be a limitation.

Malcolm is aware of the inevitable objection: It might just happen that God, though unpreventable, does not exist. To meet this, he expands his notion of the unlimitedness of God. A being who "just happens" to exist is not unlimited. He is dependent on the contingencies of "the facts".

Malcolm himself provides an excellent summary of his argument.

> If God, a being greater than which cannot be conceived, does not exist then He cannot <u>come</u> into existence or have <u>happened</u> to come into existence, and in either case He would be a limited being, which by our conception of Him He is not. Since He cannot come into existence, if He does not exist His existence is impossible. If He does exist He cannot come into existence (for the reasons given), nor can He cease to exist, for nothing could cause Him to cease to exist nor could it just happen that He ceased to exist. So if God exists His existence is necessary. Thus God's existence is either impossible or necessary. It can be the former only if the concept of such a being is self-contradictory or in some way

> logically absurd. Assuming that this is not so, it follows that He necessarily exists.[30]

There is no need to draw the parallels which exist between Hartshorne and Malcolm. They are sufficiently self-evident. But there are certain deficiencies in Malcolm's argument which Hartshorne does not share.

It will probably be obvious, even to the most casual reader, that Malcolm's interpretation of Anselm is very similar to the ontological argument of Spinoza. In fact, Malcolm has turned Anselm's argument on its head. Instead of proceeding directly from the formula to necessary existence, Malcolm argues from the formula to the divine essence. The "being greater than which no being can be conceived" must be unlimited. Unlimitedness is a divine attribute. Having established this, Malcolm proceeds to argue that this attribute of God involves his necessary existence (or impossibility). We tried to show in Chapter One that the unpreventability of something does not imply its existence. Our objection still stands. Malcolm's suggestion that a being who possesses aseity cannot be dependent on the logical contingency of its own existence

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30. ibid, pp.49-50.

surely involves a misuse of language. The modal status of one's existence is not the type of external limitation from which a self-dependent being would be necessarily free.

In short, Malcolm (along with Spinoza) has confused logical and factual necessity. He has assumed that the latter implies the former. We must insist that necessary existence - defined in terms of aseity, eternity and unpreventability - does not logically imply existence.[31] Malcolm's mistake is mitigated by the fact that he admits that the idea of divinity may be an impossible one.

But it should be noted that Malcolm's argument is quite valid in so far as the modalities which he uses are factual and not logical. If God exists, his existence is self-dependent and unpreventable. If God does not exist, his existence is factually impossible. But this implies nothing concerning the logical modality of His existence. It is quite consistent to admit the factual necessity of God (in terms of his aseity) but to deny his logical necessity.

Malcolm's formulation of the argument is also questionable from the Thomist point of view. Aquinas charges

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31. For a more detailed discussion of this from another point of view cf. R.E. Allen, "The Ontological Argument", Philosophical Review, Vol. 70 (1961), pp. 56ff.

that an a priori argument for God's existence is impossible because we cannot know his essence prior to his existence. Now this objection does not come to terms with Anselm's argument because Anselm's formula is not a description of the nature of God. But Malcolm, proceeding from the formula directly to the divine essence and from there to existence, leaves himself open to the objection of Aquinas. Thus his argument weakens, rather than supports, the proof of the Proslogium.

6. Albert A. Cock

Cock's contribution to the discussion is the earliest which we will consider. Much that he has to say is dated and irrelevant to our inquiry. But he does supply considerable insight to and makes some valuable suggestions about the problem of the ontological argument. His discussion has the additional virtue of being based on a careful and sympathetic reading of Anselm.

Cock believes the argument to be valid. He feels that Anselm has taken sufficient notice of the point which Hartshorne and Malcolm regard as decisive. Chapter III of the Proslogium is taken as ruling out the impossibility of

God. "God is the only possibility whose impossibility is inconceivable."[32] Cock does not regard Chapter III as a separate argument.

His respect for the argument is noteworthy. The tone of his attitude is summed up in such statements as: "In the Ontological Argument we are on holy ground."[33] "The 'argument' is an intellectual Epiphany: God with us."[34]

The centre of Cock's thesis lies in his contention that the argument is not dependent on the fact that existence is a predicate which is "added" to a concept. Rather, it is the fool who must "subtract" existence and in so doing involves himself in contradiction. Anselm's "addition" is apparent only, and results from the previous "subtraction" on the part of the fool.

> The fool has attempted to subtract reality *in re*, not from *any* reality *in intellectu*, but from *id quo nihil maius cogitari potest*. In attempting the impossible he has, *ipso facto*, demonstrated the reality.[35]

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32. Albert A. Cock, "The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series, Vol. XVIII (1917-18), p.366.

33. ibid, p.380.

34. ibid, p.383.

35. ibid, p.365.

Cock's interpretation of the argument is clarified in his ontological proof of the devil's existence. He starts with the definition of the devil as "that than which a lesser (or a worse) is inconceivable." The argument proceeds:

> Surely, that than which a worse is inconceivable cannot exist only in the understanding. For if, indeed, it exist only in the understanding, it can be thought to be also in reality, and this is worse than a thought evil being.[36]

Cock argues that if the ontological argument is valid for God, then it is valid for the devil.

This is an extremely important suggestion. The usual interpretation of the ontological argument would imply the necessary non-existence of the devil. But the basic implication of Cock's interpretation is that the ontological argument is not dependent on the claim that existence is a perfection. The effect of "existence" is rather to "intensify" or "make operative" whatever value, positive or negative, the thing that it predicates may possess.

Cock dismisses the suggestion that existence is a perfection, and with it the "usual" interpretation of the

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36. ibid, p.381.

argument, with a short - and very Anselmian - comment. "We could not say that not to be is worse than to be, and, therefore, no devil at all, for it is clear that to be a devil is worse than not to be one."[37]

Now Cock's justification of his position is mistaken. But that does not invalidate his contention. It is quite clear that to be a devil is worse than not to be one. But all that this proves is that devilishness is a quality which the devil must have. But it is also clear that it is worse for the devil to be than not to be, and better for God to be than not to be.

Cock can find some support in Anselm for his interpretation. Anselm develops his proof for God's existence in Chapters II-IV of his Proslogium. It is only in Chapter V that he introduces rule of divine predication: God is "whatever it is better to be than not to be." And from Chapter V onwards, Anselm leaves the question of the existence of God behind him and deals with the divine essence. Even for Anselm, the questions of God's existence and his essence are quite distinct. It is not at all self-evident that he is simply claiming that, in general, it is better to

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37. ibid, p.381.

be than not to be.

Cock devotes a good portion of his discussion to Kant's objections to the proof. We need not examine this in any detail as the Kantian criticisms were dealt with in the last chapter. But we should note that Cock's conclusions are similar to our own. The basis of Kant's rejection of the proof, Cock claims, lies in his ontological and epistemological presuppositions. Kant's philosophical position demands the rejection of the ontological argument.

> All that Kant does is to assert positively that God is not what by definition He is not, viz., given and subsumed under the forms of space and time. But no theistic proof, least of all the Ontological Argument, says that He is this. We are left where we were, with a theory of knowledge on one side, and, on the other, a definition of God which makes no pretension to enter into that theory of knowledge.[38]

While we have no wish to deny the basic consistency of the Humean-Kantian position, we can sympathize with Cock's objection: If the Kantian system does not leave room for God, so much the worse for Kant.

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38. ibid, p.371.

7. Karl Barth

Barth's study of the ontological argument has a triple importance. In the first place, it makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the argument itself. Secondly, it is an important study in the theology of St.Anselm. Finally, the work marks an important stage in the development of Barth's theology and points the direction which he was to take in his Church Dogmatics. Our interest here will be confined to the first of these. Barth's study of the argument leaves no stone unturned. In discussing his work we can do no more than touch on a few important points which emerge from his discussion.

Barth describes Anselm's formula as purely negative. It says nothing about what God is, but only who he is, viz., a being greater than which nothing can be conceived. This general observation has two important consequences.

In the first place, the formula makes no claim to the possibility of conceiving God in any sense but this negative one.

> It does not say - God is the highest that man has in fact conceived, beyond which he can conceive nothing higher. Nor does it say - God is the highest that man could conceive.

> Thus it denies neither the former reality nor the latter possibility, but leaves open the question of the givenness of them both. Clearly it is deliberately chosen in such a way that the object which it describes emerges as something completely independent of whether men in actual fact conceive it or can conceive it.[39]

Barth calls the formula a "description". We have chosen to deny the term to the formula. But Barth's use of the term and our denial of it take place on different levels of meaning. The formula is a description in so far as it is a criterion for identifying God. It is not a description in so far as it does not contain an answer to the question "What is God like?".

This point is clarified in the second consequence of Barth's position. The formula contains nothing concerning the existence or nature of God.

> It contains nothing in the way of statements about the existence or about the nature of the object described. Thus nothing of that sort is to be derived on subsequent analysis. If it is to be of any use in proving the existence and nature of God then a second assumption, to be clearly distinguished from the first one, is necessary - the prior 'giveness' ... of the thought of the Existence and Nature of God ... [40]

This is a very important point. It involves the

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39. Karl Barth, Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, (London: SCM Press, 1960), p.74.

40. ibid, p.75.

rejection of the claim that Anselm has made "God exists" an analytical proposition as well as the Thomistic objection that existence must precede essence. Anselm's formula assumes neither the existence nor the essence of God.

Barth deals with the Thomistic type of objection in relation to Gaunilo. Gaunilo had pleaded the incomprehensibility of God in objection to Anselm's procedure. Barth counters that Anselm was fully aware of the incomprehensibility of God, that Anselm's formula in fact establishes God's incomprehensibility as a matter of knowledge (cf. Proslogium, Chapter XV), and that the incomprehensibility of God cannot be known apart from the Credo which is precisely what Anselm is expounding through the use of his formula.

Let us turn now from Barth's understanding of the formula to his exegesis of its use in the proof for the existence of God. Barth distinguishes the argument of Chapter II of the Proslogium from that of Chapter III. Barth agrees with Hartshorne and Malcolm that Chapter III forms a separate argument. But he denies that this argument is an alternate existence proof to Chapter II, as Malcolm and Hartshorne would like to make it. He also implies that Anselm knew fully well what he was doing when

he wrote Chapter III, a question on which Malcolm and Hartshorne express some doubt.

Barth claims that Chapter II and Chapter III establish two connected but distinct points. Chapter II is concerned with what Barth calls "the general existence of God." It establishes only that God exists in the same sense as other things exist.

> God does not exist only in thought but over against thought. Just because he exists not only 'inwardly' but also 'outwardly' (in intellectu et in re), he ... 'truly' exists, exists from the side of truth and therefore really exists.[41]

Chapter III of the Proslogium, on the other hand, is concerned with what Barth calls the "Special" existence of God. God, and only God, exists in such a way that he cannot be conceived not to exist.

> God does not only exist in the manner of other existents (over against thinking, independent, in true objectivity). But God exists in the uniquely true manner that befits the Existent One who is at once the Origin and Basis of all that exists apart from him and beside him ... [42]

If Barth is correct, Anselm certainly has not made himself clear. In fact, Barth seems to stretch a point to support his conclusion. Surely it is, at the very least, a corollary of the first argument that God's non-existence is

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41. ibid, p.101.
42. ibid, p.101.

inconceivable. Chapter III of the Proslogium reads as if Anselm is simply taking this corollary and putting it in a different way. But Barth interprets Anselm as if the corollary didn't exist.

In both Chapter II and Chapter III, the course of Anselm's reasoning is the same: God is the being greater than which none can be conceived. If God is conceived as 'not-x', a greater can be conceived - namely as 'x'. Therefore God is 'x'. Let us see how Barth deals with this argument.

Barth sees the formula in action as a sort of measuring stick. We have the formula: that than which none greater can be conceived. Now against this standard come various candidates to be measured for the title 'God'. The first candidate to come exists in solo intellectu. The candidate turns out to be a pseudo-God as it does not measure up to the standard which the formula requires. A greater can be conceived - namely one who exists in intellectu et in re.

As a result of this model of what Anselm is doing, Barth is curiously cautious about what has been proved.

> Thus as God he cannot exist in knowledge as the one who merely exists in knowledge. It should

> be noted that nothing has been proved beyond this negative. ... The positive statement about the genuine and extramental existence of God ... does not stem from the proof and is in no sense derived from it but is proved by the proof only in so far as the opposite statement is shown to be absurd.[43]

Is there any sense in saying that 'x' is "in no sense" derived from the impossibility of 'not x'? Is the law of the excluded middle so suspect to the theologian that such tentative language should be used? Surely Barth has overstated his point!

The same model is used to analyze the argument of Chapter III. In this case the candidate for the title 'God' is one whose non-existence is conceivable.

> Once again it is obvious that a pseudo-God has to be unmasked and the name of God denied to a being who cannot be seriously taken as God. Whether or not this 'God' exists <u>in intellectu et in re</u>, he does not exist as God. God cannot possibly exist merely thus. In order to be identical with God, over and above his identity with a being who exists in this manner, he would have to be identical to this conceivable <u>maius</u>. Whether distinct from or similar to this latter he shows himself for what he always is - not God.[44]

We are perhaps in a position to see why Barth

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43. ibid, p.128.

44. ibid, p.142.

denies that the proof is claiming the proposition "God exists" to be analytical. We can analyze Anselm's formula all we want, but we will never find existence in it. It is only when the question of existence is asked of the formula (a synthetic move - the formula doesn't contain the question) that God's existence is proved.

In the face of Barth's analysis of the argument, the question, "Is there a candidate that satisfies the standard?", seems in order. But the answer shows that the question is not quite as clear as it appears. If there is no candidate that satisfies the formula, it follows that the formula is meaningless. For it has just been shown that a God who is merely conceptual is impossible.

Finally let us look at Barth's remarks on the status of the argument. Is it or is it not a proof for God's existence? Initially, Barth's answer is unequivocal. It is, and Anselm intends it to be, a proof. Barth must be taken quite seriously here. For to understand Barth as denying this is to misunderstand Barth's position.

> In so far as there is knowledge it issues in proof and proof is, as it were, the highest reach of knowledge. And Anselm wants to prove. He is also interested ... in the <u>pulchritudo</u> of the completed knowledge. But he still wants to prove.[45]

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45. ibid, p.59.

But when this is said and done, there is still more to be said. Barth also insists that we take seriously the fact that the proof is addressed to God and that Anselm defines his task as *fides quaerens intellectum*. Anselm, Barth argues, never, even provisionally, leaves the ground of faith to argue on neutral territory. He remains a man of faith addressing a God whose existence is not in doubt.

What then is Anselm's relation to the fool? In the first place, Barth contends, the fool is no "straw man" set up for the purposes of argument.

> There is no question but that this other person who rejects the Christian revelation and therefore Anselm's presupposition, is really before Anselm's mind as he writes and that he is speaking in opposition to him, addressing him, wishing to say something to him or at least wishing we reduce him to silence.[46]

Secondly, while Anselm does not leave the grounds of faith, he can still find a meeting place with the fool - not in general philosophical considerations but as human beings who are seeking.

> Anselm gives credit to the unbelievers to the extent that the *ratio* of faith which they lack and for which they ask is one and the same *ratio* as

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46. ibid, p.62.

> the one which he himself is seeking.[47]
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> He is able to promise him instruction on how he could convince himself, given a certain amount of intelligence, on the reasonableness of the Christian faith without having first accepted the truth of revelation.[48]

In short, Anselm lays bare the inner ratio of the Credo from a point at which the unbeliever is able to follow.

But Barth attaches great importance to the fact that, at the end of Chapter II and in Chapter IV of the Proslogium, the fool still confronts Anselm. The unbelief still remains. At this point, Barth's comments are a mixture of sense and nonsense.

Barth is quick to make the most of the predestinarian strain that is undoubtedly present in Anslem. It is true that, in the face of the fool, Anselm can only plead the grace of God.

> I thank thee, gracious Lord, I thank thee; because what I formerly believed by thy bounty, I now so understand by thine illumination, that if I were unwilling to believe that thou dost exist, I should not be able to understand this to be true.[49]

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47. ibid, p.66.
48. ibid, p.68.
49. St.Anselm, Proslogium, Chapter IV.

It is also true that Anselm understands the gulf between himself and the fool to be more profound than a disagreement over a particular course of reasoning. The gulf is between one who is enlightened by the grace of God and one who is still in darkness.

However, this is not to say, as Barth does, that Anselm did not regard the fool as "a clown who is incapable of following the proof because he cannot think logically."[50] Barth is correct that Anselm accepts the fact that the fool remains the fool in spite of the proof. But it is quite another thing to concede the fool's consistency in remaining in his foolishness.

Barth bases his claim on the enigmatic passage in Chapter IV of the Proslogium where Anselm distinguishes between understanding the word and understanding the "very entity". His interpretation of this passage may be summarized as follows: A thing may be understood in two ways. It may be understood as an idea or as a reality. If God is understood as an idea, his existence may be consistently denied. If he is known as reality - in other

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50. Karl Barth, op.cit., p.159.

words, if he is known - his existence cannot be denied, even as a possibility. For one who knows God through revelation, the ontological argument is valid.

The trouble with Barth's argument is that, while it does not entirely negate the argument of Chapter III, it is a virtual denial of Chapter II of the Proslogium. If the difference between "conceiving the word" and "knowing the thing" is the same as between conceiving a thing in intellectu solo and in intellectu et in rem, which Barth says it is[51], what happens to Chapter II? Anselm bases his denial of God's non-existence on the latter distinction but admits it as a possibility on the former. Clearly Barth's exegesis will not do.

It also goes without saying that if Chapter II is valid only to those who know God in revelation, then the argument is redundant.

Barth's contention that Anselm's formula is a "Name" of God which is derived from revelation doesn't affect the issue under discussion. Where the Name comes from is important only in so far as it purports to be a Name of God. It does not affect the validity of the

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51. ibid, p.163f.

argument which is based upon it.

We have now looked at three forms of the ontological argument and the comments of four modern scholars upon it. We will now proceed to draw our own conclusions.

C. God, Existence and Logical Necessity

Let us start with some critical comments on the three traditional forms of the argument which we examined earlier in this chapter.

Our attitude to Spinoza should be clear by now. For Spinoza's proof is very similar to Malcolm's restatement of Anselm's "second" argument. The proof argues from God's aseity to his existence. We have argued, both in this chapter and in Chapter One, that the absence of reasons for God's non-existence does not necessarily involve his existence. It is still reasonable to ask whether a self-dependent Being exists.

But Spinoza's argument is based on his interesting axiom that every state of affairs must have a cause - the non-existence of God not excluded. But surely this is such a flagrant violation of "Occam's Razor" that it is

scarcely worth consideration. When we have to admit such entities as "the cause of the non-existence of the pink elephant in my living room", we would seem to have multiplied entities far beyond necessity.

The arguments of Anselm and Descartes can be reconstructed in parallel. Their structure, at least, is the same. Both arguments start with a formal definition of the word "God". In Anselm, God is "that than which a greater cannot be conceived." To Descartes, God is defined as a perfect Being.

Both philosophers assume that their definitions are coherent and meaningful. Anselm makes his assumption explicit. The fool, Anselm claims, understands what he hears. He is able to conceive what the formula states. The fact that the possibility of God is assumed by the proof is most important, as we shall see.

The next move of the argument in the formulations of Anselm and Descartes is the introduction of what we have called an existence axiom. In Descartes the axiom is what the critics take it to be: Existence is a perfection. In Anselm the step is not quite so clear. Anselm asserts that God is greater if he is real than if he is imaginary. But

the grounds for this comparison are not given. Is a real God greater than an imaginary one because existence is a perfection? Anselm doesn't say. We have already seen what Albert Cock does with Anselm's point. In Cock's interpretation, existence is taken as being neutral in itself with respect to value. But in some way it acts to intensify the value of the concept to which it is applied. Thus we have two possibilities with Anselm: Either existence is a perfection or its relation to perfection is more indirect.

In the first case, Anselm's move is identical to that of Descartes. Existence is a perfection and, therefore, something that a perfect being must have. In Chapter Two we examined the traditional objections to this aspect of the ontological argument. We will not go into them again. But what the traditional criticisms fail to clarify is the axiological nature of this step of the argument. The move is basically a value judgment. An objective value is being claimed for existence as such.

The traditional criticisms attempt to show that existence is not a quality such that it can have value. We have tried to show that their attempt doesn't quite succeed.

But there is no need to take the offensive in this way in order to put the ontological argument on the defensive. The argument, in the Cartesian form, assumes an objective standard of value. Surely the onus is on the argument and not on the critics to justify its position on this point.

We need only ask on what basis such an objective value judgment may be made. Is it a logical truth? In such a case it is not too much to ask for proof. The ontological argument doesn't provide it. Is it, as we have suggested, an intuitive axiom? Then the proof is valid only for those who accept the axiom. This is a strange "objectivity"!

Of course, if God's existence is granted, there is little difficulty in finding an objective source of value in him. And perhaps on the basis that all existence is grounded in God one can say that "existence is a perfection." In so far as the ontological argument is simply "faith seeking understanding", then, perhaps, this step is in order. But it is hardly in order for something that claims to be a philosophically valid proof of the existence of God.

In short, on the basis of belief in God's existence one could make a case for the assertion that

existence is a perfection. But it is difficult to see how such a case could be made apart from such a basis.

But if we take Cock's interpretation of Anselm, this step of the argument is considerably strengthened. For if God is "that greater than which nothing can be conceived", we can say that the value judgment is given in the definition. No further value judgment is necessary if "real existence" is understood as intensifying the value implied by the definition.

The step is still intuitive and presumably can still be denied without contradiction. But it is much more convincing than its alternative:- Existence is a perfection. We might put it this way: Existence makes operative whatever value is contained in a concept. In this sense it seems reasonable to say that a real God is "greater" than an imaginary God and that the latter, consequently, has no right to the name of "God".

Assuming that the argument survives to this point, there is still another step which is by no means unproblematical. That is the conclusion: God exists. Strictly speaking, this is not the conclusion. Rather the conclusion is that God cannot be conceived as not existing.

Descartes thinks that he can justify this move by contending that whatever is clear and distinct is true. But again, what is "clear and distinct" is that God's non-existence is inconceivable. This is not quite the same as saying that God exists. Findlay, for example, concedes that the notion of God involves his necessary existence. But from this he concludes that the notion of a deity is contradictory. So we return to the point from which we started. At best, the ontological argument rules out only a contingent God; one that might exist but doesn't. It doesn't show that the notion of a God is a meaningful one.

We might also note that Anselm's so-called "second" argument does nothing to alter the situation. It says nothing about God that the first argument does not imply. It involves basically the same difficulties as the first argument. Furthermore, Anselm shows no awareness of formulating a second argument. Chapter III of the Proslogium follows Chapter II in such a way as it seems to be simply putting the first argument in another way.

As a proof for God's existence, the ontological argument fails. It fails, not because it is invalid, but because it is incomplete. It fails to exclude every other

possibility. In particular it fails to establish God's possibility, and, in the Cartesian form, it fails to lay a sufficient basis for its assertion that existence is a perfection.

But the argument does provide a strong case for the logical necessity of God's existence. It provides good evidence for the assertion that God, unlike other objects of our knowledge, cannot be understood apart from His existence. It argues that the only way that God's non-existence could be intelligible is in the same sense that the non-existence of a square circle is intelligible. Either God's existence is necessary or it is impossible.

It is probably too much to claim, as Hartshorne does, that the choice is really between positivism and theism. One doesn't have to be a positivist to find the notion of "God" meaningless. Nor is the meaninglessness of God the only ground for unbelief. Concepts which are necessarily valid can also be quite trivial. A good case can be made that the type of unbelief which finds its philosophical expression in positivism is of this type: God may exist - but who cares!

Existence is a word which has many meanings and

many uses. The type of criticism of the ontological argument that we encountered in Chapter Two assumes that the ontological argument asserts that God exists as a tree exists and not as a number exists or as Truth exists. Cock has made this point, quite correctly, against Kant. The fact is that the ontological argument is not particularly interested in the various uses of the term "exists". Its point is simply that the concept of God is a necessarily valid one.

The doctrine of God in the theology of Paul Tillich[52] provides a good illustration of this point. Tillich, to avoid the ambiguities of the word "exists", denies it to God. God does not exist. He is not a being alongside or above other beings. God is being-itself.

Tillich has come to the same point as the ontological argument, albeit by a far less subtle route. "God", in Tillich's theology, is a concept which is either necessarily valid, meaningless or trivial. Examples of this same feature in doctrines of God could be multiplied, citing theologians from Augustine through Schleiermacher to Martin Buber and the whole "Heideggerian" school of modern

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52. cf. Paul Tillich, op.cit., passim.

theology of which Tillich is a part.

Of course it is possible to construct a theology in which God is not seen as logically necessary. Not only is it possible but it is done. The question is: Is such a theology involved in idolatry or in grave danger of falling into it? Barth's defense of the argument of Chapter III of the Proslogium would argue that it is. Tillich[53] advances further arguments which would support Barth's contention.

In conclusion, there are two aspects of the logical necessity of God which should be noticed. In the first place, it is not at all clear, when we describe God as logically necessary, what we are saying about the "individual", as opposed to the word, God. Primarily we are saying that the word "God" should not be used in such a way that His existence becomes problematical. In Wittgenstinian terms we are saying that the word "God" operates in the religious language game in much the same way that the word "universe" operates in the material object language game. Doubtless, our use of language is a reflection of reality. How our use of the word "God" reflects his reality is quite another question and one that is not at all simple to answer.

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53. cf. Paul Tillich, "The Two Types of Philosophy of religion", Theology of Culture, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

Negative theology, in denying all aspects of contingency to God, is a partial attempt to come to terms with this question. We shall touch on this in the next chapter.

Secondly, if God's existence is logically necessary, it follows that it is also unfalsifiable. Logically necessary truth is true in, and therefore consistent with, all possible worlds. At this point the positivist and theist may agree. The challenge of positivism is serious but it is by no means terrifying. For the basis of the positivist critique of theology is one which we have already granted. The gulf between theism and positivism is one that cannot be resolved by appeal either to formal logic or to empirical fact. Theism and positivism are rather the philosophical expressions of antithetical theologies in a world which is free, but not obliged, to do without God.

Chapter IV

NECESSITY IN DIVINE ATTRIBUTION

Whatever is essential to something is necessary to it. To say that 'x' belongs to the essence of 'A' is to say that it is necessary that 'A' is 'x'. To deny 'x' to 'A' is really to deny 'A'. To refer to an old and familiar example, three angles belong to the essence of a triangle. This is equivalent to saying that it is necessary that triangles have three angles. To deny three angles (in a given figure, for example) is to deny (in the same context) the presence of a triangle.

This is, of course, all very elementary. But it leads to this conclusion: It would be quite redundant to speak of the necessity of the divine essence. When we speak of essence we speak, by implication, of necessity. To list "necessary attributes" of God (or of anything else, for that matter) would simply be to describe his essence. This is not our purpose in this chapter.

There are, however, peculiarities which arise in the classical doctrine of God. What is peculiar is not that there are things which are necessary to God but not to

man. This is to be expected. Rather, in the case of God, nothing is predicated of him under any mode other than necessity (or, by implication, impossibility). In God there are no accidents.

This is not without its problems. In recent years the "Whiteheadian" or "Process" school of metaphysics has attacked classical metaphysics for failing to allow "contingent states" in God. We anticipated this criticism in our discussion of Hartshorne in our last chapter. We will discuss the problems it raises here.

Throughout this thesis we have had occasion to refer to the "factual necessity" of God. We have seen that the notion of God as a necessary being is intimately connected with his aseity. In this sense, the necessity of God's existence is a problem in divine attribution. We will conclude, then, with a study of God's factual necessity.

A. The Classical View

1. Anselm

Anselm's doctrine of the essence of God arises systematically out of the ontological argument. As we noticed in the last chapter, Anselm's formula is used by him

to prove "whatever we believe regarding the divine Being."[1]

His application of the formula to the individual attributes of God is not direct. In Chapter V of the Proslogium, Anselm uses the formula to establish that God is "whatever it is better to be than not to be." This conclusion is identical to the principle of divine predication which, as we have seen, Anselm had previously established in the Monologium. What we have, then, is a secondary formula, which is common to the Monologium and the Proslogium, and which is used for the purpose of divine attribution.

Anselm's procedure is rather questionable. It is all very well to use the formula to establish God's goodness, beauty and truth. For these, it can be argued, are just other names for that which is valuable (better to be than not to be) in the realms of morality, aesthetics and epistemology respectively. But to go beyond this in attributing things to God is either to base God's nature on one's own intuitive value judgments or to argue circuitously. In the latter case, one assumes that since God is 'x', 'x' must be good. Then explicitly one proceeds from the

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1. St. Anselm, Proslogium, Preface.

goodness of 'x' to predicate 'x' of God. In the former case, on the other hand, one simply constructs an idol. "God" is a name under which one's prejudices are reified.

We are not interested, as we have already indicated, in the multiplicity of attributes which are applied to God in classical metaphysics. We are interested primarily in two aspects of the doctrine: the denial of contingency in God's nature and his aseity.

Anselm does not explicitly deny that God has accidental attributes. However, his position logically involves this. Anselm denies the very possibility of change in God. Contingency is, of course, possible in a changeless being. Such a being might change but it happens that it doesn't. However, contingency is quite impossible in a being which is necessarily changeless.

In Anselm, God is passionless, incapable of dissolution - in fact, altogether immutable. God is immutable because he is altogether simple and "without parts". For if God had parts he would be divisible and dissoluble. Such a being, concludes Anselm, is not he "than whom nothing better can be conceived."

Anselm's God is not entirely as static as these remarks would indicate. For Anselm, in the face of his

Christian experience, is willing to make an important distinction. What God is in himself is one thing; how we experience him is quite another.

> If thou art passionless, ... thou dost not feel sympathy for the wretched; but this it is to be compassionate. But if thou art not compassionate, whence cometh so great consolation to the wretched? How, then, art thou compassionate and not compassionate, O Lord, unless because thou art compassionate in terms of our experience, and not compassionate in terms of thy being.[2]

The aseity of God is quite important in Anselm. In the Monologium it is discussed at length. Anselm starts with a proof for God's existence which is almost identical to the Third Way of Aquinas. He concludes that there must be one being who exists through itself and through which all beings exist.[3] But later, Anselm turns around in order to show that that which is God, must be self-existent. His point is quite simple. That which is supreme cannot be dependent. For what is dependent is not supreme. At this stage in the argument, Anselm's name for God is the "Supreme Nature".[4]

In the Proslogium, Anselm's argument is greatly

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2. ibid, Chapter VIII.
3. St. Anselm, Monologium Chapter III.
4. ibid, Chapter VI.

condensed. God's aseity is based directly on his formula.

> What art thou, then, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be conceived? But what art thou, except that which, as the highest of all beings, alone exists through itself ... ? For whatever is not this is less than a thing which can be conceived of.[5]

2. St.Thomas Aquinas

In tracing the thought of Thomas Aquinas through the themes in which we are interested, it is necessary to start with a few general considerations concerning his proofs for God's existence. For Aquinas does not simply argue that some unknown 'x' called God exists. He argues, rather, that some being having a specific attribute exists and that this being "everyone understands to be God." The first mover, the first cause, the necessary being, the cause of all perfections, the world governor - all are proved to exist and identified with the one who is universally held to be God.

Now the two themes in which we are particularly interested arise directly out of the proofs. In the first place, in the Third Way, God is identified as the necessary being.[6] Aquinas starts from the notion of contingency and

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5. St.Anselm, Proslogium, Chapter V.

6. St.Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Ia, Q.2, A.3.

the observation that there are contingent things; things which are "possible to be and not to be." There are two features of contingency to which Aquinas calls attention: temporal finitude and dependence on a cause. He argues that contingent things are not self-explanatory and concludes that there must be a necessary being. Aquinas does not spell it out at this point, but it can be inferred that a necessary being is one that is uncaused and eternal. And this all men call God.

Actually, all the proofs argue for God's aseity. They start from observable deficiencies in the empirical world and argue to the existence of One who makes up this deficiency in himself. The world is not self-explanatory. There must be One who is.

The denial of potentiality to God is fundamental to understanding the Thomistic treatment of the immutability of God. Aquinas' point is quite simple. It makes sense to speak of "potentiality" only when, by virtue of a cause, that which is potential can be made actual. But, since God is the First Cause, there can be no cause beyond him through which his potentiality could become actual.

> For although in any single thing that passes from potentiality to actuality, the potential

> is prior in time to the actuality; nevertheless, absolutely speaking, actuality is prior to potentiality; for whatever is in potentiality can be reduced into actuality only by some being in actuality.[7]

It is a simple step from the denial of God's potentiality to the affirmation of his immutability. Change is the actualization of the potential. If God is pure actuality, it follows that he cannot change.

> Because it was shown above that there is some first being, whom we call God; and that this first being must be pure act, without the admixture of any potentiality, for the reason that, absolutely, potentiality is posterior to act. Now everything which is in any way changed, is in some way in potentiality. Hence it is evident that it is impossible for God to be in any way changeable.[8]

Aquinas allows some sort of inner movement in God, inasmuch as he is said to love himself. But he denies that this sort of movement is properly described by the normal sense of the words "change" and "movement". As far as change is implied in God's relationship with his creation, Aquinas denies this in any literal sense. God "draws nigh" to man only metaphorically.

> For as the sun is said to enter a house, or to go out, according as its rays reach the house, so God is said to approach us, or to recede from us,

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7. ibid, Ia,Q.3,A.1.
8. ibid, Ia,Q.9,A.1.

> when we receive the influx of His goodness, or decline from him.

From this very brief survey of the thought of Anselm and Aquinas, we can draw a very important conclusion. Both of these theologians, while phrasing their arguments in different terms and proceeding along lines of argument typical of different philosophical traditions, arrive at essentially the same position: God is changeless, self-dependent, and devoid of any contingency whatsoever. And while the arguments differ, they are motivated by the same concern. If we get behind the philosophical trappings of each theologian, we find that each is fundamentally concerned to deny imperfection to God. God must be placed beyond arbitrary dependence on anything outside himself. It is the task of negative theology to deny to God those things that would imply such a dependence. God must be free from the tyranny of his creation. This is the concern to which we must return as we examine the problems which arise out of classical theism.

B. The Exclusion of Divine Contingency

In the last chapter we noted that Charles Hartshorne, while holding the ontological argument to be valid, accused Anselm of working with an inconsistent notion

of perfection. In particular, Hartshorne argues, the idea of God must leave room for what he calls "contingent states". The classical doctrine, in denying the potential and accidental to God, does not do this.

We can start from the ambiguity to which Hartshorne points in relation to Anselm's formula.

> It may mean (a) no individual greater than God is conceivable, or (b) not even God Himself in any conceivable state could be greater than He actually is. Those who, as Anselm himself did, take the meaning as in (b) say that the very idea of alternative possible states of an individual is inapplicable to deity; but those who take the meaning as in (a) accept the distinction between divine individual and divine states.[9]

Hartshorne asserts that classical theism is both philosophically and religiously inadequate. In both cases the inadequacy has the same root; A changeless and unchangeable God is incapable of entering into any meaningful relationship with the world.

Philosophically, the classical doctrine is inadequate because it is inconsistent.

> The perfect being either does, or does not, include the totality of imperfect things. If it does, then it is inferior to a conceivable perfection whose constituents would be more perfect ... If the perfect does <u>not</u> include the

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9. Charles Hartshorne, <u>The Logic of Perfection</u>, p.35.

> totality of imperfect things, then the total reality which is "the perfect and all existing imperfect things" is a greater reality than the perfect alone.[10]

The classical doctrine is religiously inadequate, Hartshorne argues, because it fails to do justice to what is probably the most important element in the object of worship: the personal. Man doesn't worship God qua Parmenedian "One", but as the One who stands over against man, as his Creator, as Love, as he who guides man's destiny.

> A personal God is one who has social relationships, really has them, and thus is constituted by relationships and hence is relative - in a sense not provided for by the traditional doctrine of a divine Substance wholly nonrelative toward the world ... [11]

Now it is evident that the issue between Hartshorne and the classical metaphysicians involves much more than a simple point concerning the nature of God. In fact, it involves a whole philosophical position including many complex metaphysical questions.

One of the central questions of a philosophical nature between Hartshorne and classical metaphysics lies in

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10. Charles Hartshorne, The Divine Relativity, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), p.19.

11. ibid, p.x.

the relation of God to time. In classical metaphysics, God transcends time absolutely. From the standpoint of eternity, past, present and future are enveloped in an eternal now. Time is part of God's creation and, therefore, God is not subject to it. Consequently, it is unintelligible to speak of change in God.

According to Hartshorne, God includes his creation in his reality. Consequently, while he is not subject to time, it is still a part of his reality. Inasmuch as God includes time, it makes sense to speak of change and "contingent states" in God.

Also involved in this issue is a question of value. Is it really a bad thing, Hartshorne asks, that God should be <u>in some sense</u> dependent on his creation?

> Is the relative or the contingent as such essentially bad or mediocre? On the contrary, all the beauty of the actual world seems to consist in its relationships and its contingencies. A "good" man is not, compared to a bad or inferior one, any less relative or contingent; but rather, he is more adequately related to other things and richer and more harmonious in his accidental qualities.[12]

Ultimately, Hartshorne's critique of classical metaphysics must rest on his religious, and not his philosophical, objections. For the philosophical criticisms

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12. Charles Hartshorne, <u>The Logic of Perfection</u>, p.135.

assume what they want to prove. When Hartshorne talks, as above, of a "total reality" as being greater than a God who does not "include" his creation in his reality, he assumes that this "total reality" has the type of ontological unity that is necessary to justify speaking of "a God". In classical metaphysics, to speak of "God plus universe" as a reality would be simply a manner of speaking and nothing more. Similar considerations apply to Hartshorne's other objections to the classical doctrine. In short, the philosophical objections seem to be circular.

But one doesn't have to be a philosopher of the "Process" school to see the point in Hartshorne's religious criticisms. The fundamental religious requirement of a doctrine of God is that he have dealings with man; that he reveal himself to man, love man, judge him, save him and sanctify him. If God does not enter into relationship with man, we may still have One about whom philosophers can speculate, but scarcely One whom man may worship.

The God of Christian tradition is pre-eminently one who enters into relationship with man. The fundamental Biblical attributes of God are of the relative type (Father, Judge, Saviour, Sanctifier) rather than philosophical (immutable, omniscient, actus purus). This is not, of course,

to say that the philosophical attributes are false. Nor is it to say that the classical theologians were uncognisant of the Biblical testimony.

We saw above that Anselm and Aquinas are quite aware of God's relationship with man. But Anselm reconciles God's compassion with his immutability by distinguishing between what God is in himself and how we experience him. Aquinas calls attributes which stress God's relativity "metaphorical".

Now there may not be anything intrinsically wrong with this procedure. However it does seem strange that, in the writings of a Christian theologian, the types of predicates that are accorded to God by revelation are denied to him "as he is in himself", while attributes which are derived from what is an essentially pagan source (i.e. Greek philosophy) are affirmed of the very being of God. It is strange that Parmenedes should be regarded as speaking of God "as he is in himself" while St.Paul only spoke "metaphorically".

We have no desire to renounce the debt that Christian theology owes to Greek philosophy. Neither do we wish to set Hebrew and Greek thought against each other in an "all-or-nothing" opposition. But surely it is not too

much to ask that the theologian put first things first. And the first thing that must be said about God in a Christian context is that he enters into a dynamic relationship with his creation. If this means allowing for contingency in God, we must accept the consequences. If he is to respond to man in any but an abstract way, he is in some sense determined by the concrete contingencies of that to which he responds. If "God loves John Brown" says something about God which is not said by "God loves 'x'", then God is determined in his love by the fact that it is John Brown that he loves. This is all that Hartshorne means by "contingent states" in God. If classical metaphysics doesn't do justice to this aspect of the Christian faith, so much the worse for classical metaphysics.

The theologian who is noted for giving such systematic priority to revelation is, of course, Karl Barth. It is interesting to compare Barth's approach to Hartshorne's. For Barth is also concerned that God should be free to enter into relationship with man, but he carries out his task without the special pleading that one can sense in Hartshorne's polemic.

Barth is fully aware of the dangers involved in the idea of the immutability of God.

> If it is true ... that God is not moved either by anything else or by Himself, but that, confined as it were by His simplicity, infinity and absolute perfection, He is the pure immobile, it is quite impossible that there should be any relationship between Himself and a reality distinct from Himself - or at any rate a relationship that is more than the relation of pure mutual negativity, and includes God's concern for this other reality. And this being the case, it is only in a most highly figurative way, or in most violent contradiction to our basic assumption, that we can speak of God as the Creator and Lord of the world, of the work of reconciliation and revelation as His real work, of the incarnation, substitution and mediatorship of His Son and, on this basis, of God as the Father and believers as His children, of the gift of the Holy Spirit, of prayer and the promise given us of eternal life. ... For we must not make any mistake: The pure immobile is - death. If, then, the pure immobile is God, death is God. That is, death is posited as absolute and explained as the first and last and only real. ... And if death is God, then God is dead.[13]

Barth's point is much more subtle than is Hartshorne's. The immutable is not God, but "God is 'immutable'." God's "immutability" is retained by Barth and set within careful bounds.

> The answer ... to the question: "What is the immutable?" is: "The living God in His self-affirmation is the immutable." The immutable is the fact that this God is as the One He is, gracious and holy, merciful and righteous, patient and wise. The immutable is the fact

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13. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics, Vol.II, Part 1, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), p.494.

> that He is the Creator, Reconciler, Redeemer and Lord. This immutability includes rather than excludes life.[14]

God is "immutable" in what Hartshorne would call his "relativity". But, Barth would insist, the "relativity" of God proceeds from his freedom. God is not dependent on man apart from God's own freedom to enter into relationship with him.

In his freedom and in his relationship to man, God is constant. This is the real meaning of his immutability. God does not cease to be the One who loves, redeems and sanctifies man. Consequently, Barth prefers to speak of God's "constancy" rather than of his "immutability".

We can conclude, then, that Hartshorne's protest is not unjustified. It is a very dubious thing to exclude contingency from God. The concept of necessity is of questionable value in telling us anything special about the divine nature.

C. Necessary Being and Divine Aseity

We now return to a theme which has appeared and reappeared at several places in this thesis: the factual

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14. ibid, p.495.

necessity of God. Aquinas, in his Third Way, argues for the existence of a "necessary being" but does not understand such a being as one whose existence is expressed by a logically necessary proposition. Rather, we have seen, what Aquinas means by a necessary being is identical with the concept of aseity: a being who is self-dependent and, therefore, unpreventable and eternal.

Furthermore, we have seen, Spinoza, Hume and Malcolm attempt to argue from God's aseity to his logical necessity (Hume for purposes which are not quite the same as those of Spinoza or Malcolm). We have argued throughout that God's aseity does not logically involve his existence. We will not repeat our argument here. Rather we will attempt to distinguish further the idea of God's necessity qua aseity.

We have already drawn the distinction between logical necessity and factual necessity. To put the distinction briefly, to say that God is logically necessary is to say that the proposition "God exists" cannot be false. To say that God is factually necessary is to say that God cannot fail to exist (quite apart from the modality of the proposition which expresses God's existence).

We have assumed that God is factually necessary by

virtue of his aseity. The time has come to spell this out. The concept of aseity is as close as one can come to the idea of necessary existence without asserting logical necessity. A factually necessary being is one who cannot fail to exist. If its necessity is demonstrable, however, we have a necessity which is indistinguishable from the logical type. If it is not demonstrable, we are left with the logical possibility of its non-existence. It follows that such a necessity would be expressed by a proposition of the form "If 'x' exists, 'x' exists necessarily."

Now Malcolm's argument does just this. Arguing from God's aseity Malcolm shows that, if God exists, he cannot cease to exist nor can he have been brought into existence. In short, if God is self-existent, there is no ground for his non-existence. This is more than saying "If God exists, he exists." Rather, it is to say "If God exists, he cannot possibly not exist." In short, the nature of God involves his factual necessity.

Having satisfied ourselves that aseity implies factual necessity, we must make a further distinction. The necessary being of the Third Way is necessary in two senses. In the first place, as the self-explanatory being, it is factually necessary. But as the being which explains

contingency it has another type of necessity which we have distinguished as "hypothetical". Given the world, God is necessary as an explanation. These two senses must be kept quite separate. They must be kept separate because, while they involve two different senses of the term "necessity", they come together naturally in most forms of the cosmological argument. The natural stopping point in a causal explanation of the world lies in a being who is self-explanatory.

C.B. Martin's treatment of the notion of necessary being makes this quite clear. Martin first defines what he means by a necessary being:

> (1) A being for whose existence nothing else need exist.
> (2) A being that has always existed.
> (3) A being upon whom everything else depends for its existence.[15]

It is evident that Martin presents us with a composite of ideas. (1) and (2) are involved in the idea of aseity, but (3) is not. There is no need for a self-existent being to have other beings dependent upon it. In fact, Martin lists two senses in which such a being is necessary. The first is equivalent to what we have called "factual necessity"; the second to our "hypothetical

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15. C.B. Martin, Religious Belief, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), p.156.

necessity". Here we see the dependence of the latter on the former. (3) posits a being which explains the world. But it has explanatory power only because it possesses aseity; i.e. because it is conjoined with (1) and (2).

> We may ask, "Why is there such a being?" and we can answer, "Since there was no time at which this being came into existence and since it in no way depends upon anything else for its existence, the question has no point." This being would provide us with an excellent cosmological stopping place.[16]

In the previous section, we concluded that there was something questionable in making the divine nature totally independent of the world. Do similar dangers lurk here? If God's immutability is suspect, what about his aseity? Do not both find their basis in an identical procedure and an identical concern?

The fact is, that while the procedures and the concerns are identical, the premises are not. The aseity of God is based on the conviction that a God who owed his existence to anything external would not be God. And surely, in the face of the doctrine of Creation, this is correct. But the immutability of God is based on the suspicion that, if change can be predicated of God in any respect, it can be predicated in every respect. A

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16. ibid, p.157.

changeable God would be a mortal God - and therefore, no God at all. This premise is suspect, to say the least.

Even Karl Barth finds little complaint with the aseitas Dei. It is not the whole truth, but it is the truth. Negative theology brings us to a negative result: the independence of God. This is correct, but we must go farther.

> To be sure, this negative side is extremely significant not only for God's relation to the world, but also for His being in itself. We cannot possibly grasp and expound the idea of divine creation and providence, nor even the ideas of divine omnipotence, omnipresence and eternity, without constantly referring to this negative aspect of His freedom. But we shall be able to do so properly only when we do so against the background of our realization that God's freedom constitutes the essential positive quality, not only of His action towards what is outside Himself, but also of His own inner being.[17]

D. Conclusion

Our major conclusion was reached in the last chapter. To state our conclusion briefly, logical necessity cannot be denied to God unambiguously. We follow Tillich in asserting that a god whose existence is problematical is

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17. Karl Barth, op.cit., p.303.

really no God at all.

This chapter brings us a step farther. Necessary existence is attributable to God, not only in a logical sense, but in a factual sense as well. Theologians who are so blinded by the Kantian ontology as to find logically necessary existence an unintelligible concept can take, and indeed have taken, comfort from this fact. "Necessary Being" is a respectable name of God, both in the "logical" and "factual" senses of necessity.[18]

At the same time, the idea of necessity has limited value in relation to the divine nature. The essential and the necessary being synonymous, the concept of necessity says nothing special about the divine essence per se. When "necessity" is used to distinguish the divine nature from others, (i.e. when "contingency" is excluded from God) we have found the result to be theologically questionable.

But even though we conclude that "Necessary Being" is a proper name for God, we have done so only by emasculating its apologetic value. The necessity of God is not something which can be used to batter the fortress of unbelief. As an apologetic weapon it proves to be

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18. "Hypothetical" and "psychological" necessity are discussed briefly in the Appendix.

something of a boomerang. The notion of God's necessary existence can be used and has been used for apologetic from the other side. Perhaps it is time that theist and atheist stopped their apologies long enough to see that, on this particular point, there is really no issue.

APPENDIX

HYPOTHETICAL NECESSITY, PSYCHOLOGICAL NECESSITY AND GOD

As we indicated in Chapter One, both hypothetical and psychological necessity are used in relation to God. In Chapter Four we had cause to refer again to hypothetical necessity. We saw there that hypothetical necessity is what the various cosmological arguments assert of God: Given the world, God is necessary.

Now if to speak of God as necessary for the existence of the world is simply to reiterate the Christian doctrine of Creation, then there is no problem. From a theistic point of view, God is necessary in this sense. If there was no God there would be no world.[1] However, if to assert this is to argue that the world cannot be explained without God, then the assertion of hypothetical necessity of God is false. The world can be seen and has been seen quite apart from God. Science in particular and the world in general have no need of this hypothesis.

Similar considerations apply to psychological necessity. To say "God cannot be conceived as not existing"

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1. cf. C.B. Martin, Religious Belief, pp.156-7.

may mean two things. It may mean that the speaker has an adequate conception of God. If God's non-existence is unintelligible, as we have argued in Chapter Three, then God, properly understood, is psychologically necessary. If, however, the speaker means that everybody believes in God whether they admit it or not, then, again, the claim is false. Man is quite free to do without God - which we also sought to show in Chapter Three.

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