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Duns Scotus and Leibniz on the Ontological Argument

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DUNS SCOTUS AND LEIBNIZ ON THE
ONTLOGICAL ARGUMENT

by

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LIFE

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PREFACE

The main purpose of the thesis is to describe and compare the attitude of Duns Scotus and Leibniz toward the famous ontological argument of St. Anselm for the existence of God. The thesis shows that both Scotus and Leibniz emphasize two main points: (1) that the basic insight of the ontological argument is valid, namely that it is the prerogative of the Divine Being alone that He exist, provided only that He be possible; and (2) that the possibility of God means that the Divine Being or Essence is in some manner conceivable by us without a contradiction; but Scotus, claiming that Anselm assumed God's possibility, and Leibniz, claiming the same of Descartes, attempt to prove that God is possible. Scotus' proofs of the possibility of God are: first, an analysis of the concept of Infinite Being; secondly, an appeal to the experience of intellect and will which seek the Infinite Good; and thirdly, an a posteriori proof of God's possibility from efficiency. Although this last proof does not enter explicitly into his re-doing of Anselm's argument, it is not contrary to Scotistic principles to combine the a posteriori proof with the re-doing of Anselm's argument. Leibniz's proofs of God's possibility which
enter into his re-doing of Anselm's argument are: first, an analysis of the concept of Being possessing all simple perfections; and secondly, an *a posteriori* proof from contingency that the Necessary Being is possible. In the *a posteriori* arguments of Scotus and Leibniz for God's possibility, we find that they begin with the apprehension of being or essence as real without beginning with existing things as existing. Scotus and Leibniz, then, offer us a complex justification that we can know the possibility of God and that we can infer God's existence from His possibility. The philosophical problems which we discuss in the last chapter are: "Can we know the possibility of God? And if so, can we argue from His possibility to His actual existence?"
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CHAPTER I

SCOTUS

The best manner in which to understand what Scotus accomplishes in his re-doing of the ontological argument of St. Anselm is to examine the re-doing in its context. Scotus colors or re-does the ontological argument in the Oxford Commentary on the Sentences and in his Treatise on the First Principle. We will use the Oxford Commentary because the re-doing is essentially the same in both works and because the Oxford Commentary makes more references to Anselm.

In Book I, Distinction II, Question I, of the Oxford Commentary, Scotus asks: "Whether there is among beings something existing actually infinite?" In Question II, he asks: "Whether
it is known through itself that an infinite being, i.e., God, exists?"  

The method of Scotus is summarized in five steps: first, the question is proposed; secondly, arguments against the answer which Scotus will give are proposed; thirdly, in a contra, Scotus quotes some authorities to support the answer that he will give; fourthly, he gives his own answer to the question; and fifthly, he answers the arguments that were proposed in the second step. This five-step method of Scotus is applied to the above two questions as follows: first, he gives the first three steps for Question I; then he gives the first three steps for Question II; then he proceeds to give the fourth and fifth steps to Question II; and finally he gives the fourth and fifth steps to Question I.

God's Existence Is Not Known Through Itself By Us

In the treatment of Question II, in the second step wherein objections are proposed, Scotus proposes as an argument the opinion of St. Anselm that the existence of God is known through itself:

Further, that existence than which nothing greater can be thought is known through itself; God is of this kind, according to Anselm, Proslogion, chapter 5; therefore God's exist-

5 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 2; II, 128.

6 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 131. Scotus answers the second question first, because he wishes to determine the way of knowing God's existence before he determines if he can know God's existence.
ence is known through itself. But that than which nothing greater can be thought is not something finite, therefore it is infinite. The major is proven, because the opposite of the predicate is repugnant to the subject: for if it does not exist, it would not be that than which nothing greater can be thought, because if it were in reality, it would be greater than if it were not in reality but only in the intellect.

Scotus has made it clear that Anselm's greatest conceivable object, that than which nothing greater can be thought, should be considered as the infinite being. This is the only text where Scotus explicitly makes that identification. In the re-doing of Anselm's argument, Scotus only implies that the starting point should be considered as infinite being. The point of raising Anselm's argument here is that his argument makes the existence of God known through itself. For it would be a contradiction that existence not be predicated of that than which nothing greater can be thought, because then the greatest conceivable object would exist only in the intellect and hence would not be the greatest conceivable object. For it is greater to exist both in reality and in the intellect than in the intellect alone.

After Scotus has proposed the first three steps of both Question I and Question II, he proceeds to answer Question II whether the proposition God is is known through itself. The answer is that:

Therefore this proposition God is or this essence is is

7 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 2; II, 129.
known through itself; because those terms are suited to make evident the fact of their combination to anyone who perfectly apprehends the terms of that combination, because existence is applicable to no thing more perfectly than to this essence.

For anyone who perfectly apprehends the divine essence, the proposition God is is known through itself, per se nota. However, Scotus immediately adds that no concept which we conceive of God can make the proposition God is known through itself for us:

But if it is asked if existence is in any concept which we conceive of God, so that such a proposition is known through itself in which existence is predicated of such a concept (for example, of such a proposition whose extremes can be conceived by us; there can be in our intellect some concept predicated of God which is not common to God Himself and to creatures, such concepts as the necessary being or the infinite being or the highest good); and if it is asked whether of such a concept we can predicate existence in that way in which the concept is conceived so that the proposition God is is known through itself; I answer that no such proposition is known through itself.

The reason is, Scotus continues, that:

the concept is not true in itself, unless the parts of the concept are united. And just as it is necessary to know in quidditative predications that the parts of the concept are able to be united quidditatively, such that one part contains the other part formally, so also is it necessary for the truth of a proposition which predicates existence that we should know that the parts of the concept of the subject or predicate are actually united.

On the basis of these texts, it is clear that for Scotus no proposition predicating existence of God is known through itself by us.

8 *Ordinatio*, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 138.

9 *Ordinatio*, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 141-142.

10 *Ordinatio*, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 141-142.
from the concepts of infinite being, necessary being, or highest
good, because we do not know that the parts of these concepts are
actually united. We do not know that infinite and being are actu­
ally united.

Scotus then considers the argument of Anselm. It was
proposed as an objection that that being than which nothing grea­
ter can be thought is known through itself. Scotus answers this
objection by explaining that Anselm does not say that such a propo­
sition is known through itself. 11 Scotus notes, on the one hand,
that the proposition, "that being than which nothing greater can
be thought does exist," is false if it is held to be known through
itself; and on the other hand, that such a proposition is true al­
though not known through itself. 12 Scotus has two reasons for
holding that the proposition is not known through itself. 13 First,
it is not evident through itself that the opposite of the predi­
cate is repugnant to the subject. That is, it is not evident
through itself that non-existence is repugnant to that being than
which nothing greater can be thought. Secondly, it is not evident
through itself that the parts of the concept of the subject are
actually united. That is, it is not evident through itself that

11 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 145.
12 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 146.
13 Ibid.
that being and that than which nothing greater can be thought i.e., (greatest conceivable) are actually united. Those are the two reasons of Scotus for holding that Anselm's proposition, "that being than which nothing greater can be thought does exist," is not known through itself.

Since Scotus has explicitly identified Anselm's greatest conceivable object with the notion of infinite being, we can paraphrase the two reasons for holding that Anselm's proposition is not known through itself. First, it is not evident through itself that non-existence is repugnant to the notion of infinite being. Secondly, it is not evident through itself that infinite and being are actually united. It is significant to make this paraphrase because in the re-doing of Anselm's argument Scotus shows that those two positions are to be held as persuasively proven: first, that infinite and being are composable, that is, that there is quidditative being in the concept of infinite being; and secondly, that the infinite being must exist, that is, must have being or existence, since it is a contradiction to its essence to be caused by another. Scotus, therefore, will persuasively prove the two points which were assumed in the objection to be evident through themselves.

Scotus has completed his answer to Question II. He begins his answer to Question I by concluding from the previous discussion that the existence of the infinite being is not demonstrable propter quid with respect to us, although from the nature of
the terms the proposition the infinite being exists is demonstrable propter quid. But the proposition can be demonstrated for us by a demonstration quia from creatures, since from the existence of one relative, such as effect, we can immediately conclude to the existence of its correlative, the cause. Scotus divides his answer into two articles: Article I demonstrating the existence (esse) of the relative properties of the infinite being from creatures; Article II demonstrating the existence (esse) of the infinite being from the relative properties of the infinite being.14

Demonstration of God's Possibility and Actuality from Efficiency

Article I is divided into three parts: first, a three-fold conclusion that there is actually among beings some effective cause which is simply first, that there is some being which is simply first with respect to finality, and that there is some being which is simply first with respect to eminence; secondly, that all three primacies must exist in the same being; and thirdly, that the triple primacy can exist in only one kind of nature.15

The first part of Article I which proves that there must exist the three primacies of efficiency, finality, and eminence is divided accordingly into three proofs, each proof having three similar steps: for example, 1, Scotus starts with the possibility

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14 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 148-149.
15 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 149-150.
of something being effected and arrives at the possibility of a first effective cause; 2, then he shows that the first possible effective cause is totally uncausable; and 3, finally he shows that the first possible effective cause must actually exist. 16

We wish to make two comments on this aspect of possibility. First, we wish to explain why Scotus starts with the possibility of something being effected. Scotus does so in order to fulfill his requirements for a demonstration. Alan Wolter explains that there are four conditions which the conclusion of a demonstration must fulfill. 17 First, the conclusion must be certain; consequently the premises must be certain. Probable premises cannot give the certainty required in scientific knowledge; probable premises give only opinion. Secondly, the conclusion must be a necessary truth. Thirdly, the conclusion must not be immediately evident but known by reason of other necessary and evident truths. And fourthly, the conclusion must be caused by the premises. It is the third condition, that the conclusion be known from necessary and evident truths, which requires Scotus to argue from the possibility rather than the actuality of something being effected. Scotus tells us that:

I could indeed argue that some nature is produced because some subject undergoes a change and therefore the term of the

16 Ordinatio, I, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 151-165.
change comes into existence in the subject, and consequently this term or the composite [i.e. the subject and term] are produced or effected. Hence by the nature of the correlatives, some efficient cause exists. Formulated in this fashion, this first argument would be based upon a contingent but manifest proposition.  

Any conclusion derived from the contingent proposition that something is being effected would not be scientific knowledge. Scotus wants to start with the truth of a necessary proposition, a truth which cannot change. He continues:

However to prove our conclusion the argument can be reformulated in such a way that it proceeds from necessary premises. Thus it is true that some nature is able to be produced, therefore something is able to produce an effect. The antecedent is proved from the fact that something can be changed, for something is possible ("possible" being defined as contrary to "necessary"). In this case, the proof for the first conclusion proceeds from what the thing is or from its possible existence, but not from its actual existence.

It is not clear in Scotus's short explanation why the premise about the possibility of something being effected is a necessary truth. His point is that the actual existence of something being effected is contingent whereas what the thing is, the possibility or essence of the thing, is necessary. To show why this possibility is necessary, we can read this text from the Prima Lectura of Scotus:

Likewise I say that although things other than God are actually contingent in respect of their actual existence, in respect of their possible existence they are necessary; as although that a man exist is contingent, it is necessary that

18 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 161-162.
19 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 162.
It is necessary that a man is possible because there is no contradiction in the quiddity of man. For the possible being has its possibility from its own quiddity. By proceeding from a premise about the possibility of something being effected, Scotus starts with a necessary premise which will give a necessary conclusion: the possibility of something being caused requires the possibility of the first uncausable efficient cause because of the impossibility and unintelligibility of an infinity of essentially ordered causes.

In our second comment, we wish to examine the movement from the possibility of the first, uncausable, effective cause to its actual existence. Scotus argues that the first, possible, effective cause must exist of itself since it is repugnant to the nature of the first effective to be caused by another:

Proof: Anything to whose nature it is repugnant to receive existence from something else, exists of itself if it is able to exist at all. To receive existence from something else, however, is repugnant to the very notion of a being which is first in the order of efficiency, as is clear from the second conclusion (which shows that the first possible effective cause must be uncausable). That it can exist, is also clear.


21 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 151-161.
from the first conclusion which shows that the first effective cause is possible. From all this it follows that an efficient cause which is first in an unqualified sense of the term can exist of itself. Consequently, it does exist of itself, for what does not actually exist of itself, is incapable of existing of itself. 22

There are two ways that a being may be possible: either possible-as-producible or possible-as-existent. Either the quiddity can be caused to exist, or the quiddity must exist of itself. Since the first possible effective cause must be uncausable, its quiddity must exist of itself. For the only way in which its possibility, which was already proven, can be not contradicted is that the first possible effective cause exist of itself. We shall see later that Scotus will refer to this movement from possibility to actuality when he re-does the ontological argument.

The second part of Article I proves that the first effective cause must also be the first final cause and the supreme nature. 23 Then the third part of Article I proves that there can be only one kind of nature to which the triple primacy of efficiency, finality, and eminence is applicable. 24 Later in Book I, Distinction 2, Question 3, Scotus shows that there can be numerically only one being which possesses the specific nature of the triple

22 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 164-165.
23 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 169-171.
24 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 171-173.
The Proofs of Infinity

In Article II, Scotus proposes to show that the one nature possessing the triple primacy is the infinite being. He begins by showing that the first efficient has intellect and will, that his understanding is his essence, and that his essence is representative of an infinite number of objects. He then concludes with four arguments that the first being is infinite: a) from the fact that the first being is the first efficient cause of all other things; b) from the fact that the first being has knowledge of an infinite number of things; c) from the fact that the first being is the ultimate end; and d) from the fact that the first being is the supreme nature.

We will now make a close examination of the third and fourth proofs of infinity because it is in their context that Scotus re-does the ontological argument of Anselm.

Scotus offers this short proof for the infinity of the first being from finality:

Our will can always love and seek something greater than any finite being, even as our intellect is always able to know more. And, what is more, there seems to be a natural inclination to love an infinite good to the greatest degree possi-

25 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 3; II, 222-244.
26 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 174.
27 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 189.
ble, because the free will of itself and without the aid of any habit promptly and delightfully loves this good. Indeed it seems that the will is not perfectly satisfied with anything else. And if such an infinite good were really opposed to the natural object of the will, why is it that the will does not naturally hate an infinite good, just as it naturally hates non-existence, according to Augustine in De libero arbitrio, III, viii? For it seems that if "infinite" and "good" were incompatible, then there would be no way in which the will could be satisfied in such a good, nor could it readily tend towards anything which is opposed to its proper object. This argument will be confirmed in the following by a similar argument from the intellect.28

Since Scotus treats the argument from the intellect as a persuasive proof,29 it appears that the argument from the will is also a persuasive proof. For the arguments from the intellect and the will are similar in assuming compatibility since incompatibility is not apparent.

The purpose of this argument is to show that "infinity" is not incompatible with "good." If "infinity" and "good" were incompatible, "infinite good" would be equivalent to non-existence and so would be hated by the will. For, as Augustine points out, the will naturally hates non-existence. Since, however, the will actually strives for infinite good (because it does not rest in any finite good), "infinite" and "good" cannot be incompatible.

Next, in arguing from the fact that the supreme nature is most perfect, Scotus uses an analysis of concepts to establish

28 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 205-206, trans. Allan Wolter, Duns Scotus: Philosophical Writings, London, 1962, 70-71. The word "similar" is not in the Latin text.
29 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 207.
the possibility of infinite being:

That to which intensive infinity is not repugnant is not all perfect unless it be infinite, for to be infinite is compatible with it. And if it is finite, it can be exceeded or excelled. Now infinity is not repugnant to being, therefore the most perfect being is infinite. The minor of this proof ... cannot, it seems, be proven \textit{a priori}. For just as contradictories by their very nature contradict each other and their opposition cannot be made manifest by anything more evident, so also these terms, viz. "being" and "infinite" by their very nature are not repugnant to each other. Neither does there seem to be any way of proving this except by explaining the meaning of the notions themselves. "Being" cannot be explained by anything better than itself. "Infinite" we understand by means of finite. I explain "infinite" in a popular definition as follows: The infinite is that which exceeds the finite, not exactly by reason of any finite measure, but in excess of any measure that could be assigned.\textsuperscript{30}

The argument is that the eminent being is that which cannot be excelled. Now if the most perfect being were finite, then the most perfect being could be excelled if and only if infinity were compatible with being. But the most perfect being is that which cannot be excelled. Therefore the most perfect being is not finite but infinite, if infinity and being are compatible. The crucial point of the argument is the question whether infinity and being are compatible. The compatibility of notes in these two concepts would mean that the thing conceived is possible.

Scotus noted that it cannot be demonstrated \textit{a priori} that infinity is compatible with being. Bettoni offers an ex-

We demonstrate a truth a priori when we attain the truth by a simple explanation of the meaning of the terms involved. In the simple explanation of the terms "being" and "infinite" we cannot judge that there is a necessary connection between the terms. Thus we cannot judge a priori that an infinite being is possible. But at least our analysis of the terms shows that there is no apparent contradiction in the notion of an infinite being.

Scotus next tries to show that there can be no contradiction in the notion of an infinite being:

The following persuasive argument can be given for what we intend to prove. Just as everything is assumed to be possible, if its impossibility is not apparent, so also all things are assumed to be composable, if their non-composability is not manifest. Now there is no non-composability apparent here, for it is not of the nature of being to be finite; nor does finite appear to be an attribute coextensive with being. But if they were mutually repugnant, it would be for one of these reasons. The coextensive attributes which being possesses seem to be sufficiently evident.

It is important to note that this argument is only called persuasive. Scotus is arguing that just as a thing is assumed to be possible if its impossibility is not apparent, so those things are assumed to be composable if their non-composability is not apparent. Although this is an assumption, Scotus believes that it is not unreasonable.

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32 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 207.
Scotus notes that there are two cases which would show non-composibility between infinity and being. The first case is that the nature of being might always have to be conceived as finite. Scotus rejects this alternative because of his univocal notion of being. For Scotus, being is the proper object of the human intellect; just as man may abstract the concept of being from the sensible accidents and by this concept have a concept of substance as being, so man may abstract the concept of being from finite being and thus have a concept of being which may be applicable to an infinite being. Univocity of being is an abstraction for Scotus. Univocity of being in no way prevents that there be different modes of being, among which one is infinite and many are finite.

The second case which would show non-compossibility between infinity and being would be that finiteness might be an at-


34 Alan Wolter, O.F.M., The Transcendentals and Their Function In The Metaphysics of Duns Scotus, St. Bonaventure, N.Y., 1946, 48: "Scotus, in short, saw no contradiction in admitting that the term 'being' can be predicated either equivocally (analogously) or univocally depending upon whether it signifies all things properly or not. In the first instance, it signifies the intrinsic mode as well as the common ratio of being and hence has as many corresponding proper concepts as there are intrinsically different classes of beings. In the second instance, it signifies things only imperfectly, since the mind abstracts from the proper intrinsic modes. But in this case we have not several concepts, but one univocal common concept."
tribute coextensive with being. But the only attributes coextensive with being are: one, true, and good, whereas the attribute finite-infinite is a disjunctive attribute of being. Scotus argues:

In the disjunctive attributes, however, while the entire disjunction cannot be demonstrated from "being", nevertheless as a universal rule by positing the less perfect extreme of some being we can conclude that the more perfect extreme is realized in some other being. Thus it follows that if some being is finite, then some being is infinite. And if some being is contingent, then some being is necessary. For in such cases it is not possible for the more imperfect extreme of the disjunction to be existentially predicated of "being", particularly taken, unless the more perfect extreme be existentially verified of some other being upon which it depends. 35

Alan Wolter points out that this "universal rule" describes what may be concluded, not immediately inferred. 36 That is, from the finite one may conclude by a reasoning process to the infinite. There is no ex professo analysis of this "universal rule" by Scotus. We may suppose that this "universal rule" is obvious in some disjunctive attributes, for example, caused-cause, and is probably extended by Scotus to include finite-infinite. We may also suppose, as Wolter points out, that Scotus's analysis of the implications of an essential order shows that where an essential order exists, one member in a disjunctive attribute must follow in our from the other member of the disjunction. 37

36 Wolter, The Transcendentals, 137.
37 Wolter, The Transcendentals, 159-161.
Since Scotus has rejected the two cases which would show non-composibility between infinity and being, he assumes that infinite being is possible.

Scotus offers two more arguments persuasive of the composibility of infinity and being:

Another persuasive argument adduced is this. Infinity in its own way, is not opposed to quantity (that is, where parts are taken successively); therefore, neither is infinity, in its own way, opposed to entity (that is, where perfection exists simultaneously).

Again, if the quantity characteristic of power is simply more perfect than that characteristic of mass, why is it possible to have an infinity [of small parts] in an [extended] mass and not an infinite power? And if an infinite power is possible, then it actually exists, as is evident from the third conclusion about the first efficient cause, and will also be proved again later.38

The two arguments are essentially this: an indication of infinity is found in quantity where parts are potentially divisible into infinity. If infinity is possible on the less perfect level of quantity, then infinity ought to be possible on the more perfect levels of being and power, that is, being and efficient causality. Scotus believes that it is possible to have infinite or eternal movement, an endless motion, and that it is possible to have infinite effects, that is, an endless number of effects successively.39 Now if either infinity is possible, then the power which is able to produce such infinity in quantity successively must be it-

38 *Ordinatio*, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 208, trans. Wolter, *Duns Scotus*, 72.

39 *Ordinatio*, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 190-194.
self infinite. Now such an inference designates the power as infinite by extrinsic denomination from the effects. And Scotus apparently has no problem arguing that that which is infinite by extrinsic denomination is infinite in its being. He argues:

If the First Being at one and the same time formally possessed all causal power, . . . it would be infinite, because . . . it has power to produce an infinite number all at once, and the more one can produce simultaneously, the greater the power in intensity. But if the First Being possessed such power in an even more perfect way than if it had it formally, . . . its intensive infinity follows a fortiori. But the full causal power that each thing may have in itself, the First Being possesses even more perfectly than if it were formally present.

We can establish naturally the existence of an infinite power which on its part possesses simultaneously the fullness of causality and could produce an infinite number of things at once, if only they were capable of existing simultaneously.40

Since the first efficient cause has its power independently, it has the totality of its effect in its power at one and the same time. And because it has the power of producing an infinite number of effects at the same time (if these things were capable of existing simultaneously), the first efficient cause is infinite in itself, that is, intensively.41

It would help our understanding to contrast the starting point of the first argument for the possibility and existence of the First Being with the starting point of the last argument of

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41 *Ordinatio*, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 190.
Scotus. In the arguments for the First Being, Scotus starts with the reality of essences which is known from existent changeable beings. Scotus does not work with existence in the beginning of his premises but with the reality of essence which may very well exist but which need not be considered as existing. The arguments from the reality of essence which is known from changeable beings are considered by Scotus to be true demonstrations. But the argument we have just seen is considered by Scotus to be only a persuasion. For its starting point is the assumption that if infinity is possible on the imperfect level of quantity, then infinity ought to be possible on the more perfect level of being and efficient causality.

In the next text, Scotus continues his analysis of the concept of infinite being and also notes that the intellect even delights in trying to know an infinite being:

Again, why is it that the intellect, whose object is being, does not find the notion of something infinite repugnant? Instead of this, the infinite seems to be the most perfect thing we can know. Now if tonal discord so readily displeases the ear, it would be strange if some intellect did not clearly perceive the contradiction between infinite and its first object (viz. being) if such existed. For if the disagreeable becomes offensive as soon as it is perceived, why is it that no intellect naturally shrinks from the infinitely intelligible as it would from something out of harmony with, and even destructive of, its first object.\(^\text{42}\)

Scotus makes a comparison between a sensory faculty and the intel-

\(^{42}\) Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 208, trans. Wolter, Duns Scotus, 72-73.
lectual faculty. If being and infinite were contradictory, the notion of infinite being should be as disagreeable to the intellect as a discordant sound is to the ear. But the notion of infinite being is not disagreeable to the intellect. Rather, it seems to be the most perfect thing we can know. Therefore, being and infinite are not contradictory.

We have seen many arguments trying to prove the compatibility of infinity and being. Before these arguments, Scotus has already shown that the being with the triple primacy in efficiency, finality, and eminence, exists. Because this being must be the most perfect, it must have all possible perfections which would be befitting to its nature. If infinity and being are compatible, then the most perfect being must have the perfection of infinity. This is why Scotus has introduced many arguments trying to prove the compatibility of infinity and being. For Scotus, the proofs of compatibility do not assume that we have a proper concept of the infinite being, since he has defined infinity in a negative manner: "The infinite is that which exceeds the finite, not exactly by reason of any finite measure, but in excess of any measure that could be assigned."43 Since infinity is known in a negative way, and since being is a concept abstracted from finite beings, the compossibility of infinity and being would represent

43 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 207, trans. Wolter, Duns Scotus, 72.
what is possible, even though the compossibility is not a proper concept.

The Re-doing of Anselm's Argument

Immediately after this persuasive argument that the intellect can discern no contradiction in the notion of an infinite being, Scotus continues: "In this same way Anselm's argument in the Prologion about the highest conceivable good can be touched up. 44 Our interpretation of the words, "in this same way", is that Scotus will emphasize that the starting point of Anselm's argument should be interpreted as the concept of infinite being in which the intellect can discern no contradiction. And since Scotus maintained that the argument from the intellect's delight in the notion of an infinite being is a confirmation of the striving of the will to possess an infinite good, we can interpret Scotus to be connecting both of the prior arguments from the will and the intellect with his re-doing of Anselm's argument.

The Possibility of God

Scotus does think that that than which nothing greater can be thought is the infinite being, since he said so explicitly in Book I, distinction II, question II. 45 And in the very re-do-

44 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 208-209, trans. Wolter, Duns Scotus, 73.

45 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 128. See page 3 of thesis.
ing of Anselm's starting point, Scotus is seen to be substituting the concept of infinite being for Anselm's greatest conceivable object and to be emphasizing that the concept is without contradiction:

His description must be understood in this way. God is a being conceived without contradiction, who is so great that it would be a contradiction if a greater being could be conceived. That the phrase "without contradiction" must be added is clear, for anything, the very knowledge or thought of which includes a contradiction, is called "inconceivable", for it includes two conceivable notions so opposed to each other that they cannot in any way be fused into a single conceivable object, since neither determines the other.

It follows then, that the greatest object conceivable without contradiction can actually exist in reality. This is proved first of its essential being, for in such an object the intellect is fully satisfied; viz. "being", is verified and this in the highest degree.46

We interpret that the last paragraph is arguing that there is no contradiction in the starting point, the notion of an infinite being. For in the greatest conceivable object, we discover the primary object of the intellect, being, and in its highest degree. We understand Scotus to mean infinite being by the words, "being and this in the highest degree," on the basis of another passage where he shows us the better meaning that he wishes to give to the concept, "highest being." This passage occurs after Scotus has fully proven the existence of one infinite being, in the discussion of the question whether man is able to have nat-

46 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 209-210, trans. Wolter, Duns Scotus, 73.
But if you say that "highest good" or "Highest Being" expresses an intrinsic mode of being and includes other concepts virtually, I reply that if "highest" be taken in a comparative sense, then it includes a relation to something extrinsic to the being, whereas "infinite" is an absolute concept. But if "highest" is understood in an absolute sense, i.e., as meaning that the very nature of the thing is such that it cannot be exceeded, then this perfection is conceived even more expressly in the notion of an infinite being, because "highest good" does not indicate as such whether it is infinite or finite.47

Thus the better meaning that can be given to the word "highest" is "infinite," in which there is no relation to something extrinsic to the infinite being. If "highest" were taken in a comparative sense, then we would not know whether the highest being is infinite or finite. And if the highest being were only finite, then the replacing of Anselm's starting point with the concept of the highest finite being would not make sense in this context where the notion of an infinite being is being discussed.

The non-contradiction of the notion of infinite being is stressed by Scotus. If infinite and being were contradictory to one another, they would not form a unified concept. But as Scotus argues, the concepts do form a unified concept, namely:

the concept of an infinite being. For this is simpler than the concept of "good being" or "true being" or other similar concepts, since infinite is not a quasi attribute or property of "being" or of that of which it is predicated. Rather it signifies an intrinsic mode of that entity, so that when

I say "Infinite Being", I do not have a concept composed accidentally, as it were, of a subject and its attribute. What I do have is a concept of what is essentially one, namely of a subject with a certain grade of perfection -- infinity. It is like "intense whiteness," which is not a notion that is accidentally composed, such as "visible whiteness" would be, for the intensity is an intrinsic grade of whiteness itself. Thus the simplicity of this concept "Infinite Being" is evident.48

Although a formal note is added to being when infinite is predicated of being, we do not have a concept composed accidentally, as it were, of a subject and its attribute. Rather we have a concept which is essentially one, a subject with a certain degree or mode of perfection, infinity.

We have seen the proof of Scotus that the concept, infinite being, does not form a contradiction and that therefore the concept has essential being, esse quidditativum.49 Since that proof is similar to the proofs from the intellect and will for the compatibility of infinite and being, it appears that Scotus holds his re-doing of Anselm's argument to be only a persuasive argument. For Scotus noted that the argument from the intellect's analysis of the concepts, infinite and being, was only a persuasive proof. We should note once again that these proofs of compatibility do not assume that we have a proper concept of the infinite being. The compatibility of infinity and being

48 Ordinatio, 1, d. 3, q. 1-2; III, 40, trans. Wolter, Deut Scotus, 27.

49 Wolter has translated esse quidditativum as essential being.
would represent what is possible even though the compatibility is not a proper concept.

The Actuality of God

We can continue the analysis of the argument. Now that the esse quidditativum of the infinite being has been persuasively shown, it remains to show that the infinite being must have actual existence, esse existentiae:

It is further argued, then, that this being actually exists because the highest conceivable object is not one which is merely in the intellect of the thinker, for then it both could exist, because as something possible it is conceivable, and yet could not exist, because the idea of existing in virtue of some cause is repugnant to its very nature. This latter was shown above in the second conclusion of the proof from efficiency. Therefore, what exists in reality is conceivably greater than what exists only in the intellect. This is not to be understood, however, in the sense that something conceived if it actually exists, is by fact of existing, conceivable to any greater extent. The meaning is that whatever exists is greater than whatever is solely in the intellect. 50

The reality of the essence or esse quidditativum of infinite being has already been shown. If the essence were only in the intellect of a person conceiving its possibility, then the only way that the essence could exist, if it did not already exist of itself by necessity, would be that the essence were caused to exist. But it is contradictory to the notion of infinite being, the greatest conceivable object, that it have the imperfection of being caused.

50 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 210, trans. Wolter, Duns Scotus, 73-74. Note that Wolter has translated esse existentiae as actual existence.
Therefore the essence cannot be only in the understanding but must exist of itself in order to preserve the status of the essence of infinite being as a true possible. Scotus notes finally that what exists in reality is conceivably greater than what exists only in the intellect. He says that this means not that the thing is conceived to a greater extent if it exists, but that a possible which exists is greater than anything which is only in the intellect.

By this re-doing, Scotus has persuasively proven the two points which were assumed in the objection (which summarized Anselm's argument) to be evident through themselves. The two points assumed to be evident through themselves were: first, that infinite and being were composable, and secondly, that the infinite being must exist. Infinite and being are composable, that is, their notes have a quidditative reality since there is no contradiction in the concept of infinite being, and since the will and intellect strive to attain the infinite good and truth. The infinite being must exist, that is, must have existential reality since it is a contradiction to its essence to be caused by another.

Scotus offers another re-doing of Anselm's argument:

Or the argument could be retouched in this way. Whatever exists is conceivable to a greater extent than what does not exist; that is to say, it can be known more perfectly, because it is intuitively intelligible or visible. What does not exist either in itself or in something more noble to which it adds nothing, is not capable of being intuited. Now what can be seen is able to be known more perfectly than what cannot be intuited, but known only abstractively. Therefore,
the most perfect thing that can be known exists.51

This argument presupposes from the previous re-doing that Scotus has established the essential being, the esse quidditativum, of the infinite being as the most perfect thing that can be known. Now in this argument, Scotus analyzes what would necessarily be predicated of this essential being. Now the essential being of infinite being implies that the best perfection of knowability be attributed to its essential being. But the most perfect way of being known is intuitive knowledge. For intuition is knowledge of presence, that is, knowledge of existence. Therefore, the essential being of infinite being must have actual existence, esse existentiae. For if the infinite being did not actually exist, it would not be able to be intuited; and then its non-existence would contradict its essential reality which ought to be able to be intuited. But we cannot contradict the essential being. Therefore, the infinite being must exist.

The Pure Perfections

We have seen two re-doings of Anselm’s argument for the existence of God. In the first re-doing, Scotus has placed the emphasis on showing the compatibility between infinity and being.

By showing Scotus's emphasis on the fact that the pure perfections are compatible, we will better understand his re-doings of the argument of Anselm.

In defining a pure or simple perfection, Scotus starts with Anselm's description: "Perfection in the unqualified sense of the term is one which, in anything having it, it is better to have than not to have." Elsewhere, Scotus defines: "That is said to be a pure perfection which is better in everything than that which is not-it." This definition is qualified by Scotus in two places. First, the phrase, "than that which is not-it," is to be understood as "than anything positive which is incompatible with it." Allan Wolter explains that, although human nature is better than a stone (a non-human nature), still human nature is a limited perfection, not a pure perfection, since human nature is not better than angelic nature which is positively incompatible with it. But intelligence is a pure perfection since it is better than anything positively incompatible with it. For the intelligent is always better than what is not intelligent.


53 Roche, De Primo Principio, 77.

54 Ibid., 79.

55 Wolter, The Transcendental, 164.
a pure perfection is not better in everything. For example, intelligence in a dog is not better than non-intelligence in a dog because intelligence is incompatible with the nature of a dog. Briefly, a pure perfection may be defined as "that which is absolutely and in an unqualified sense better than everything incompatible with it."57

Allan Wolter notes that Scotus gives special attention to four properties of the pure perfections: (1) all pure perfections are mutually compatible; (2) all pure perfections are compatible with infinity; (3) pure perfections are communicable; and (4) pure perfections are irreducibly simple.58

(1) All pure perfections are mutually compatible. Wolter summarizes the argument of Scotus: Let us designate by A and B two pure perfections which are mutually incompatible. Now since a pure perfection is that which is simply and absolutely better than anything incompatible with it, A as a pure perfection must be better than B which is incompatible with A. But in like manner, B as a pure perfection will be better than A which is incompatible with B. But such mutually contradictory propositions cannot be true. If they were true, then any given pure perfection could be both better and not better than another pure perfection. Since

56 Roche, De Primo Principio, 79.
57 Ibid.
that contradiction in the notion of a pure perfection follows from holding that pure perfections are incompatible, we must hold that every pure perfection must be compatible with every other pure perfection. This consequence preserves the definition of a pure perfection.59

(2) Every pure perfection is compatible with infinity. Wolter notes that this presupposes two propositions: first, that infinity is a positive perfection or mode of being, and secondly, that nothing exceeds that which is infinite. Now if a pure perfection were incompatible with infinity, it would be better than infinity. For a pure perfection is better than anything incompatible with it. But since nothing exceeds the infinite, a pure perfection cannot exceed the infinite and therefore must be compatible with infinity.60 Scotus here is able to offer another definition of a pure perfection as "that which can exist unlimited in something."61 Thus Wolter explains that a pure perfection can be described as that whose formal notion contains no imperfection or limitation.62

(3) Every pure perfection is communicable. Scotus argues for the communicability of the pure perfections with regard

59 Ibid., 167.
60 Ibid., 167-168.
to the Persons in the Divine Nature. However, we can abstract his argument from its context and describe it briefly. If the pure perfections were incommunicable, the definition of a pure perfection would be contradicted. For a pure perfection is "one which, in anything having it, it is better to have than not to have." A pure perfection has been defined as that which can be in many, as that which many can participate in. So a pure perfection must be communicable to many.

(4) Every pure perfection is irreducibly simple. If a pure perfection were composed of parts A and B, these parts would have to be pure perfections in order to constitute the original perfection. These parts would have to form an essential unity, for an accidental unity could not constitute a pure perfection. But these parts can make an essential unity only by being related as act and potency. But to be related as act and potency would be to make these parts mutually perfectible and consequently imperfect. Hence these parts cannot be pure perfections. And hence a pure perfection cannot be composed of parts. For parts can never constitute a pure perfection.

Scotus' analysis of the pure perfections has emphasized the characteristic of compatibility. We can see this emphasis on

63 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, p. 2, q. 1-4; II, 347.
64 Quodl. q. 5; XXV, 216a.
65 Wolter, The Transcendentals, 169.
compatibility in the De Primo Principio where Scotus establishes that: "Every pure perfection is predicated of the Highest Nature as necessarily existing there in the highest degree."66 This is proven by showing that necessary existence in the Highest Nature is compatible with a pure perfection. Wolter's analysis is to the point: a pure perfection is by definition more perfect than what is incompatible with it. Now if a pure perfection is incompatible with the Supreme Nature, it would have to be more perfect than the most perfect nature -- which is a contradiction. Therefore a pure perfection must be compatible with the Supreme Nature. Now a pure perfection cannot exist contingently in the Supreme Nature but must exist necessarily. For a perfection is more perfectly possessed necessarily than contingently, providing that necessity of inherence is not repugnant to a pure perfection, for if it were, a pure perfection would be exceeded by something incompatible with it, that is, by what can necessarily exist in the Supreme Nature. Therefore, necessity of being able to exist in the Supreme Nature is not repugnant to a pure perfection. And since it is possible for the uncausable First Nature to possess a pure perfection necessarily, therefore it does possess it necessarily.67

In examining Scotus' treatment of the pure perfections, we have seen him emphasizing compatibility: compatibility in the re-doing of Anselm's definition; compatibility in the analysis of

the properties of the pure perfections; and compatibility in showing that the pure perfections must exist in the Supreme Nature.

Perhaps now we can see how and why Scotus has re-done the ontological argument of Anselm. Scotus believes that in treating concepts such as being and infinity and the pure perfections, he is thinking real concepts from which consequences can be drawn for this existent world. In Chapter II, we shall see that Leibniz also treats concepts as realities from which he can draw consequences for the existent world.
The purpose of this chapter is to describe Leibniz's re-doing of the ontological argument; we may begin by noting his references to Descartes. Leibniz summarizes Descartes' ontological argument for the existence of God as follows:

Descartes' argument for the Existence of God assumes that the all-perfect being, or the necessary being, is possible. The argument comes to this: the all-perfect being includes in its idea among other perfections that of existing necessarily; or the all-perfect being is a necessary being. Now the necessary being exists; therefore, the all-perfect being exists.1

The argument, God is all-perfect and has then the perfection of necessary existence, is valid but needs strengthening; Leibniz writes:

The Geometers, who are the past masters of the art of reasoning have realized that in order that proofs based on definitions be valid one must show, or at least postulate, that the notion comprised in any of the definitions used is possible. . . . The same precaution is necessary in every type of reasoning, and above all in the demonstration due to Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (in libro contra insipien-tem), which proves that since God is the greatest or most perfect being, He possesses also that perfection termed ex-

istence, and that consequently He exists; an argument which was subjected to scrutiny by St. Thomas and other Scholastics, and which was revived by M. des Cartes. Regarding this it must be said that the argument is quite valid, providing that the supremely perfect being or the being possessing all perfections is possible. For here we have the central characteristic of the divine nature—that its essence contains its existence, i.e., that God exists provided only that He is possible. And thus simply omitting all reference to perfection, one can say: If the Necessary Being is possible, He exists—doubtless the most beautiful and important proposition of the doctrine of modalities, since it furnishes a passage from possibility to actuality and it is here and here alone that a posse ad esse valet consequentia. 2

Since Anselm and Descartes base their arguments for the existence of God upon their definitions of God, Leibniz points out that in proofs based on definitions one must show or at least postulate that the notion used is "possible." Then he remarks that if it can be shown that God is possible, it would follow that God exists because his essence contains his existence. Thus Leibniz will emphasize the establishing of the possibility of God.

Leibniz presents three ways of establishing the possibility of God: a) the postulating or the presuming of the possibility of the most perfect being until impossibility is shown; b) a proof of the possibility of the necessary being which moves from contingency to necessity; and c) an a priori proof of the possibility of the most perfect being which establishes the compossibility of God until impossibility is shown; b) a proof of the possibility of the necessary being which moves from contingency to necessity; and c) an a priori proof of the possibility of the most perfect being which establishes the compossibility of God until impossibility is shown; b) a proof of the possibility of the necessary being which moves from contingency to necessity; and c) an a priori proof of the possibility of the most perfect being which establishes the compossibility of God until impossibility is shown; b) a proof of the possibility of the necessary being which moves from contingency to necessity; and c) an a priori proof of the possibility of the most perfect being which establishes the compossibility of God until impossibility is shown; b) a proof of the possibility of the necessary being which moves from contingency to necessity; and c) an a priori proof of the possibility of the most perfect being which establishes the compossibility of God until impossibility is shown; b) a proof of the possibility of the necessary being which moves from contingency to necessity; and c) an a priori proof of the possibility of the most perfect being which establishes the compossibility of God until impossibility is shown; b) a proof of the possibility of the necessary being which moves from contingency to necessity; and c) an a priori proof of the possibility of the most perfect being which establishes the compossibility of God until impossibility is shown; b) a proof of the possibility of the necessary being which moves from contingency to necessity; and c) an a priori proof of the possibility of the most perfect being which establishes the compossibility of God until impossibility is shown; b) a proof of the possibility of the necessary being which moves from contingency to necessity; and c) an a priori proof of the possibility of the most perfect being which establishes the compossibility of God.

bility of the pure perfections. 3

a) The first way, then, is the presumption of the possibility of God. Leibniz writes:

In my view it [Descartes' argument] is a good argument though imperfect and what it lacks can be supplied. But even as it stands, imperfect and with nothing added, it has considerable value insofar as it proves that the divine nature enjoys at least this privilege that it needs only possibility of essence in order to exist. What is more, the argument gives at least presumptively the existence of God, for all existence must be thought possible in the absence of proof to the contrary, until that is to say, we are made to see that it is impossible. This presumption, as we may call it, is incomparably higher than a simple supposition, since most suppositions must be proved before they can be admitted, while whatever is presumed must pass as true until it is refuted. . . . Now possibility is always presumed and must be held true until impossibility is proved. This argument accordingly has the force that it lays the onus probandi on him who denies it, and since no one can prove its impossibility we must hold God's existence to be real. 4

Thus Leibniz would accept the ontological argument with the addition that possibility is always presumed until impossibility is shown. And no one can prove the impossibility of God. 5

b) However, Leibniz admits that such a presumption does not rigorously demonstrate the existence of the necessary being. So he offers an absolute demonstration of the possibility of God as the second way of establishing the possibility of God. Leibniz writes, continuing the last text quoted:

4 Leibniz, "Reform of the Ontological Argument," The Monadology, 155-156.
5 Cf. infra, 47-52.
Should we wish however, to make the demonstration absolute in the manner of geometry we must give the proof of the possibility which it requires. I have tried to contribute such a proof by making it evident that if the necessary being were impossible, all the contingent beings would be impossible also, and so nothing would be possible. For since contingent beings have not in themselves the sufficient reason of their existence they must have recourse to the necessary being, which is the ultima ratio rerum, the final ground of things.  

The final sentence of this text seems best interpreted as the proof of the position stated in the same text that if the necessary being is impossible, all contingent being would be impossible. For the last sentence argues that since contingent beings have not in themselves the sufficient reason of their existence, they must find their sufficient reason in the necessary being. The word "existence" was underlined in the last sentence to show that Leibniz has argued that, since contingent beings must find the sufficient reason of their existence in the necessary being, all contingent beings would be impossible if the necessary being would be impossible. Thus we see that Leibniz's position that the possibility of contingent being is dependent on the possibility of the necessary being has required from Leibniz a proof of the actual existence of the necessary being.

In the position that "if the necessary being were impossible, all contingent beings would be impossible," Leibniz has expressed the major of a conditional syllogism whose conclusion is

6 Leibniz, "Reform of the Ontological Argument," The Monadology, 155-156.
to be that the necessary being is possible. But nowhere in the text quoted or in the context does he express the minor of this syllogism. Therefore we interpret that this minor premise be supplied to make the conditional syllogism read as follows:

If the necessary being is impossible, all contingent beings would be impossible.
But, some contingent being is possible.
Therefore, the necessary being is possible.

We have already seen how Leibniz establishes the major premise. The minor premise, which we have supplied, may be known in either of two ways, as Leibniz writes:

Being is that whose concept involves something positive, that is, something which is able to be conceived by us in a way that that which we conceive is possible and does not involve a contradiction. We can know this fact of possibility if the concept is perfectly clear and does not involve anything confused. We can also find out, if the thing actually shall have existed, that that which exists is also Being or a possible.\(^7\)

For Leibniz, the possibility of contingent being may be known either by an analysis of the concept of the thing or by discovering that the thing actually exists or has existed.\(^8\)

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\(^7\) Leibniz, "De modo distinguendii phaenomena realia ab imaginariis;" Gerhardt, VII, 319.

\(^8\) Rescher, in his article, "Contingence in the Philosophy of Leibniz," The Phil. Review, LXI, 35, translates a text from Gerhardt, IV, 406, as follows: "Those who hold that one can never infer actual existence solely from notions, ideas, definitions, or possible essence, . . . deny the possibility of the Necessary Being. . . . But if the Necessary Being or Ens a se is impossible, then all of the things which owe their existence to others will also be impossible, since they must ultimately stem from the Ens a se. Thus no existence at all will be possible. . . . This reasoning leads us to another modal proposition. . . . which
The first way in which the possibility of contingent being is known by an analysis of the concept of a contingent being makes this argument from contingency very much like Leibniz's argument for God's existence from the reality of eternal truths. For just as it is sufficient to make an analysis of a concept to show the possibility of contingent being, so also it is sufficient for him to make an analysis of a concept to show the reality of an eternal truth. And just as there is an inference from the possibility of contingent being to the possibility of the necessary being, so also is there an inference from the reality of eternal truths to the Supreme Mind which is God. Leibniz writes:

As regards eternal truths, it must be observed that at bottom they are all conditional, and say in effect: such a thing posited, such another thing is. For example, in saying every figure which has three sides will also have three angles, I do nothing but suppose that if there is a figure with three sides this same figure will have three angles. . . .

The scholastics have disputed hotly . . . how the proposition made about a subject can have a real truth, if this subject does not exist. The fact is that the truth is only conditional. . . . But it will be further asked, in what is joined with the previous one [from footnote two: If the Necessary Being is possible, then He must exist] completes the demonstration. This proposition can be formulated thus: If the Necessary Being does not exist, neither will anything else. Rescher then believes that Leibniz implies a minor affirming the existence of a contingent being, which, when joined to the last sentence in his translation, would lead to a conclusion affirming the existence of the Necessary Being. But Rescher has indirectly translated that last sentence: "Si l'Etre [sic] nécessaire n'est point, il n'y a point d'Estre [sic] possible." It should be translated thus: "If there is no Necessary Being, there is no possible being." Rescher's interpretation is incorrect.
this connection between subject and predicate founded, since there is in it some reality which does not deceive? The reply will be that it is the connection of ideas. But in answer it will be asked, where would those ideas be if no mind existed, and what would then become of the real foundation of this certainty of eternal truths? This leads us finally to the ultimate ground of truths, namely to that Supreme and Universal Mind, which cannot fail to exist, whose understanding is the region of eternal truths. . . .

Leibniz is certain that his mind knows an eternal truth and that the ground of this certainty lies in the ideas themselves, independently of the senses. An ultimate ground of the certainty of eternal truths is required which cannot fail to exist. This ultimate ground of truths is the Mind of God.

Because the argument from contingency starts with an analysis of a concept and concludes to the ultimate ground of being and because the argument from the certainty of eternal truths starts with an analysis of a concept and concludes to the ultimate ground of truth, it appears that they are basically the same argument. This interpretation is confirmed by a text in the Monadology where Leibniz equates possibles, essences, and eternal truths. He writes:

43. It is also true that in God is the source not only of existences but also of essences, so far as they are real, or of that which is real in the possible. This is because the understanding of God is the region of eternal truths, or of


the ideas on which they depend, and because, without him, there would be nothing real in the possibilities, and not only nothing existing but also nothing possible.

For, if there is a reality in essences or possibilities or indeed in the eternal truths, this reality must be found in something existing and actual, and consequently in the existence of the necessary being in whom essence involves existence, or with whom it is sufficient to be possible in order to be actual.11

Leibniz has said that the understanding of God is the region of eternal truths, that is, the region of the ideas on which the eternal truths depend. And the ideas, essences, and possibles are the same for Leibniz. Thus the proof from contingency and the proof from eternal truths are basically the same since they both start with the reality involved in the possibles or essences.

We have seen one interpretation of the connection of the argument from contingency with the ontological argument by seeing how the minor of the conditional syllogism was evident by an analysis of the concept or essence of a contingent thing. There should be another interpretation if the minor of the conditional syllogism is evident by discovering that some contingent actually exists. Then Leibniz is arguing that some contingent being is possible because it is actual and that this possibility of contingent being is dependent upon the possibility of the necessary being. But the question should be asked: how does he know that this being which exists is contingent?

To answer that question we must investigate Leibniz's

11 Leibniz, "Monadology;" Wiener, 541.
notion of truth. His idea of a true proposition is "such that every predicate, necessary or contingent, past, present, or future, is included in the idea of the subject." The predicate is contained in the subject of a true proposition in one of two ways. For Leibniz holds that there are two kinds of truths:

**those of reasoning and those of fact.** Truths of reasoning are necessary and their opposite is impossible, and those of fact are contingent and their opposite is possible. In truths of reasoning, the predicate is expressly contained in the notion of its subject, and the opposite of the truth is impossible since the opposite would express a contradiction. But in truths of fact, the predicate is only implicitly contained in the notion of its subject, and the opposite of the truth is possible since the opposite would not express a contradiction.

Now we are able to understand why Leibniz holds that there are contingent beings. It is the same reason why a man's free choice is contingent. As Leibniz writes, a free choice is "contingent, because neither I nor any other mind more enlightened than I, could demonstrate that the opposite of this truth implies

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13 Leibniz, "Monadology, 33;" Wiener, 539.
14 Leibniz, Untitled Essay; Gerhardt, VII, 199.
15 Ibid.
a contradiction. Thus Leibniz holds that a free choice is contingent and that a being is contingent because he cannot demonstrate that the opposite of the free choice or of the being implies a contradiction. For Leibniz writes of the proposition about himself that I exist:

is a proposition of fact, founded upon an immediate experience, and it is not a necessary proposition whose necessity is seen in the immediate agreement of ideas. On the contrary, there is no one but God who sees how these two terms I and existence are connected, that is, why I exist.

Only God can make the infinite analysis required to examine all the possibles and their relationships in order to know why the essence of Leibniz would contribute to the best possible world and therefore would exist. We have uncovered the reason why Leibniz holds that a being is contingent. His reason is that there is no immediate agreement of the ideas I and existence and thus there is no contradiction in saying "I do not exist."

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16 Leibniz, "On Necessity and Contingency;" Wiener, 481.
17 Leibniz, "New Essays on Human Knowledge;" Wiener, 469.
20 Although it is necessary that the essence of Leibniz exist, this necessity of existence does not destroy the contingency of his existence. Leibniz writes: "And God has chosen among an infinite number of possibles what he has judged most fit. . . . This is the necessity, which can now be ascribed to things in the
In examining Leibniz's conditional syllogism proving the possibility of God from contingency, we have seen two ways of establishing the minor premise, "Some contingent being is possible." One way was by the analysis of the concept of a contingent being. The other way was by judging that some contingent being actually exists.

c) Finally, Leibniz offers an a priori proof of the possibility of God. Before we describe this a priori proof, however, we should see what Leibniz says about knowing the possibility of a thing a priori. He writes:

The possibility of a thing, however, is known either a priori or a posteriori: the former, when we analyze the idea into its elements, that is, into other ideas whose possibility is known, and know that it contains nothing which is incompatible. For example, this is the case when we perceive the manner in which an object is produced, whence causal definitions are of such paramount significance. On the other hand, we recognize the a posteriori possibility of a thing when its actuality is known to us through experience. For whatever exists or has existed must in any case be possible. In any case of adequate knowledge we have at the same time an a priori knowledge of the possibility; to wit, if we have carried the analysis through to the end and no contradiction is visible, the possibility of the idea is demonstrated. But whether human knowledge will ever attain to a perfect analysis of ideas, hence to first possibility and to unanalyzable concepts—in other words, whether it will be future, which is called hypothetical or consequential necessity (that is to say, founded upon the consequence of the hypothesis of the choice made), which does not destroy the contingency of things, and does not produce that absolute necessity which contingency does not allow." (Leibniz, "On Necessity and Contingency;" Wiener, 480-481). Those truths and things are absolutely necessary whose opposites imply a contradiction. Those truths and things are contingent whose opposites do not imply a contradiction in terms.
able to reduce all thoughts to the absolute attributes of God himself, --to first causes and the final reason of things that is a question which I do not dare to consider or decide just now. 21

Leibniz would know the possibility of a thing a priori by resolving the concept of the thing into its component parts which must be known to be, first, possible in themselves, and secondly, compatible with each other. This analysis into the components of a concept is called adequate knowledge when it is perfectly done. In this adequate knowledge, the knower recognizes the object present, discerns the specific notes of the object, and makes an analysis complete to the end of the components of the object. 22 Leibniz does not know if man is able to have such adequate knowledge but says that the best example which approaches very closely to adequate knowledge is our knowledge of numbers. 23 It is significant to note that Leibniz doubts whether adequate knowledge is available to man, and it is also significant to note that Leibniz has said in the last text that he does not now dare to determine whether or not man can make a perfect analysis which would finally reach the first possibles and irresoluble notions, the very absolute attributes of God. These two doubts are significant because they would seem to weaken the certainty of any demonstration a priori.


22 Ibid., 283-285.

23 Ibid., 285.
ori of the possibility of any thing, especially of God.

However, Leibniz does not hesitate to present an a priori demonstration of the possibility of God. The criterion that he uses for establishing the possibility of anything is twofold: first, the concept is resolved into its component parts which must be known to be possible in themselves; and secondly, the component parts must be compatible with one another, that is, non-contradictory with one another. Leibniz fulfills this twofold criterion by showing these two things: first, that there exist qualities susceptible of perfection in the highest degree; and secondly, that all these perfections are compatible.

Here are examples which illustrate that there are perfections susceptible of infinity, as Leibniz writes:

We must also know what perfection is. One thing that can surely be affirmed about it is that those forms or natures which are not susceptible of it to the highest degree, say the nature of numbers or of figures, do not permit of perfection. This is because the number which is the greatest of all (that is, the sum of all the numbers), and likewise the greatest of all figures, imply contradictions. The greatest knowledge, however, and omnipotence contain no impossibility.24

The contradiction in the sum of all the numbers is that the whole would equal the part since the sum of all numbers would include itself.25 Elsewhere Leibniz explains what the contradiction is in

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the notion of the fastest motion. He assumes that a wheel is turning with the fastest motion; then he points out this contradiction: if one of the wheel's spokes is extended beyond the rim, the spoke's end point would be moving faster than a nail lying on the rim, whose motion is therefore not the fastest. In contrast to contradictions found in the notions of the fastest motion and the greatest number, Leibniz holds that there are no contradictions in the notions of the greatest knowledge and of omnipotence. Because he can discover no contradiction in those concepts, he holds that they are possible, that they contain no impossibility.

In a short paper, "Quod Ens Perfectissimum existit," Leibniz tells us exactly what he means by a perfection. He writes:

I call a perfection every simple quality which is positive and absolute, or which expresses whatever it expresses without any limits.

Because a quality of this kind is simple, it is therefore irresoluble or indefinable. For otherwise, either the simple quality would not be one but an aggregate of many, or if it were one, it would be circumscribed by limits, and thus it would be understood by the negation of something ulterior. But that is against the hypothesis which assumes that the quality is purely positive.27

A perfection is a simple quality which is positive and absolute. "Simple" means that the quality is not made of parts. "Positive" means that the quality expresses a reality which is not understood

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26 Leibniz, "Reflections on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas;" Wiener, 286-287.

27 Leibniz, "Quod Ens Perfectissimum existit;" Gerhardt, VII, 261.
by any negation. And since the quality is not understood by any 
egation, the quality expresses a reality which is, as conceived, 
without limits, that is, the quality is "absolute."

The other requirement that the qualities should be com-
patible with one another is fulfilled by his universal characteristic. He writes:

But for the present it is sufficient for me to remark that 
that which is the foundation of my characteristic is the same 
as the demonstration of the existence of God. For the simple 
thoughts are the elements of the characteristic, and the sim-
ple forms are the source of things. So I suppose that the 
simple forms are compatible among themselves. That is a 
proposition which I would not be able to demonstrate very 
well without explaining at length the fundamentals of the 
characteristic. But if that proposition is granted, it fol-
ows that the nature of God, which encloses all the simple 
forms absolutely taken, is possible. 28

Leibniz holds that his thoughts are a true representation of reali-
ty and that God is really possible if the simple forms or thoughts 
are compatible. That the simple forms, that is, the perfections, 
are compatible is shown in his short paper, "Quod Ens Perfectissi-
mum existit." From the definition of perfection as a simple qual-
ity he argues that all the perfections are compatible. He writes:

From this definition of perfection it is not difficult 
to show that all the perfections are compatible among them-
selves, that is, that they can exist in the same subject.

For let there be a proposition of this kind:

A and B are incompatible

(understanding through A and B two simple forms or perfec-
tions, and it is the same if many simple forms are taken at

28 Leibniz, Untitled letter; Gerhardt, IV, 296.
the same time) it is clear that that proposition is not able to be demonstrated without a resolution of terms A and B, either of one of the two or of both. For otherwise the nature of those things would not enter into a reasoning process and incompatibility would be able to be demonstrated equally about any other things and about themselves. But (by hypothesis) they are irresoluble. Therefore this proposition about them cannot be demonstrated.

But this proposition would be able to be demonstrated about them if the proposition were true, because it is not true through itself and because all propositions necessarily true are either demonstrable or known through themselves. Therefore this proposition is not necessarily true. Or in other words the proposition rejected is it is not necessarily that A and B are in the same subject, or again therefore A and B cannot be in the same subject. Therefore, since the reasoning about any of these qualities is the same, all the perfections are compatible.

Therefore there is given or there can be understood a subject of all perfections, the most perfect being.29

We can best summarize the import of this text by these four points. First, A and B refer to any simple perfections of which we can have proper ideas such as the greatest knowledge and omnipotence. Now God is defined as the subject of all simple perfections, the most perfect being. Although this concept does not exhaust or adequately define God, still the concept will represent the possibility of God, if the simple perfections are compatible. Secondly, to prove that all the simple perfections are compatible is impossible, since the number of such is infinite and we would never be able to compare them all. Thirdly, therefore Leibniz proves that indirectly by showing that it is not necessary that A and B are incompatible—where A and B refer to any simple perfections. If it is not

29 Leibniz, "Quod Ens Perfectissimum existit;" Gerhardt, VII, 261-262.
necessary that A and B are incompatible, it is at least possible, i.e. non-contradictory, that they are not incompatible and so are compatible. Fourthly, to show that it is not necessary that A and B are incompatible, Leibniz considers the proposition that it is necessary that A and B are incompatible. If this proposition is necessarily true, it must be either self-evident from the terms or demonstrable by finding a middle term. But the proposition is not self-evident since Leibniz cannot discover any incompatibility in the concepts of A and B. And neither is the proposition able to be demonstrated. For A and B are simple and irresoluble terms and no middle term could be found agreeing with A and B, since A must retain its distinction from the middle term and from B. A demonstration would require the impossible, that is, finding a middle term in the concepts of A and B, that is, finding a complexity in two simple concepts. Since this proposition, it is necessary that A and B are incompatible, is neither self-evident nor demonstrable, the proposition must be false. Therefore this is true that it is not necessary that A and B are incompatible. Therefore it is possible that A and B are compatible. Since A and B refer to any simple perfections, it is possible that all simple perfections are compatible. Therefore, Leibniz can understand the idea of a being possessing all simple perfections.

Leibniz has fulfilled the two requirements for demonstrating the possibility of God a priori. The first requirement was that there be qualities possible of perfection in the highest
degree. The second requirement was that these qualities be compatible. Although the compatibility of these simple perfections does not exhaust the reality of God, still the compatibility of these perfections does represent the possibility of God. For Leibniz does have adequate ideas of these perfections. These adequate ideas are objective concepts and represent what is possible.

After this a priori proof, Leibniz tells us why he has constructed it. The turning point of the argument is the idea of God. Descartes only appeals to the experience of the idea in his mind; he does not tell others how to have the same experience. Leibniz, by this a priori proof, has instructed others how to have the experience of the idea of God. 30

From the Possibility of God to His Actual Existence

In the a priori proof, there is a movement from God's possibility to His actual existence. Leibniz writes that existence is a perfection and hence that the being possessing all perfections must exist: "Whence it is clear that this being exists, since existence is contained in the number of perfections." 31

Although he has merely asserted here that existence is a perfection, his treatment of the movement from the possibility to the actuality of the most perfect being is not lightly done.

30 Ibid., 262.
31 Ibid.
For in one re-doing of the ontological argument, he remarks that perfections seem to be certain qualities and that existence is not like these qualities. However, his basic criterion for judging whether or not existence is a perfection is that existence must increase the reality of the thing conceived. We see this criterion used when Leibniz resolves his doubt and decides that existence is a perfection: "It is also clear that Existence is a perfection, or in other words, that it increases reality, that is, that more of reality is conceived when an existent A is conceived than when a possible A is conceived." Thus Leibniz holds that existence is a reality, that reality is a positive predicate, and that a thing conceived as existing has more reality than the same thing conceived as possible. Therefore, since existence is a perfection, the most perfect being must have the perfection of actually existing.

It would be helpful to our understanding of Leibniz to indicate how basic he regards his teaching that all possibles or essences tend towards existence. From the actual existence of contingent beings, Leibniz discerns that essences tend towards exist-


33 Leibniz, "Leibniz an Eckhard, 1677;" Gerhardt, I, 266.

ence. He writes, that:

we ought first to recognize that from the very fact that something exists rather than nothing, there is in possible things, that is, in the very possibility or essence a certain exigent need of existence, and so to speak, some claim to existence; in a word, that essence tends of itself towards existence. 35

This proposition that every possible tends to exist is held by Leibniz to be an absolutely first truth of fact from which all facts can be demonstrated. 36 In a footnote to his proof of that first truth of fact, Leibniz remarks that existence is the very exigency of inclination of the essence to exist. 37 Hence we see that Leibniz emphasizes essence or possibility so much that he regards existence as a consequence of essence.

This emphasis of essence as the principle of existence can be seen in Leibniz's demonstration of the existence of the best possible world. Arguing from the position that essence tends of itself towards existence, Leibniz writes:

Whence if further follows that all possible things, whether expressing essence or possible reality, tend by equal right toward existence, according to their quantity of essence or reality, or according to the degree of perfection which they contain, for perfection is nothing else than quantity of essence.

Hence it is most clearly understood that among the infinite combinations of possibles and possible series, that

35 Leibniz, "Discourse on Metaphysics;" Wiener, 347.


37 Ibid.
one actually exists by which the most of essence or of possibility is brought into existence. And indeed there is always in things a principle of determination which is based on consideration of maximum and minimum, such that the greatest effect is obtained with the least, so to speak, expenditure. . . . So it being once posited that being is better than not being, or that there is a reason why something rather than nothing should be, or that we must pass from the possible to the actual, it follows that even if nothing further is determined, the quantity of existence must be as great as possible. 38

Since all possibles tend by equal right toward existence according to the quantity of essence, that combination of possibles (i.e., the best possible world) must exist by which the most of essence is brought into existence.

Such an argument may also be applied to God for Leibniz. 39 For he writes that "since nothing can hinder the possibility of that which possesses no limitations, no negation, and consequently, no contradiction, this alone is sufficient to establish the existence of God a priori." 40 Since the divine essence has no limitation, that is, since the divine essence contains the greatest quantity of essence, the divine essence must exist. Leibniz does speak of the most perfect being as "the one that contains the


39 This is the insight of William May, "The God of Leibniz," The New Scholasticism, XXVI, October, 1962, 516.

40 Leibniz, "Monadology, 45;" Wiener, 541-542.
We can now understand Leibniz's emphasis upon the possibility of God when he remarks that God is "a pure consequence of possible being," for Leibniz regards existence as a consequence of essence. Leibniz has treated concepts as objective, as representative of the possibility of an essence which may exist. His concept of God is a reality from which he discovers that God exists.

41 Leibniz, Untitled fragment; Wiener, 93.
42 Leibniz, "Monadology, 40;" Wiener, 540-541.
CHAPTER III

COMPARISON AND EVALUATION OF

SCOTUS AND LEIBNIZ

In this chapter we shall compare and evaluate the re-
doings of the ontological argument by Scotus and Leibniz under two
main headings: (1) proving the possibility of God, and (2) moving
from the possibility of God to His actual existence.

(1) Proving the Possibility of God

Both Scotus and Leibniz emphasize proving the composi-
bility of the terms involved in the concept of God, for example,
the terms "infinity" and "being", and "being" and the "simple per-
fections", and "necessity" and "being". Now both show the compos-
sibility of the terms in similar ways: a) either by a conceptual
analysis of the concept of God, or b) by referring to contingent
being.

a) the first way in which they try to establish the pos-
sibility of God is that they find that a conceptual analysis can
discern no contradiction in the concept of God.

The view of Scotus is that there is no contradiction in
the concept of the greatest conceivable object because in it is
discovered the primary object of the intellect, i.e., infinity. The terms, "infinity" and "being", are composable. This compositility cannot be shown a priori since no analysis of concepts could find a necessary connection between infinity and being. Rather this compositility is shown by discovering that the analysis of the concept of infinite being does not show any contradiction. Scotus gives the following argument as a persuasive reason for holding the compositility of infinity and being:

Just as everything is assumed to be possible, if its impossibility is not apparent, so also all things are assumed to be composable, if their non-compositility is not manifest. Now there is no non-compositility apparent here, for it is not of the nature of being to be finite; nor does finite appear to be an attribute coextensive with being. But if they were mutually repugnant, it would be for one of these reasons. The coextensive attributes which being possesses seem to be sufficiently evident.1

Although Scotus makes the assumption that compositility is to be presumed unless non-compositility is evident, he believes that the assumption is not unreasonable and so calls the proof a persuasion. Scotus notes that there are two cases which would show non-compositility between infinity and being. The first case is that the nature of being might always have to be conceived as finite. Scotus rejects this alternative by his univocal notion of being. Univocity of being is an abstraction which prescinds from the various modes of being. Just as man may abstract the concept of being from the sensible accidents and by this concept have a concept of

1 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 207.
substance as being, so man may abstract the concept of being from
finite being and thus have a concept of being which may be applicable to an infinite being. The second case which would show non-
composability of infinity and being would be that finite is an
attribute coextensive with being. But the only attributes coextensive with being are: one, true, and good, whereas the attribute
finite-infinite is a disjunctive attribute of being. Scotus holds
that in the disjunctive attributes we may conclude as a universal
rule that the more perfect extreme exists if the less perfect ex-
treme of the disjunction exists. Allan Wolter has pointed out
that Scotus' analysis of the implications of an essential order
shows that where an essential order exists, one member must follow
in our knowledge from the other member of the disjunction. Since
Scotus has rejected the two cases which would show non-composibil-
ity between infinity and being, he assumes that the infinite being
is possible.

Similarly to Scotus, Leibniz tries to establish that God
is possible because the intellect can discern no contradiction in
the notion of the supremely perfect being. One reason that Leibniz
offers is exactly the same as one of Scotus' reasons. For Leibniz
holds that all existence must be presumed possible until its impos-
sibility is shown. The reason why no one can show the impossibil-
ity of God is shown in the a priori proof of the possibility of the

2 Wolter, The Transcendentals, 159-161.
most perfect being. As Scotus does, Leibniz makes a conceptual analysis of the terms involved in the concept of God. We can summarize the analysis of Leibniz which establishes the possibility of God a priori. The criterion which Leibniz uses is twofold: first, the concept is resolved into its component parts which must be known to be possible, and secondly, the component parts must be compatible or compossible. He fulfills that twofold criterion by showing the following: first, that there exist qualities possible of perfection in the highest degree, and secondly, that all these perfections are compatible. As to the first requirement, Leibniz notes that "the greatest knowledge" or the "all-mighty" do not imply a contradiction, whereas the concept of the greatest number does imply a contradiction. For the sum of all numbers would have to be the sum of itself and all the other numbers. But such a concept as perfect knowledge is possible since it has no contradiction. Now using a definition of perfection as a simple quality which is purely positive and absolute, that is, without limits, Leibniz tries to prove that all the simple perfections are compatible. To do so, he considers a proposition that it is necessarily true that A and B are incompatible—where A and B refer to any simple perfections of which we have proper knowledge or can have such. Leibniz makes this indirect approach because it is impossible to prove that all simple perfections are compatible, since the number of such is infinite and we would never be able to compare them all. So, Leibniz considers the consequences of the necessar-
ily true proposition that $A$ and $B$ are incompatible. If the proposition is necessarily true, it must be either self-evident from the terms or demonstrable by finding a middle term. But the proposition is not self-evident since Leibniz cannot intuit any incompatibility in the concepts of $A$ and $B$. And neither is the proposition able to be demonstrated. For $A$ and $B$ are simple terms which cannot be resolved into parts; thus no middle term could be found agreeing with $A$ and $B$, since $A$ and $B$ must retain a distinction from any middle term. Since the proposition that it is necessarily true that $A$ and $B$ are incompatible is neither self-evident nor demonstrable, the proposition must be false. Therefore this is true that it is not necessary that $A$ and $B$ are incompatible. Therefore it is possible that $A$ and $B$ are compatible. Since $A$ and $B$ refer to any simple perfections, it is possible that all simple perfections are compatible. Therefore, Leibniz can understand the idea of a being possessing all simple perfections as a possible. Although the compatibility of these simple perfections is not a proper concept of the essence of God, still these perfections represent the possibility of God. For Leibniz does have some idea of these perfections. And he believes that these ideas are objective concepts, that is, representative of what is possible.

Since we have seen Leibniz make an argument for the possibility of God from the compatibility of simple perfections, we may examine Scotus' treatment of the same perfections. The significant use of the pure perfections is in the De Primo Principio
where we have seen Scotus argue that every pure perfection must exist in the highest nature. Scotus proves that by showing that necessary existence in the highest nature is compatible with a pure perfection. In that proof, Scotus is arguing from a definition of a pure perfection conceived from this world. A pure perfection is that which is simply and absolutely better than anything incompatible with it. Somehow Scotus derives the definition from this world.

Perhaps we can construct a re-doing of Anselm's argument which would be in accord with Scotus' treatment of the properties of a pure perfection. The four significant properties are: (1) all pure perfections are mutually compatible; (2) all pure perfections are compatible with infinity; (3) pure perfections are communicable; and (4) pure perfections are irreducibly simple. Leibniz has based one of his proofs of the possibility of God on the simplicity of pure perfections. However, a Scotistic proof of compatibility of the pure perfections would be based on the first two properties. First, we would show that all pure perfections are mutually incompatible. Now since a pure perfection is that which is simply and absolutely better than anything incompatible with it, A as a pure perfection must be better than B which is incompatible with A. But in like manner, B as a pure perfection will be better than A which is incompatible with B. If such mutually contradictory propositions were true, then any given pure perfection would be both better and not better than another pure perfec-
tion. Since that contradiction follows from holding that pure perfections are incompatible, we must hold that every pure perfection must be compatible with every other pure perfection. This consequence preserves the definition of a pure perfection. Having first shown that all pure perfections are compatible, we secondly show that every pure perfection is compatible with infinity. To do this, we would have to presuppose that infinity is a positive perfection or mode of being and that nothing could exceed that which is infinite. Now if a pure perfection were incompatible with infinity, it would be better than infinity. For a pure perfection is better than anything incompatible with it. But since nothing can exceed the infinite, a pure perfection cannot exceed the infinite and therefore must be compatible with infinity.

The compatibility of all pure perfections with each other and with infinity does constitute a proof according to Scotus' principles of the possibility of God. For we have seen Scotus argue from the compositibility of infinity and being for a proof of the possibility of God. Both proofs presuppose that infinity is a positive perfection or mode of being, even though our knowledge of the infinite is by a negative definition: the infinite is that which exceeds the finite not exactly by reason of any finite measure, but in excess of any measure that could be assigned. We may even say that both proofs are required for proving that the infinite being who possesses all perfections is possible.

b) Secondly, Scotus and Leibniz try to establish the pos-
sibility of God by referring to contingent being.

One persuasive reason that Scotus offers for the compossibility of infinity and being is the activity of intellect and will. He argues that just as the intellect can seek something greater than any finite being because the intellect experiences itself as seeking more intelligibility than finite beings exhibit of themselves, so also the will can love something greater than any finite good because finite good does not perfectly satisfy the will. Now if infinite and good were incompatible and so equivalent to non-existence, the will would hate an infinite good just as it naturally hates non-existence. But the will does not hate an infinite good, but even seeks it since the will is not satisfied in any finite good. Therefore this follows, that infinite and good are compossible. Another persuasive reason that Scotus offers is the analogy that if infinity is possible on the level of quantity as potential, then infinity ought to be possible on the more perfect level of being and efficient causality.

Scotus also establishes the possibility of the first efficient cause by a demonstration from creatures. This demonstration of the possibility of the First Nature with a triple primacy in efficiency, finality, and eminence, does not enter explicitly into the re-doing of Anselm's argument. Pietro Migliore, O.F.M. Conv., believes that the re-doing of Anselm's argument transforms
the Anselmian argument into the third Scotistic way. This third way is the argument which establishes the possibility of the most perfect nature. It is very briefly stated by Scotus:

The first conclusion is that some eminent nature is simply first in perfection. This is evident because an essential order exists among essences, for as Aristotle puts it, forms are like numbers. And in such an order an ultimate nature is to be found. This is proved by the five reasons given above for a first being in the order of efficient causality.

Migliore offers three reasons why the re-doing of Anselm’s argument makes the argument into the third way of Scotus for proving the possibility and actuality of God. The first reason is that Scotus re-does the argument in the context of a consideration of the eminence of the First Nature. His second reason is that Scotus argues in the re-doing that the greatest object conceivable without a contradiction has an essential reality, esse quidditativum, because in it the primary object of the intellect, namely being, is verified, and in the highest degree, namely as the most perfect being. His third reason is that Scotus uses the second conclusion of the proof from efficiency in the re-doing in order to show that the most perfect being must actually exist. It would be contradictory to the notion of the most perfect being that it have the imperfection of being caused. Therefore the essence can-


4 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 167, trans. Wolter, Duns Scotus, 48.
not be only in the understanding but must actually exist of itself in order to preserve the status of the essence as a possible. There is nothing in Scotistic principles which would forbid Migliore from connecting the proof of the possibility of the pre-eminent nature with the re-doing of Anselm's argument. However we do not believe that Scotus intended such a connection. Migliore is missing the significance of the context in which Scotus re-does Anselm's argument. The context shows that Scotus is offering persuasive arguments for the compossibility of infinity and being, of infinity and good. Then Scotus argues that in the same way Anselm's argument may be colored. This "same way" seems to be primarily a persuasive argument for the compossibility of being, the primary object of the intellect, and infinity, the highest possible degree of being. Even Scotus' use of the second conclusion of the proof from efficiency does not make the re-doing dependent upon that proof from efficiency. We think that he uses that second conclusion mainly as a comparison showing that just as the infinite being must exist since it is a contradiction to its nature to be caused, so also the first efficient cause must exist because it is a contradiction to its nature to be caused. Scotus then refers to the second conclusion of the proof from efficiency because he does not wish to establish the conclusion again. However he

5 It is clearly seen that the re-doings of Anselm's argument do not depend on the proof from efficiency since the second re-doing establishes existence by arguing that Infinite Being must be able to be intuited.
could have proven his point by holding that it would be an imperfection for the most perfect nature to be caused.

Although Migliore does not seem to be correct in what Scotus actually accomplishes in the re-doing of Anselm's argument, we can say that his interpretation is in accord with the principles of Scotus. There is no contradiction in connecting the proofs of the possibility of the First Nature with the triple primacy with the re-doing of Anselm's argument. We may consider the demonstration of the possibility of the first efficient cause to be a demonstration of the possibility of the infinite being, since Scotus' proof of the infinity of the first being is founded upon the essence of the first being, not on its existence. We may briefly describe the proof from efficiency. Scotus starts with the possibility of something being efficiently caused. This being is either caused by itself or by nothing or by something other than itself. Since it cannot be caused by itself and since nothing causes nothing, the possibility of something being caused requires the possibility of an efficient cause. Either this possible cause is the first possible efficient cause or it is a dependent cause. If it is a dependent cause, then ultimately we must conclude to the first possible efficient cause because of the impossibility and unintelligibility of an infinity of essentially ordered causes. Because this cause is able to produce its effect

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6 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 151-161.
independently, that is, because this cause is first, it is totally uncausable.

Leibniz has an argument similar to Scotus' demonstration of the possibility of the first efficient cause. Leibniz argues from the possibility of contingent being to the possibility of the Necessary Being. We have summarized his reasoning as follows:

If the necessary being is impossible, all contingent beings would be impossible.  
But some contingent being is possible.  
Therefore the necessary being is possible.

The major premise is evident by the inference that contingent beings can find the sufficient reason of their existence only in the necessary being. Although Leibniz phrases the major in terms of possibility, the major is evident only by a proof of the actual existence of the necessary being. The minor premise is known either by an analysis of the concept of a contingent thing or by discovering that the thing actually exists or has existed.

If the possibility of a contingent being is known by an analysis of the concept of being, then Leibniz's argument is similar to his proof for God's existence from the reality of eternal truths. Just as it is sufficient to make an analysis of a concept to show the possibility of contingent being, so also it is sufficient for him to make an analysis of a concept to show the reality of an eternal truth. And just as there is an inference from the

7 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, q. 1-2; II, 162-164.
possibility of contingent being to the possibility of the necessary being, so also there is an inference from the reality of eternal truths to the Supreme Mind which is God. For Leibniz is certain that his mind knows an eternal truth and that the ground of this certainty lies in the ideas themselves, independently of the senses. An ultimate ground of this certainty of eternal truths is required which cannot fail to exist. This ultimate ground of truths is the Mind of God. The proofs from contingency and from eternal truths are basically the same since they both start with the reality involved in the possibles or essences.

If the minor premise which asserts the possibility of contingent being is known, not by an analysis of a concept, but by discovering that something existent is contingent, then the problem must be raised how he knows that this existent is contingent. To answer that problem, we must note that his theory of truth is that every predicate, necessary or contingent, is included in the idea of the subject. In truths of reasoning, the predicate is necessarily and expressly contained in the notion of its subject, and the opposite of the truth is impossible since the opposite would express a contradiction. But in truths of fact, the predicate is contingently and implicitly contained in the notion of its subject, and the opposite of the truth is possible since the opposite would not express a contradiction. Leibniz holds that an existent is contingent because he cannot demonstrate that the opposite of the existent implies a contradiction. Only
God can make the infinite analysis required to examine all the possibles and their relationships to know why a particular essence would contribute to the best possible world.

We have summarized and compared the arguments of Scotus and Leibniz for the possibility of God. They have raised the problem: "Can we know the possibility of God?" We will now discuss this problem by evaluating the arguments which they have offered: a) by a conceptual analysis of the concept of God, and b) by referring to contingent being.

a) Scotus and Leibniz try to prove God's possibility by an analysis of the concept of God. Scotus holds that his argument is demonstrative. We believe that Scotus holds his proof as persuasive because of the distinction he makes between logical and real possibility:

A logical possible is a way of composition formed by the intellect of that whose terms do not include a contradiction. . . But a real possible is that which is accepted from some potency inhering in something. . . .

Because he makes this distinction, his redoing of the ontological argument does not demonstratively show the real possibility, that is, the real composability, of the infinite being. Scotus has rejected any propter quid demonstration of the possibility of the infinite being. A propter quid demonstration would show possibility by finding a necessary connection between the terms infinity

8 Ordinatio, 1, d. 2, p. 2, q. 1-4; II, 282.
and being. This necessary connection would have to be found by an analysis of the terms infinity and being. But Scotus admitted in the context of the re-doing that no propter quid or a priori analysis could find a necessary connection between infinity and being. The re-doing by the analysis of the concept of infinite being only establishes logical possibility.

Although only logical possibility is established, Scotus believes that he has persuasively established the possibility of the infinite being. We must further evaluate his proof. The following incoherences are these: (1) Scotus makes the key assumption that the composibility of infinity and being is to be presumed if incompatibility is not evident. Scotus thinks that the assumption is not unreasonable. However, it appears that the assumption is unreasonable. If only the Divine Being must exist if He is possible, then to assume that He is possible is to make a very great assumption. A very great assumption may very well be unreasonable. (2) The infinite is not positively understood; we have no proper concept of the essence of God. For Scotus defines the infinite as that which exceeds the finite, not exactly by reason of any finite measure, but in excess of any measure that could be assigned. From such a negative definition, it is difficult to determine whether or not actual infinity in being is possible. (3) Scotus argues that finite does not appear to be an attribute coextensive with being. For the attribute finite-infinite is a disjunctive attribute of being. However, Scotus holds
as a universal rule that by positing the less perfect extreme we can conclude that the more perfect extreme is realized in some other being. But since we can only conclude by a reasoning process from some finite being that some infinite being exists, Scotus is assuming what he should prove when he assumes that finite is not an attribute co-extensive with being.

The Scotistic and Leibnizian argument for the compatibility or compossibility of all pure perfections is more difficult to evaluate. Apparently, this argument holds that we so have knowledge of perfections existing in this limited world that we can abstract the perfections from their limited existence. For example, we can have knowledge of the perfection of intellectual knowledge. We know that sense knowledge cannot be a pure perfection, one which can exist unlimited, because sense knowledge is bound up with the concrete, singular, material world. We know that man's intellectual knowledge has the imperfection of going from potency to act. However when man's intellect is in act and knows the essence of something, we know that the intellect's act is not limited by this material world as the act of sense knowledge is limited. After such an analysis of a pure perfection and after having proven that God exists and that pure perfections must be predicated of God, we then make an analogous predication that God is knowledge in the most perfect way. What the Scotistic and Leibnizian argument wants to do, however, is simply to argue from the compossibility of all pure perfections with themselves and
with infinity that God is possible.

We may use Scotus' distinction of logical and real possibility and evaluate the proof of the compatibility of the pure perfections as establishing only logical possibility. However Scotus still thinks such an argument gives a possibility from which existence can be inferred. We can make a closer analysis of the argument. Scotus' argument that the pure perfections are mutually compatible depends upon his definition of a pure perfection as that which is simply and absolutely better than anything incompatible with it. If two pure perfections were mutually incompatible, then each would have to be greater than the other and less than the other. To avoid that contradiction, Scotus holds that the pure perfections are compatible. The argument is valid, but the truth of the conclusion depends upon the truth of the definition of a pure perfection. Must we accept the definition of a pure perfection? It appears that we do not have to accept that the definition is true, that is, that the definition has an objective correlate in the existent world. For the only perfections we know are perfections which are limited, conditioned. How do we know that the abstracted definition of a pure perfection has an objective reference until we have proven that such a pure perfection actually exists? Scotus would object that we only have to prove that the definition of a pure perfection is derived from the real world and that it is without contradiction. The non-contradiction shows possibility, and existence would be inferred from possibility. However in re-
response to the objection of Scotus, we can offer this distinction. If there exists an omnipotent God, and if omnipotence consists in the power to produce whatever does not involve an internal contradiction, then the absence of internal contradiction in the definition of a pure perfection does prove that the pure perfection is possible as such. But if we do not presuppose the existence of divine omnipotence, then the absence of internal contradiction in the definition of a pure perfection proves no more than the coherence of an object of thought. 9

There is another weakness in both Scotus' and Leibniz's proofs that a pure perfection is compatible with infinity. The infinite is defined negatively, by reference to finite being. We have no proper concept of the essence of what would be actually infinite. With our concept of infinity we could only guess as to the possibility of the infinite being, or as to the possibility of the pure perfection, infinite knowledge.

b) Scotus and Leibniz try to prove God's possibility by referring to contingent being. These arguments are difficult to evaluate.

The persuasive argument of Scotus from the activity of the intellect and will does not appear to be fallacious. For he argues that the intellect seeks more intelligibility than finite

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being gives and that the will seeks more good than finite being
can give. By saying that the intellect seeks to understand more
than finite beings, Scotus may mean that a finite, caused being is
not intelligible of itself but requires its correlative, an un-
caused cause, which makes the caused being intelligible. However
we do not think that Scotus means that; rather Scotus means that
the intellect and will are seeking their ends in infinite truth
and goodness. But if Scotus means that the intellect and will have
a natural desire for the infinite truth and good, there seems to
be an inconsistency in his thought, since the desire to live for-
ever is similar to the desire for the infinite good. For Scotus
argues that an argument from natural desire begs the question:

If the argument is based on the notion of natural desire taken
in an exact and proper sense, and a natural desire in this
sense is not an elicited act but merely an inclination of na-
ture towards something, then it is clear that the existence of
such a natural desire for anything can be proved only if we
prove first that the nature in question is able to have such
a thing. To argue the other way round, therefore, is begging
the question. Or if natural desire is taken in a less proper
sense, viz. as an act elicited in conformity with the natural
inclination, we are still unable to prove that any elicited
desire is natural in this sense without first proving the
existence of a natural desire in the proper sense of the
term.10

We would first have to prove according to Scotus that the infinite
being exists and is related to man as the ultimate final cause.

Then he says that we know that man's desire for the infinite good

10 Joannis Duns Scoti: Opera Omnia, ed. Vives, Lib. IV
Sententiarum, XLIII, q. 2; XX, 63b.
is a natural desire. So Scotus thinks that every argument based on natural desire is inconclusive. We do not see how we can reconcile the proof of the compossibility of infinity and being with the rejection of any proof of immortality from natural desire. There does not seem to be any point in calling the proof persuasive of compossibility and also inconclusive of compossibility.

Scotus offers another persuasive argument: an analogy that if infinity is possible in quantity, then infinity is possible in being and efficient causality. The analogy seems weak. The infinity in the division of quantity is never actual, but only potential. However, Scotus asserts in the analogy that just as infinity is not opposed to quantity potentially, so neither is infinity opposed to being and efficient causality in an actual way. Because it is possible, that is, not contradictory, to have an actually infinite number of effects realized successively, for example, in an eternal motion, Scotus can conclude that the infinite cause of these effects is possible. Now if there exists an omnipotent God, and if omnipotence consists in the power to produce whatever does not involve an internal contradiction, then the absence of internal contradiction in the idea of an infinite number of successive effects does prove that the infinity in effects is possible. Therefore Scotus can conclude that the proper cause of these effects is possible. But if we do not presuppose the existence of divine omnipotence, then the absence of internal contradiction in the idea of an infinity in successive effects proves no more than the coher-
ence of an object of thought. Therefore the real possibility of God is not established.

The argument of Scotus for the first possible efficient cause appears to be valid. The reason that Scotus proves the possibility of the First Nature is that Scotus starts with the possibility of something being caused. Scotus does so in order to have a necessary premise about an essence or possible which does not consider the essence as contingently existing. Scotus believes that it is necessary that a man is possible because there is no contradiction in the quiddity of man, that it is necessary that a man is possible because the possible being has its possibility from its own quiddity. We have to disagree with this reason of Scotus. For if we do not presuppose the existence of divine omnipotence, then the absence of internal contradiction in the quiddity of man proves no more than the coherence of an object of thought. It is only necessary that man can be if God exists. However, we are able to know another way that it is necessary that a man can be. If we know that a man exists, then while we know this, it is necessarily true that a man exists. Similarly, while we know that this man exists, it is necessarily true that this man is able to exist, i.e., that he is possible. Scotus could have found a necessary premise about a contingent existent, but he did not find such a premise. He thought he had found a necessary premise about the possibility of something being caused, but his presuppositions for necessity were weak. However we have found a way to support
his premise that it is necessarily true that something is possible. For while we know that a man exists or that something is being caused, it is necessarily true that something can be caused. Thus we may start with the apprehension of real possibility without beginning with the existent as existent. Therefore, because of the impossibility and unintelligibility of an infinity of essentially ordered causes, the real possibility of something being caused requires the real possibility of the first uncausable efficient cause. Therefore we can demonstrate the possibility of God.

Leibniz's proof of the possibility of the Necessary Being appears to be fallacious. For he argues:

If the necessary being is impossible, all contingent beings would be impossible.
But some contingent being is possible.
Therefore the necessary being is possible.

The major premise is evident only by proving that the actual existence of contingent beings depends upon the existence of the Necessary Being. The weakness of the argument is that the actual existence of God is implied in the major; therefore, of course, the conclusion follows that God is possible. And so the conclusion proves less than the major premise assumes for its proof in Leibniz's treatment. There is another weakness to the argument. This weakness is Leibniz's notion of contingency. He holds that an existent limited being is contingent because his knowledge finds no contradiction in the terms in predicing non-existence of a limited essence. Leibniz makes contingency more a fact of my knowledge of
being; the question could very well be asked whether or not beings must correspond to my knowledge.

Leibniz's proof of that conditional syllogism is fallacious. But his syllogism can be proven by Scotus without fallacy. For the minor premise that some contingent being is possible can be known from actual experience of some existent being which perishes, but not from an analysis of the concept of a being. Then we would know that some contingent being was possible. Now it would be a requisite condition of the real possibility of some contingent being that some necessary being be really possible. For if something can be caused, something must be able to cause that being; and because of the impossibility of an infinite series of essentially ordered causes, some first cause must be possible. That is what the major premise of Leibniz can assert in terms of impossibility: if the necessary being is impossible, the contingent being is possible. The syllogism of Leibniz can be understood as simply casting Scotus' argument into a conditional syllogism.

We have examined and evaluated the arguments of Scotus and Leibniz for the possibility of God. A key point in their arguments is the distinction between the real or possible being and existent being. Scotus distinguishes between logical possibility and real possibility, but Leibniz holds these two possibilities are of equal strength in an argument. But Scotus does not attribute equal strength and holds that an argument from the really possible as known from an existent can demonstrate the real possibil-
ity of God. He holds the arguments from logical possibility to be only persuasive and the argument from the activity of the intellect and will as seeking the infinite good as persuasive. The strongest argument we have accepted for God's possibility is our interpretation of Scotus' proof from efficiency. We will now discuss and evaluate the arguments establishing God's existence from His possibility.

2) **Inference from the Possibility of God to His Actual Existence**

Scotus argues from the possibility of the first uncausable efficient cause to its actual existence, and he argues from the compossibility of infinity and being that the infinite being actually exists. With regard to the first efficient cause, he argues that anything, to whose nature it is contradictory to receive existence from something else, exists of itself, if it is able to exist at all. Since it is contradictory for the first uncausable efficient cause to be caused by receiving existence from another, the first possible efficient cause must exist of itself since it was proven to be a real possible which guarantees the real possibility of something being able to be caused. With regard to the compossible infinite being, Scotus has two arguments. First, he argues that it is contradictory to the notion of infinite being that it be caused by another to exist. Therefore, the compossible infinite being must have actual existence in order to preserve its status as a possible. Scotus' second argument is that if the infi-
nite being did not actually exist, it would not be able to be intuited; but then its non-existence would contradict the essential reality of the possible which ought to be able to be intuited. Since the possible reality of the infinite being cannot be contradicted, the infinite being must actually exist.

In making the transition from possibility to actual existence, Scotus remarks that to conceive a thing as existing does not mean that that thing is conceived to a greater extent. But because a possible which does exist is greater than anything else which is solely in the intellect, what exists in reality is conceivably greater than what exists only in the intellect.

Leibniz also argues that if God, the being possessing all perfections, is possible, He must exist. For existence is a perfection; hence the being possessing all perfections, whose possibility was established in the a priori proof of the compatibility of all pure perfections, must possess the perfection of existence. Leibniz's basic criterion for judging whether or not existence is a perfection is that existence is a perfection if it increases the reality of the thing conceived. Now he affirms that a thing conceived as existing has more reality than the same thing conceived as possible.

In the demonstration from contingency which is to show the possibility of the necessary being, it is evident to Leibniz that the possibility or essence of the necessary being means that it necessarily does exist of itself.
The principle that we will use to evaluate the arguments for the existence of God is that His existence can be known only in connection with man's intellectual and sensible knowledge of the existent world. Therefore, the only valid argument is Scotus' demonstration of the possibility and actuality of the first efficient cause. For he started with the real possibility of something being caused as experienced from the changeable, causable existent world. All the other arguments are invalid since they assume possibility because impossibility is not evident. Such possibility is only logical and proves only the coherence of an object of thought. No existence can be inferred from logical possibility.

There is one objection which might be raised against our position. The objector would say that, once the world of existence is left and we enter the realm of the possible (essences which can be), we must remain in the possible world. Our answer is a distinction: if we enter the world of logical possibility, then we cannot infer existence; but if we know real possibility through our experience of what actually is, then we can infer the existence of that which necessarily guarantees that real possibility. If the objector says that real possibility means nothing, then we must simply disagree. It is meaningful and it means more than simply the absence of internal contradiction to say that the existent world is possible, since it does actually exist. What actually is, can be. The essence which exists is an essence which can
We wish to make clear that our emphasis on the reality of possibility or essence does not mean that we treat existence as a consequence of essence. We agree with Scotus that a possible which exists is greater than anything else which is solely in the intellect. And we agree with Leibniz that the existent thing has more reality than the same thing conceived as only possible. We are not saying that existence is to be conceived. Existence in this world is known by the judgment intellectually, not as a concept. It might seem that we treat existence as a consequent of essence when we infer that God exists because we know His possibility. We are not saying that His existence flows from His essence. Rather we are saying that the only way that God can be really possible is that He necessarily exists of Himself. His essence is His existence.

We have accomplished our task of describing, comparing, and evaluating the attitude of Duns Scotus and Leibniz toward the ontological argument. Originally, the thesis was planned to be only a description and comparison; however, the opportunity has been taken to discuss the philosophical problem which Scotus and Leibniz have raised: "Can we know the possibility of God? And if so, can we infer His existence from His possibility?" In their ontological arguments, Scotus and Leibniz are aware that they are arguing from the concept of God to the existence of God. They have carefully tried to justify the reality of the concept of God.
and the validity of the inference from possibility to actual existence. The arguments most difficult to reject were: the argument of Scotus for the real composibility of all pure perfections, and the argument from the striving of the will for the Infinite Good.

The only argument which we have accepted as proving God's possibility is Scotus' *a posteriori* demonstration from efficiency.
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B. ARTICLES


The thesis submitted by William Martin O'Meara has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

May 21, 1965

Signature of Adviser