

KANT AND HEGEL: HOW AN OBJECTION BECOMES PROOF

Angelo CICALLO¹

Università degli Studi di Palermo

Since its Cartesian launch, the modern ontological proof has undergone many vicissitudes that have stood in its way. Criticism, levelled at its argumentative strength, its conclusive efficacy and even its claim to boast the status of proof, in the strict sense of the term, has not ceased but has continued to grow up to the present day. That this should be the case is, moreover, a matter of course, if one takes into account the boldness that generally animates all attempts to deduce a priori the existence of the supreme being. Nor should it be surprising that criticism, even at its most vigorous, has offered, more or less directly, unforeseen resources thanks to which the proof has acquired new strength. Indeed, it could be said that in many circumstances the attacks of detractors have played a greater role in fostering the vitality of the ontological proof than the strenuous defence of its supporters. What is surprising, however is that certain critiques have unwittingly become arguments containing an original reformulation of the ontological proof.

The singular phenomenon of the metamorphosis of an objection into proof is precisely what we intend to consider in this essay, tracing a path that leads from Kant, the author of the objection on which we will focus most, to Hegel. This is because the Hegelian dialectic offers a new way of reading the Kantian critique leading to a possible rehabilitation of a proof that seemed to have its fate sealed.

1. THE KANTIAN OBJECTION TO THE ONTOLOGICAL PROOF

“Being is obviously (*offenbar*) not a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing” (A 598/B 626; trans. p.567). The evidence of Kant’s thesis shines through in a rigorous use of language: being is not a real predicate simply because it is a verbal predicate, and to pass off a verbal predicate as a distinctive note containing the determination of a thing is to speak of things incorrectly.

This is well known, as it is also well known that the thesis conveys the critique of the Cartesian a priori argument that Kant transposes filtered through Baumgarten’s scholastic

<https://doi.org/10.36311/2318-0501.2024.v12n1.p123>

systematisation². What has aroused less interest among scholars, however, is the way in which Kant goes on to enunciate his thesis on existence, offering if not a demonstration, then a sort of indirect proof, an argument aimed at bringing out the untenable consequences that would derive from the contrary thesis and that would affect not only the proof in the strict sense, but the entire ontological system on which it is based:

[...] when I think a thing, through whichever and however many predicates I like (even in its thoroughgoing determination), not the least bit gets added to the thing when I posit in addition that this thing is. For otherwise what would exist would not be the same as what I had thought in my concept, but more than that, and I could not say that the very object of my concept exists (KrV, A 600/B 628; trans. pp. 567-568).

Therefore, I could not say that the object of my concept exists because with the addition of existence, conceived as a predicative determination, the notion of the thing would undergo an increase in content that transforms its nature. Thus, if existence added something to the notion of a possible thing, if being were a real predicate, by stating that a thing exists one would be speaking of a thing other than that whose existence is predicated. The existing object would in principle be other than the object thought of in the concept, since the assertion of existence would change its nature.

In highlighting the aporetic results of the thesis that being is a real predicate, Kant thus intends to show how the logic underlying the ontological proof arises from within, since it renders impossible the correspondence of concept and being that the proof also claimed to sanction as the result of that being that bears within itself all perfections.

In essence, the ontological proof is doomed in any case: either being is not a predicate of the thing, and therefore cannot be so even of that most perfect thing that is God, or being is a predicate of the thing but, in this case (already excluded by Kant), any assertion of existence would be destined to come into conflict with itself. Which means that every existing thing would not be true, if by true is meant the conformity of an object with its own concept. And thus even God, I mean the *ens perfectissimum* of the ontological proof, would exist as something other than the concept expressing its possibility.

This, moreover, would be the inevitable result of an operation that Kant judges to be fundamentally contradictory and which consists in introducing “under whatever disguised name” (KrV, A 597/B 625; trans. p. 566) existence into the concept of a thing. That is, existence is infiltrated into the concept under the name of a *realitas*, of a *perfectio*. And it is this ambiguity that Kant intends to dissolve by denying that existence is a real predicate and thus suggesting that we look elsewhere, and not among the distinctive notes that determine the concept of a thing, for the *more* that distinguishes the possible from the existent. Otherwise, to express it with the famous Kantian image, I could not say that I possess a hundred thalers without finding them increased by the mere fact that they are in my estate instead of not being there. Ultimately, any assertion of existence would result in a false assertion.

2. THE REALITY OF THE POSSIBLE

One is tempted to ask whether Kant's reasoning does not conceal a sophism. What does it indeed mean that if existence were a predicate of the thing, to exist would not be the same thing thought in the simple concept? Is it certain that this argument really invalidates the genuine meaning of the ontological proof? Reduced to its *extrema ratio*, the ontological proof says no more than this: to think of God without existence, therefore as only possible, is a contradiction.

If this is the case, to speak of existence as an addition of content, i.e. as a real predicate, would mean nothing other than affirming that we only *truly* think God insofar as we do not think him separate from his existence. Otherwise, not only would we not think God, but we would not think at all, since a perfect being devoid of the perfection of existence would respond to an obvious contradiction; which would even prevent God from becoming the notion of a possible entity. This is what emerges, moreover, from the formula adopted by Descartes in the fifth of the *Meditationes de prima philosophia*:

[...] it is no less contradictory to think of God (that is, a supremely perfect being) lacking existence (that is, lacking some perfection), than it is to think of a mountain without a valley (Descartes, A.T. 7: 66; trans. p. 37).

One might, then, conclude that Kant's reasoning bears within itself an artifice, insofar as it overturns in its favour the terms in which the a priori proof is posited, which starts from the notion of the *perfectissimum*: To the ontological argument that holds that it is not possible to think of God as non-existent without placing a different entity from the *perfectissimum* from which the proof takes its starting point, Kant objects, in fact, that the very conception of existence as a real predicate gives rise to an inevitable discrepancy between the existing thing and the notion that defines its possibility. Which would ultimately mean that existence configures an excess of content, in virtue of which the notion we have in mind when we think of God is transformed when we refer to an entity that is not only *in intellectu* but also *in re*. As we have seen, however, the ontological proof holds that we have no notion of the divine entity in mind except insofar as it is already connected with existence. As if to say, that *more*, in the case of God, is already necessarily implied in the notion by which we think of its nature and thereby its possibility.

On closer inspection, however, the Kantian objection can also be understood on a different level. Indeed, it intercepts a crucial point of the ontological proof that brings into play the thorny question of the mode of existence proper to the divine entity. And it is precisely in providing a determinate concept of such an existence that the ontological proof reveals its deepest deficiency for Kant. In fact, the objection that being is not a real predicate introduces a systematic critique of rational theology which denounces the impossibility of providing a determinate concept of absolutely necessary existence, i.e. of the way in which actual existence and logical necessity can come together.

That the ontological proof, at least in the form Kant is aiming at, claims to do this by sucking existence into the sphere of *perfectiones*, is exactly what the objection aims to refute,

when it argues that an increase in content, an increase in *realitas*, would result in an entirely different content, so that one would not be dealing with the passage from a possible thing to an existing thing, as the proof claims, but with the passage from a thing of a certain nature to an entirely different thing.

The rationalist attempt to conceive of the necessary existence of a being that is *sub specie aeternitatis* essentially consists of the presumption of resetting to zero the ontological distance between essence and existence and understanding the latter as a complement to the former; a complement which, in the case of *the ens perfectissimum*, is in fact necessary. As Descartes' proof predicts, it is proper to God to exist as it belongs to the triangle to have three angles, or to a mountain to have its valley.

More generally, the thesis of existence as *complementum essentiae* is characteristic of the search which *methodically* disregards the fact of existence in order to draw on the *ratio* why something exists rather than not existing. The ambition is to trace a path that from the thing that can exist, from the minimum ontological requirement of being something thinkable, must lead to actual existence as a consequence. In short, it is a question of pausing on the essential dimension that of a thing that first defines its being *something*, and then identifying the reason for its being in act. This is what happens in Descartes starting from his need to show first of all that the representation of the *ens perfectissimum* can be thought of clearly and distinctly and that this is why it is true and not the result of invention. This is made clear in Descartes' reply to those who, repeating against him the objection formulated by Thomas against Anselm, point out the inadequacy of a proof that claims to attribute to God "actual existence" on the basis of the fact that existence must be thought of as inseparable from God by virtue of his name alone (cf. *Primae Objectiones*, A.T. VII, p. 99; trans. p. 57), that is, by virtue of a nominal definition that indicates God as the most perfect being. Descartes replies to this accusation:

But my argument went as follows: what we clearly and distinctly understand to belong to the true and immutable nature, or essence, or form of a thing, can truly be affirmed of that thing. But after having investigated with sufficient care what God is, we clearly and distinctly understand that it belongs to his true and immutable nature that he exists. Thus we can at that point rightfully affirm of God that he exists (*Primae Responsiones*, A.T. 7: 115-116; trans. p. 66-67).

The belonging of existence to the true and immutable nature of the most perfect being is what must be clearly and distinctly conceived in order to be able to show that God actually exists. That is, the transition to God's actual existence must be inscribable in the possibility of clearly and distinctly conceiving the notion of God. The Cartesian wager, in short, fundamentally points to the possibility of first of all ascertaining that the notion of God is not a vague notion, let alone an arbitrary one, but responds to a true and immutable nature.

Thus, God necessarily exists if his concept really means something, if it does not correspond to a mere name. This abiding in the idea, the preliminary distinction in the space of the thinkable between what is real and what is arbitrary, the instance of rigourising the idea of God represents precisely the methodical procedure of the modern ontological proof. Pivotal

to this procedure is the reference to the reality of the possible, understood not in the privative sense of what does not yet exist, but in the ontologically pregnant sense of what is in itself something regardless of the fact that it exists, and which indeed demands to exist precisely in relation to its being the thing that it is, and to its being in one way rather than another.

The type of existence that the modern ontological proof attributes to the supreme being can, therefore, only be made accessible from the metaphysical distinction between the mode of being of essences and the fact that essences can refer to existing entities. There is, in short, a being of things that prescind from their *de facto* existence, from their contingent being, and pertains to their being something real, a *res*, insofar as they cannot be thought of otherwise than as they are thought, in the same way that a triangle cannot be thought of without three angles and three sides, or a mountain cannot be thought of without a valley, to cite the famous Cartesian example again. It is precisely the possibility of a purely rational consideration of things that prescind from their factual existence that allows access to divine reality as that whose essence coincides with existence, insofar as it is not given in the contingent manner in which factual realities are given³. It can be said that God necessarily exists insofar as the thought of his essence, of his possibility, implies existence; which is consistent with the status of the modern a priori proof which, as Descartes makes explicit, is such only insofar as it moves from the notion of a possible being, and not from an existence⁴. What this means, however, is that the ontological proof, in affirming that God is not thinkable without existence, ends up by sucking existence into the sphere of the definition of an entity that is thought of, at least in principle, regardless of its actual existence.

Now, it is precisely against this outcome that Kant's critique of rational theology is directed, reaffirming against the modern ontological proof the a priori undecidability of existence, whether of God or of anything else. To claim to have cognitive access to the reality of entities that are in the mode of essences, therefore irrespective of their contingent existence, of their occurrence in time and space, is to commit oneself to the existence of things whose content can only be accessed by abstracting from the spatio-temporal mode, the only one for Kant in which it is possible to recognise something as existing; therefore, it is to expose oneself to a dialectical conflict of reason.

The Kantian objection must be understood against the background of the critical thesis about the impossibility of human reason to access the existence of things from a consideration that abstracts from their factual existence.

Starting from this objection, Kant rehabilitates, against rationalist metaphysics, a model that intends to valorise the point of view according to which it is not possibility that from which existence can be thought, since existence presents a constitutive trait of surplus, a something more that cannot be sought in the sphere of the notes through which a thing is thinkable, even in its complete determination, but which must be sought elsewhere. Thus, Kant says that what makes the difference between a possible and an existing thing is not "what is posited" but "how it is posited" (BDG, AA 2: 75; trans. p. 120). This difference, which, as is well known, distinguishes the relative position from the absolute position, sanctions the a priori unattainability of existence as a fact that cannot be sucked within the mere possibility

or determinability of the nature of a thing. Existence is not added content, but exceeds in principle what can be thought of as the meaningful content of a thing. Kant's thesis is, in short, that existence simply cannot be *thought*, unless one wishes to condemn any assertion of existence to an inevitable contradiction: "what would exist would not be the same as what I had thought in my concept, but more than that, and I could not say that the very object of my concept exists".

3. GOD IS MORE THAN HIS CONCEPT

Kant's objection is not resolved, however, entirely in the space of a systematic critique of rationalist ontology. It contains within itself the outline for a formulation of the ontological proof in a profoundly renewed key, and this, in a way, goes beyond the author's own intentions. The scandal of an affirmation that contradicts itself, and the objection that the ontological proof leads, if it moves from its own presuppositions, to a God who, insofar as he exists, cannot be identical with the notion we have of him, that is, with the notion that expresses the possibility/ thinkability of God, offer considerable grounds for rewriting, and even rehabilitating, the proof against which the same objection is launched. Moreover, never as in this case can it be said that the criticism by the detractors has contributed more to the renewal of the ontological proof than the strenuous defence by its supporters; and this is because in this case it is the objection itself that becomes a proof of God's existence.

This implies, however, that the material Kant prepares must be reshaped and understood on the basis of a radical refounding of the relationship between thought and being.

This is what happens with Hegel, whose reformulation of the ontological proof goes hand in hand with the reform of logic. Within the framework of this reform, Hegel offers, in fact, an unexpected way to rethink the Kantian objection along the lines of an argument in favour of the actual reality of the concept of the divine: God exists insofar as he denies the simple identity with himself, the identity thought in his abstract notion. The existing God is the God who has become other than himself. The contradiction, the denied identity, does not therefore mark the failure of the proof. Instead, it marks the transition from the abstract notion to the concrete God. And this is because the truth of God cannot be found in a presumed correspondence between the notion we have of Him and an external entity, but must be identified precisely in a non- correspondence. In fact, in the perspective opened up by Hegelian logic, only that which is differentiated in itself, which suffers contradiction with itself, can thereby gain its concrete being.

The emergence of the Hegelian proof at the heart of the Kantian objection can therefore only be fully understood against the backdrop of a radical change in the way of understanding the nature of thought and the concept: thought, like the concept, does not express in Hegel a function of the thinking 'I', but the dynamic process of the real of which the 'I' is itself a result, the ontological consistency of which cannot be isolated from the process that produced it, except at the price of producing an abstract and unilateral representation. As will be seen, the Hegelian rehabilitation of the ontological proof follows the path of this conception

that identifies the essence of the concept in the movement that removes as a mere abstraction any opposition between the thinking I and thought reality.

Now, if it is true that this approach points to a profound distance between Hegel and Kant, it is equally true, however, that it is precisely Kant's demolishing operation that prepares the ground for a search that, like Hegel's, unhinges the paradigm of the true that underpins the rationalist matrix ontology: the existing God of the Hegelian proof is the true, concrete God, not because it corresponds to the notion through which we think of its possibility. On the contrary, the existence of God represents the disproof of such a notion. In this, the Hegelian thesis puts to good use, albeit in a completely unforeseen direction, the Kantian argument that the existent God of the ontological proof does not coincide with the God thought of in the concept.

But let us look more closely at the Hegelian rewriting of the proof.

The attempt to rehabilitate the a priori argument bears no nostalgic trace in Hegel of the past marked by rationalist theology. On the contrary, nothing is further from him than the ontological logic that aims to deduce the existent from the possible as its determination. Against this paradigm Hegel speaks out by explicitly denying, as Kant had already done, that existence can be regarded as a predicative determination of the thing:

Concrete existence, then, is not to be taken here as a *predicate*, or as a *determination* of essence, of which it could be said in a proposition, "essence exists concretely," or "it *has* concrete existence". On the contrary, essence has passed over into concrete existence; concrete existence is the absolute self-emptying of essence, an emptying that leaves nothing of the essence behind (WL, *Werke* 6: 128; trans. p. 422).

The thesis that being adds nothing to the concept, however, finds in Hegel a different motivation from the Kantian one. Hegel does not so much insist on the fact that existence does not constitute an increase in content with respect to the thing thought of as merely possible, but emphasises that the existence of a thing responds to the becoming other of that which is represented through the notion that describes its nature. The passage *into* existence is at the same time the passage *of* essence. As Hegel says, essence has not remained. In fact, it does not exist insofar as it possesses existence as its determination, but insofar as it *becomes* existence; becoming which entails the negative gesture of its removal as mere essence. The inadequacy of the proposition 'essence exists', emphasised by Hegel, concerns precisely the fact that to exist is not and cannot be something that is conceived a priori apart from existence. Thus, Hegel's dialectic rethinks the terms of the Kantian objection according to which, we repeat, "I could not say that the object of my concept exists [...]"

In short, the Hegelian thesis on existence revisits the meaning of the Kantian objection in a direction that leads, however, towards the rehabilitation of the ontological proof. It is the difference between the existent and the abstract notion that we have of it that points the way by which the ontological argument can be renewed under the banner of a criterion of truth that is no longer that of the mere correspondence between thought and being: the concept's entry into existence expresses, in fact, not its external authentication, but the concept's

becoming other than its simple and immediate identity with itself, so that what is real is not the same content expressed by the concept in its abstract form. Instead, what is real is that which results from the negative movement of removing the defect for which the concept would be something merely subjective, the concept of something only possible. Existence is thus not given as the complement of the possible, as its intensification, but of the possible it rather says the perishing⁵.

So, the fact that something other than what is thought of by means of the ontological notion of its possibility exists does not, as the Kantian objection claimed, invalidate the truth of the concept of the thing that exists, but affirms that the truth of the concept cannot be adequately expressed by the proposition in the form of a judgement, and in particular by the proposition that judges the correspondence of the concept to a reality outside thought. Indeed, this would be tantamount on the one hand to reducing the concept to a purely subjective notion, to that which Hegelianally expresses the mere representation of a thing, and on the other hand to pursuing the being of the concept in a supposedly objective counterpart that appeals to the empirical phantasm of bare factual exteriority, and thus to something that, in principle, cannot be indicated as the reality *proper* to the concept, since it rather expresses what the concept is lacking. If it is a matter of correspondence, this is to be understood, according to Hegel, under the banner of a dynamic processuality that characterises the life of the concept insofar as it expresses the self-realising, objectivising impulse (*Trieb*) of thinking:

The idea is the *truth*; for the truth is this, that objectivity corresponds to the concept, – not that external things correspond to my representations; these are only *correct* representations that *I, this person*, have. In the idea is not a matter of an indexical this, it is a matter neither of representations nor of external things⁶.

It is necessary for truth to gain the vantage point of speculative philosophy, where one no longer has to deal with subjective representations that pursue their ontological complement in the giving of external things, but instead has to deal with a reality that shows itself to be self-founded in the movement of the concept. It is in the nature of the concept to remove the defect by which it would be a purely subjective thing, so that it is not what is thought of as merely subjective content that asserts itself as real, as existing, but what constitutes the negation of the merely subjective.

Beginning with this radical shift in perspective, it is no longer a question of understanding whether or not the concept of what we have in our minds responds to something whose being does not depend on being thought of by us, as if to build an argumentative bridge between the subjective and the objective. Instead, it is a matter of understanding that the true reality of the concept lies first and foremost in the negative gesture of removing the opposition between the subjective and the objective.

This is what Hegel states as a corrective to what he sees, not surprisingly, as the deficient form in which the traditional ontological proof is presented:

The concept of the most real essence should contain all realities, including, therefore, the reality of existence. This expresses, however, only the positive side, according to which being is a moment of the

concept, but not the negative side, according to which the one-sidedness of the subjective concept is to be suspended (G.W.F. Hegel, *Enz. A*, §140; trans. p. 117).

Thus reformulated, the ontological proof does not aspire to the achievement of a result that sanctions the truth of what is contained in the premise; on the contrary, it is based on the possibility that the premise, the positive notion of the *perfectissimum*, insofar as it refers to a concept that is only subjective, and therefore lacking, does not remain in simple being⁷, as if it could boast a reality of its own, an existence that concerns it as its own determination, but is removed from itself, so that with it the opposition between the subjective and the objective finally dissolves:

We are not here talking about any adding of being to the concept or about a simple unity of concept and being — expressions like that are misleading. The unity in question is to be grasped rather as an absolute process, as the living activity of God — but in such a way that both sides are also differentiated in it so that it is the absolute activity of eternally producing itself. We have here the concrete representation of God as spirit (G.W.F. Hegel, *VPR III*: 275; trans. p. 356).

The existence of God is not reduced to a determination pertaining to the notion of a thing. Rather, to think it is to think a *difference* that cannot be resolved on the level of the predications that determine the notion of a thing. Kant thinks of this difference in the form of an objection, pointing out the contradiction that would arise from any assertion of existence that claimed to include the actual being of a thing in its notion. Hegel, on the other hand, identifies precisely in this contradiction the decisive passage from concept to existence. As if to say, what Kant detects in the form of an objection Hegel rediscovers under a radically changed sign, as the argument in which the process of the concrete becoming of God is made explicit as a movement of the concept that denies simple identity with itself.

The effort of metaphysical rationalism was all aimed at securing the notion of God to a reality, to a non-arbitrary content, and then deducing its existence as a predicate belonging to its true and immutable nature. But, by the same token, it left unexplained the terms in which such a nature actually existed, or was actually distinguishable from any other essence conceivable as only possible. Ultimately, it left the very being of God unexplained.

The question then arises in the following terms: what marks the transition from God's *reality* to his *actual existence*, from being understood abstractly as the predicate of the possible, to existence understood as the verb, as the act of being? What *more* does God have than any eternal essence such as that of the triangle, which, in a Cartesian sense, we can conceive of regardless of its existence, even though it is something whose nature does not depend on our will. This is precisely the question that metaphysical rationalism would ultimately leave unanswered. It did not conceive the existence, the concrete being of God, it did not conceive his being necessarily in act, that is, the conjunction between eternal being and actual being.

In the light of this perspective, Kant's objection and Hegel's proof can be read as two sides of the same instance of the rigourisation of the concept of the necessary absolute, of a notion of existence that implies the exit from the logical-ontological order of predicates concerning the notion of the nature of a thing. Kant conceives of this surplus as a possible

architectural agreement between theoretical reason and practical reason that identifies in the existence of God the necessary postulate in order to be able to think of the supreme good in the world as realisable as the fulfilment of our moral life. Hegel finds this surplus in the effected dynamic of the concept, in its becoming other than itself.

In conclusion: according to Kant's critique of rationalist ontology, understood in its deepest sense, the concept of the necessary absolute of rational theology remains an empty, indeterminate concept because it cannot express the concrete existence of God. Hegel intends to fill this void on the ground of a logical reform of the concept which, going beyond rationalism and Kant's critique of it, provides the tools for a rehabilitation of the ontological proof. In it, the unity of thought and being, in the concrete sense of actual existence, no longer appears as a presupposition, a given, but as the result of the self-differentiating process that concerns the very nature of the concept. Although with this Hegel shows a decisive distance from Kant, this does not detract from the fact that Hegel, precisely in the space of this distance, capitalises on the disruptive character of the Kantian objection: 'there would not exist exactly the same thing as I thought in the concept'.

Abstract: In many circumstances the attacks of detractors have played a greater role in fostering the vitality of the ontological proof than the strenuous defence of its supporters. What is most surprising, however, is that certain critiques have unwittingly become arguments containing an original reformulation of the ontological proof. The singular phenomenon of the transformation of an objection into proof is precisely what we intend to consider in this essay, tracing a path that leads from Kant, the author of the objection on which we will focus most, to Hegel.

Keywords: Kant, Hegel, Ontological Proof

REFERENCES:

- DESCARTES, R., *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, in *Oeuvres*, ed. Ch. Adam/P. Tannery (= A.T.), Vrin, Paris, 1974 ff., 7, p. 66; trans. by R. Ariew/D. Cress (Hackett, Indianapolis 2006).
- HEGEL, G.W.F., *Wissenschaft der Logik* (=WL), in G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke in zwanzig Bänden*, auf der Grundlage der Werke von 1832-1845 neu edierte Ausgabe (=Werke), Redaktion E. Moldenhauer und K. M. Michel, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1969, Bd. 5-6 [I-II]; transl. by G. di Giovanni (Cambridge University Press, New York 2010).
- HEGEL G.W.F., *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse [1817]* (= Enz. A), in G.W.F. Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* (=GW). In Verbindung mit der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft, hrsg. von der Akademie der Wissenschaften, Meiner Hamburg 1968 ss., 13, Bd. 13; trans. by S. A. Taubeneck (Continuum, New York 1990).
- HEGEL, G.W.F., *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830)* (= Enz. C), GW 20; trans by K. Brinkmann and D. O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge University Press, 2010).
- HEGEL, G.W.F., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion* (=VPR), III: *Die Vollendete Religion*, hrsg. von W. Jaeschke, Meiner, Hamburg 1984, p. 273; trans. from R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson, and J. M. Stewart with the assistance of H. S. Harris (Clarendon Press, Oxford 2007).
- KANT, I., *Gesammelte Schriften* (=AA), hrsg. von der Preußischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Berlin, 1902 sgg.
- KANT, I., *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (=BDG), AA 2, trans. by D. Walford, in collaboration with R. Meerbote (Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- KANT, I., *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (=KrV), to be quoted according to original pagination A/B); trans. by P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

LEIBNIZ, G.W., *Die philosophischen Schriften*, hrsg. von C. I. Gerhardt, Berlin; repr. Olms, Hildesheim 1978 (=GP)

NOTAS / NOTES

¹ Angelo Cicatello teaches Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Palermo. As a researcher on Kant and German classical philosophy, he has also taken an interest in the themes of Classical Critical Theory and developments of ontological-metaphysical problems within contemporary reflection. He is the author of the volumes *Dialettica negativa e logica della parvenza. Saggio su Th. W. Adorno* (2001), *Soggettività e trascendenza. Da Kant a Heidegger* (2005), *Ontologia critica e metafisica. Studio su Kant* (2011), *Ragione umana e forma del mondo. Saggi su Kant* (2023).

² “Baumgarten [...] maintains that it is this which is more in existence than in mere possibility, for it completes that which is left indeterminate by the predicates inhering in or issuing from the essence. But we have already seen that the difference between a real thing and a merely possible thing never lies in the connection of that thing with all the predicates which can be thought in it” (BDG, AA 2: 76; trans. p. 121).

³ In this regard Arnauld emphasises, for example, that it makes no sense to ask why God exists, since God is a being whose existence is the essence, whereas only things in which it is possible to distinguish essence from existence require an efficient cause in order to exist and to be preserved in being (Cfr. *Quartae Obiectiones*, A.T. 7: 213; trans. p. 127). The existence of the necessary being can thus concern only something that is in the manner of essences and not in the manner of things whose existence is distinguishable, as a contingent fact, from essence. That which does not need an efficient cause in order to exist is, precisely, that which, in order to exist, awaits no passage into existence, insofar as it already exists according to its essence. Thus, Descartes will say in substantial agreement with Arnauld, “when the question arises whether something can give itself existence, one must understand this to be equivalent to asking whether the nature or essence of anything is such that it needs no efficient cause in order to exist” (*Quartae Responsiones*, A.T. 7: 240; trans. p. 144).

⁴ The need to rigorise the notion of God as a possible being will become explicit in Leibniz’s reinterpretation of the Cartesian ontological proof. For Leibniz, what distinguishes the proof from a sophism is precisely the showing first of all that the *ens perfectissimum* is possible, that is, that all perfections are compatible with each other and can, therefore, be found in the same subject (cf. for example G.W. Leibniz, GP IV: 405).

⁵ “We may concede that being is not a predicate, but we are not supposed to be adding anything to the concept. Rather we are removing from it the shortcoming that it is only something subjective, not the idea. (In any case it is already very misleading to call each and every existent entity, however bad, a concept). The concept that is only something subjective, separate from being, is a nullity” (G.W.F. Hegel, VPR III: 273; trans. p. 354).

⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Enz. C*, § 213; trans. p. 283

⁷ The concept that is only something subjective, separate from being, is a nullity” (G.W.F. Hegel, VPR III: 273; trans. p. 354).

Received: 02.02.2024

Accepted: 22.03.2024

