GOD, POSSIBILITY, AND KANT

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In one of his precritical works, Kant defends, as "the only possible" way of demonstrating the existence of God, an argument from the nature of possibility. Whereas Leibniz had argued that possibilities must be *thought* by God in order to obtain the ontological standing that they need, Kant argued that at least the most fundamental possibilities must be *exemplified* in God. Here Kant's argument is critically examined in comparison with its Leibnizian predecessor, and it is suggested that an argument combining the strengths of both of them has much to be said for it

It is not as widely recognized as it should be that much of the discussion of arguments for the existence of God in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, including much of the criticism of the "ontological" and "physico-theological" arguments, is drawn from an earlier work of Kant's, *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God*,[1] in which he endorsed a metaphysical argument for theism—a different argument. That "precritical" argument is not successful as it stands, but I think it will still repay philosophical attention. It is the main subject of the present paper.

I. Strategies of Theistic Argument

Kant's precritical strategy of theistic proof is based on an idea that remained important to him: the idea of God as an *ens realissimum*, a most real being, possessing attributes or perfections that are archetypes of the less perfect attributes of finite things. His proof belongs to the same historic family as the fourth of St. Thomas Aquinas's famous "Five Ways" of proving the existence of God, which "is taken," as Aquinas says, "from the degrees that are found in things." Since "there is found in things something more and less good and true and noble," Thomas claims that there must be, as a standard of comparison, "something that is truest and best and noblest, and consequently is maximally a being; for those things that are maximally true are maximally beings."[2] How do finite things depend on the divine archetype? Aquinas conceives of the dependence as causal. The Fourth Way concludes as follows:

> But what is called maximally such in any kind is the cause of all that are of that kind, as fire, which is maximally hot, is the cause of all hot

> things [being hot] ... Therefore there is something that is the cause of being to all beings, and of goodness and of whatever perfection; and this we call God.[3]

This way of arguing is based on the idea, prominent in both Aristotelian and Platonic traditions, that like is caused by like. In some cases, at least, as in the Aristotelian example of fire causing heat, this idea appeals to common sense. Things that are very hot seem to cause heat in other things, though generally not as high a degree of heat as they themselves possessed to begin with. Similarly, the reasoning goes, it is by possessing the maximal degree of every perfection that God can cause the more limited perfections of other things.

This view of the causal dependence of finite perfections on the divine perfection has not altogether vanished from Kant's thought,[4] but he did not emphasize it as a basis of theistic argument. This reflects the declining prestige of the like-causes-like principle in modern philosophy. In the "only possible argument" to support a metaphysical proof of theism in Kant's precritical period, it is the possibility rather than the actual existence of the qualities of finite things that is explained by the corresponding perfections in the divine nature, and the argument is not in the ordinary sense a causal one.

Though not causal, Kant's argument is still explanatory, justifying theism on the basis of an explanation it makes possible. It is very important to metaphysics that not all explanations are causal, and metaphysical theories can be justified by the value of their noncausal explanations. In many metaphysical theories what is explained is not the causation but the constitution of certain facts. Kant saw the only possible basis for theistic proof in an explanation of what facts about possibility can consist in, given that they are commonly facts about things that do not exist.

Among arguments for the existence of God, those based on theistic explanations of the nature of possibility are not as well known as they deserve to be, but Kant was presumably familiar with the one found in Leibniz's *Monadology*:

> In God is not only the source of existences, but also that of essences, insofar as they are real, or of what is real in possibility. That's 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.[5]

Leibniz believed, as many philosophers do today, that there are necessary truths about possibilities that are not actual, which could and would have been true even if no contingent beings (such as we are) ever existed. Leibniz also held that all truths must be ontologically grounded in facts about concrete existing particulars. But facts that would still obtain if no contingent beings ever existed cannot depend on contingent beings for their ontological grounding; for instance, they cannot depend on thoughts in merely human minds. Leibniz concluded that some substance must exist necessarily that could ground the eternal truths in the possible case in

which no contingent beings would have existed. So "if there is a reality in the Essences or possibilities, or indeed in the eternal truths, that reality must be founded in something existing and Actual; and consequently in the Existence of the necessary Being."[6]

Leibniz held that the only possible ontological basis for the whole system of necessary truths about possibilities would be in the mind of a being that understood all of them in all their relations with each other. We may call such a being *modally omniscient*. Leibniz inferred that there must necessarily exist a modally omniscient being to think all the eternal truths and the ideas that ground them. Elsewhere I have discussed in some detail Leibniz's reasons for thinking that a single individually necessary and modally omniscient being would be required to ground the reality of possibilities, and that this metaphysical task cannot be parceled out among a plurality of individually less impressive beings.[7]

In the present paper I will discuss those reasons much more briefly, and not until after we have examined Kant's argument. For the present, suffice it to say that on these points I find Leibniz's reasons persuasive, though not indisputably conclusive.

The most striking difference between this Leibnizian argument and the argument of Kant's *Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* is that what Leibniz's argument requires God to do to ground the possibilities and the eternal truths is to *think* them, whereas Kant's argument requires God to *exemplify* possibilities—not all possibilities, but the most fundamental qualitative possibilities. Kant's argument is that in order for possibilities to have their "material" content, the primitive positive qualities involved in that content must actually be possessed by some being; he is emphatic that actual existence of something possessing them is required. Not that all qualities that could possibly be exemplified must be actually exemplified. It is enough if the most fundamental qualities are exemplified; the other possible qualities can be constructed from them. Kant held that any hypothesis that would take away the material of possibility thereby renders itself impossible, and concluded that the most fundamental positive qualities are necessarily exemplified.

The role this argument assigns to God is that of necessarily existing and necessarily exemplifying the most primitive and purely positive qualities; it is the role of an *ens realissimum*. Leibniz had believed that God does necessarily possess those qualities, and that all qualities of finite beings are constructed from the divine qualities, mainly by limitation. To my knowledge, however, Leibniz did not use this thesis to argue as Kant did for the necessary existence of God as a ground of possibilities, using instead, for that purpose, a thesis about God's thinking all the possibilities.

I can now state the central question of the present paper: Was the precritical Kant right in holding that the ontological grounding of possibility requires *actual exemplification* of the most fundamental qualitative possibilties? Or would it be enough for these (and other possibilities to be *thought* by a modally omniscient being? I think there is something important to be said for the requirement of actual exemplification, but it will take some work to develop the argument for it.

II. The Critical and the Precritical

Some may wonder whether it is worth spending time and energy on Kant's early, precritical argument for theism, given that Kant himself, in his later, critical period, famously rejected all theoretical proofs of theism, presumably including his own earlier proof. Why should we bother with a proof whose author later found a fallacy in it? In fact it is hard to find specific criticisms of Kant's own earlier theistic proof in his critical works. Three theistic arguments are subjected to withering criticism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Kant's own argument is not one of them; this should not surprise us, since some of these criticisms of metaphysical arguments for theism are borrowed from his earlier work, in which they justified preferring his "only possible argument" for theism to the others.

Kant has a bit to say about his earlier proof in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, chiefly in the course of explaining why the idea of an *ens realissimum* is an inescapable idea of reason. The idea of such a being is necessary, he still thinks, to explain the matter of possibility. However, he does now say that for this purpose "reason does not presuppose the existence of a being conforming to the ideal, but only the idea of such a being."[8] Does this mean he has changed his mind and now thinks that the most basic realities need not be exemplified, but only thought in an "idea"? I think not.

The "idea" of which Kant speaks in this passage of the *Critique* is not God's actual thinking of all the matter of possibility, but only our own rather formal and abstract idea of an *ens realissimum*. We should not misread Kant's fundamentally epistemological claim in the *Critique* as a metaphysical claim about the grounds of possibility. We may get a fuller view of Kant's "critical" attitude toward his earlier "only possible argument" for theism from his *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, dating from shortly after the publication of his first *Critique*. Here it is clear that Kant is certainly not prepared to reject as false the claim that God must exemplify the most basic realities in order to ground their possibility. That claim is still embraced, but subject to an epistemological reservation. In the *Lectures* Kant says that

> we have no concept of real possibility except through existence, and in the case of every possibility which we think *realiter* we always presuppose some existence; if not the actuality of the thing itself, then at least an actuality in general which contains the data for everything possible.[9]

This may look like Kant's precritical position, but it is not a full-blooded metaphysical affirmation; it is about our concepts of things rather than about the things themselves. Similarly Kant says in the *Lectures*, about his earlier argument, that "even this proof is not apodictically certain; for it cannot establish the objective necessity of an original being, but establishes only the subjective necessity of assuming such a being."[10] That is the extent to which his precritical theistic argument is repudiated in Kant's critical philosophy: it shows that we must (subjectively) think of things as related to an *ens realissimum*, but does not prove (at least not apodictically) that such a being exists in objective fact.

We see here the extreme demandingness of the epistemological standards that Kant's critical philosophy would impose on metaphysical reasoning. If we cannot conceive of anything being possible except in relation to something existent, and we are sure that some things are possible, that would seem to *me* a good reason for believing in the relevant existence. I grant that this reason yields no *apodictic* proof, for it could be that that there is some other true ground of possibility but we have been unable to conceive of it. But I do not see how we can proceed in philosophy without allowing our beliefs to be guided by the only ways in which we can conceive of things that we believe being true. I don't think that Kant in fact manages to avoid relying on such reasons in his critical philosophy; perhaps he is able for the most part to confine his reliance on them to his reasoning about the structure and necessary conditions internal to our own experience, but it is not clear to me that such reasoning should be trusted even there if it is not trustworthy about things in general. In any event, Kant's epistemological standards are not mine. In relation to the epistemological standards that *I* think appropriate for forming metaphysical beliefs, I would have to say that the mature Kant still thought very well of his earlier basis for theistic proof. It does not follow, of course, that *I* should think his argument a good one. So let us examine it in some detail.

III. Form and Matter of Possibility

The argument begins with a distinction of great interest:

> A triangle that has a right angle is possible in itself. The triangle as well as the right angle are the data or the material in this possible; whereas the agreement of the one with the other according to the principle of contradiction is the formal [constituent] of the possibility. I shall also call this latter the logical in the possibility, because the comparison of the predicates with their subjects according to the rule of truth is nothing but a logical relation. The something, or what stands in this agreement, will sometimes be called the real [constituent] of the possibility.[11]

This distinction between a formal or logical constituent and a material or real constituent of possibility remained important to Kant throughout his career. It is close kin to the first *Critique's* distinction between logical and real possibility.

Distinctions between the formal and the material are subtle and can be contextually relative. Shape is matter for the logical form of consistency, but is itself, I would argue, a geometrical form that requires matter of its own. Kant's concern in this context, in any event, is with logical form. The following example of logical form may help us to understand the relation between form and matter, and the need for material content. `For some $x$, $Fx$ and $Gx$' and `For some x, Kx and Lx' have the same logical form. Moreover, if the predicate letters are merely schematic, the one formula does not express or mean anything different from the other. They have, in that case, no material, but only formal, content.

One is tempted to add that they express no proposition at all—if the predicate letters are merely schematic. This would be a bold illustration of the point that form without content is empty. Perhaps it is too bold, however. For one *could* treat both formulas as equivalent to the second order formula `For some *x* and for some *F* and *G*, *Fx* and *Gx*,' which is just as formal and empty of material content, but can be taken as expressing a proposition—the proposition, namely, that there is something that has a predicate and has a predicate (that may or may not be different from the first one). In terms of Kant's later "critical" philosophy, this is a proposition employing the pure, nonempirical category of subsistence and inherence. It is a formally consistent, "logically possible," proposition of the sort that Kant allows we can *think* even about empirically inaccessible things in themselves. But it does not express what Kant calls a "real possibility" unless some material content is possible for the predicates. His "only possible argument" is concerned with *real* possibility.

The distinction between formal and material constituents of possibility is important to that argument for at least two reasons. The first is that it is specifically, and I think only, with respect to the material constituents of possibility that Kant argues that they would be lacking if the most fundamental of them were not exemplified an existent being, and in fact in God. Or perhaps the point is that to consider any constituent of possibility with regard to its ontological grounding is to consider it as material for possibility, so that even the question whether there is any such property at all as consistency, as opposed to the question whether *this* proposition is consistent rather than inconsistent, is about the material rather than the formal requirements of possibility. In any event I think Kant's argument can be made more vividly plausible for the most unequivocally material or qualitative constituents.

The second reason for the importance of the distinction in Kant's argument is that it structures his account of how there can be a necessary being, a being that exists necessarily. A necessary being is one whose nonexistence is impossible; and impossibility of nonexistence, Kant thought, could not be grounded in the formal requirements of possibility. The most important formal requirement of possibility (in fact the only one Kant mentions as such) is logical consistency. And he believed that all hypotheses of nonexistence pass the test of merely logical consistency. He defends this belief in *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* on the same grounds as in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.[12]

Hypotheses of nonexistence may still fail to satisfy *material* requirements of possibility, however. "Possibility falls away, not only if an inner contradiction is to be met with, as the logical [constituent] of impossibility, but also if no material, no datum, is there to be thought." Suppose there is something on whose actual existence the material for all possibility depends, as Kant argues is the case. Then "all possibility falls away entirely" if that being fails to exist. Kant claims that it follows that the nonexistence of that being is impossible, for "that through which all possibility altogether is annulled is absolutely impossible."[13]

For the moment I am interested in this, not as an argument for the existence of such a being, but as an explanation of *how* the nonexistence of a

being could be absolutely impossible even if it is not logically inconsistent. Early and late Kant held that nonexistence is never logically inconsistent, and appealed to this point in criticizing the ontological argument for theism. Some have taken his arguments on these points as showing that the nonexistence of a being cannot be absolutely (or metaphysically) impossible, and a narrow focus on certain texts[14] might lead us to suppose that was Kant's conclusion too. In a larger view that interpretation is hard to sustain, however. Even in his critical period he professed belief in God, on practical grounds, and thought of God as a necessary being.[15]

And he still accepted, in a way, his earlier explanation of how God's existence could be necessary. In his lectures on philosophical theology in the 1780's he held that we have a "rational concept of real necessity ... where a thing is *eo ipso* necessary if its nonexistence would remove all possibility." He went on to say that on this basis "only the subjective necessity of such a being is...established, i.e. that our speculative reason sees itself necessitated to presuppose this being if it wants to have insight into *why* something is possible, but the objective necessity of such a being can by no means be demonstrated in this matter."[16] But I take "demonstrated" (*demonstriret*) to be the key word in this qualification, and "objective" to have an epistemological rather than metaphysical sense; for Kant's earlier account here is presented in a manner that seems to indicate that he still thought that so far as we can see, the existence of God might be metaphysically necessary in this way.

IV. Kant's Argument and Leibniz's

It will be difficult to take this explanation seriously if we haven't at least an idea of how the nonexistence of God, or of some other being, might remove all possibility. In relation to Kant's account of the matter, we want some reason why the ontological grounding of possibility would require actual exemplification of the most fundamental qualitative possibilties. Kant's argument is not maximally helpful on this point. He begins by arguing that "the internal possibility of all things presupposes some existence or other." This might be grounded, as Leibniz would ground it, by appealing to the principle that all facts, even about possibility, must be grounded in existing things; but Kant does not make this appeal. Instead he reasons: "to say `There exists nothing' means the same as `There is nothing at all'; and it is obviously self-contradictory to add, in spite of this, that there is something possible."[17] This reasoning already tends toward the conclusion that whatever is possible must in some way be something that actually exists, but it also seems to be a verbal trick. It rests on the assumption, embraced by many philosophers today, that 'there is' always implies existence; but why should a philosopher who accepts that assumption express possibility claims in the form `There is something possible' rather than in the form `It is possible that ...', which seems more neutral ontologically?

Kant's reason for his view is somewhat better articulated when he comes to defend the more specific thesis that "all possibility is given in something actual, either in it as a determination or through it as a consequence."[18] He thinks that the most fundamental qualitative possibilities

must be given as "determinations"—that is, properties—*of* something existent; but other possibilities can be given as "consequences" of the more fundamental ones.[19] Kant's motive for allowing the second alternative is that he does not want to be committed to ascribing all possible qualitative properties to God, because he thinks some of them are dynamically if not logically incompatible with each other.[20] But he insists that the most fundamental "material" of possibility must actually exist, or must be given as a "determination" or property of something actually existing.

Kant's example of a fundamental property in making his argument at this juncture is extension:[21]

> Given that you cannot analyze the concept of extension any further into simpler data ... as you must necessarily come anyway in the end to something whose possibility cannot be analyzed, then the question here is whether space and extension are empty words or whether they denote [*bezeichnen*] something. ... If space does not exist, or is not at least given as a consequence through something existing, then the word 'space' means [*bedeutet*] nothing at all.[22]

Here Kant seems to be assuming that in order to be meaningful, or at least in order to have material content, a concept must either denote something existing or else result in some way from existing things. But why should we assume that? Why can't concepts have meaning, and material content, by representing possible things that do not exist at all? That is the central question before us, and Kant offers here no noncircular argument to settle it.

We have uncovered thus far no reason to prefer Kant's argument, or Kant's way of grounding possibilities in God, to Leibniz's. Neither will we find any in the next phase of Kant's argument. It is not enough, for Kant's purposes, to argue that the most fundamental qualitative or "material" possibilities must be grounded in existing things as "determinations" or properties of those things. He must argue further that they must all be thus grounded in one and the same thing, and that the latter must exist necessarily; for it is such a single necessary being that is to be identified with God.

Kant must therefore exclude any alternative grounding of possibilities in a plurality of existing beings—some of the fundamental qualities being present as determinations in one of those beings, and others in others, but not all in any one existing being. There are two cases to be considered in this alternative hypothesis. It might be supposed that all of the plurality of beings exist necessarily, and we will come to that case; but the most interesting part of Kant's argument concerns the case in which some or all of them exist contingently. About this latter case Kant assumes that if one of those contingent beings failed to exist, the possibilities grounded in that being would also be lost; and he reasons as follows.

> For if one so conceives of internal possibility, then, that some can be annulled, yet in such a way that there still remains what is also given as thinkable through the other parts [of the plurality], then one must represent to oneself that it is possible in itself for internal possibility to be negated or annulled. But it is totally unthinkable and contradic-

> tory for something to be nothing, and this is as much as to say: to annul an inner possibility is to root out everything thinkable.[23]

The most important point about this reasoning is that Kant is arguing that whatever would annul *any* possibility is impossible. Kant's usual formula for necessary existence, as I have quoted it from both precritical and critical works, is that a thing's nonexistence is really, though not logically, necessary if its nonexistence would remove *all* possibility. There might seem to be an obvious advantage in relying only on this thesis rather than on the more sweeping premise that a thing's existence is necessary if its nonexistence would remove *any* possibility; but in truth I do not see how Kant's theistic argument can avoid the latter assumption, for reasons connected with the hypothesis to be refuted here, of possibilities grounded in a plurality of contingent beings. For your existence or mine would surely be enough to give a toehold in reality (though a precariously contingent one) to the possibility of those properties that we exemplify. So God's nonexistence would not take away *all* possibility unless it excluded the existence of beings like us; and while the dependence of finite existence on God is a theistic thesis, it is not a thesis to be assumed in a theistic argument like Kant's.

So Kant must hold that nothing is possible that would remove *any* possibility. In terms familiar to modal logicians today, he must hold that whatever is possible is necessarily possible. And he did hold that. The justification that Kant offers for this thesis is not convincing. It is that "it is totally unthinkable and contradictory for something to be nothing, and this is as much as to say: to annul an inner possibility is to root out everything thinkable."[24] But it is neither unthinkable nor contradictory for something that would otherwise be something to be nothing, if by being something and being nothing we mean existing and not existing, respectively; and the claim that it is impossible where being something and being nothing are being possible and not being possible, respectively, is just the thesis that is to be proved: that what is possible is necessarily possible. It is not clear that Kant has a noncircular argument for this thesis, but perhaps he can get away without an argument for it, taking it as a starting point. It is not an altogether uncontroversial thesis, but it is widely accepted and sufficiently plausible that we will be lucky if our metaphysical arguments never have starting points shakier than that.

This, however, does not complete the argument against the pluralistic alternative to theism for the ontological grounding of possibilities. So far as I can see, Kant has assumed without argument that if a possibility is grounded in a being that exists contingently, it is only contingently grounded and could fail to have a ground. This is plausible, but we might wonder how we know it is not a necessary truth that if one of the contingent grounders were to fail to exist, its grounding role would be taken up by some other individually contingent being.

More important, we have yet to deal with the alternative in which the plurality of grounding beings all exist necessarily, which would seem to provide enough assurance against the loss of any of the possibilities. Kant gives an argument that it is impossible for several things to be absolutely necessary, but I think it is not compatible with the argument we have just

examined against a plurality of contingent beings. Kant argues that if *B* is a necessary being, then its fundamental qualities are necessarily given in itself, and depend on no other ground for their possibility; but if *A* is also a necessary being, then "by virtue of the definition" *B's* possibility must depend on *A*. This last point might follow if a necessary being is by definition one whose nonexistence would entail the annulment of *all* possibility, but we have just seen that the argument against a plurality of contingent grounders requires the assumption that a thing's existence is necessary if its nonexistence would remove *any* possibility. The latter assumption is plausible too; but if it is correct, then *A* and *B* can both be necessary beings without grounding each other's possibility, so long as there is *some* possibility grounded by each.

For these reasons I think Kant's argument that all possibilities must be grounded in one and the same existing being is not a success. Leibniz seems to me to have done somewhat better on this point. Leibniz grounds his argument, more explicitly than Kant grounds his, in the general principle that every fact or truth must be grounded in things that exist. This applies quite emphatically to necessary as well as contingent truths. What the existing thing provides for the necessary truths is not exactly the reason why they are true rather than false, but is rather what we may call *ontological standing*, a foothold in reality. The possibility of the fundamental qualities that Kant calls realities is central to the system of necessary truths for Leibniz, but it by no means exhausts the necessary facts that need ontological grounding on his account. These fundamental possibilities give rise to indefinitely many necessary truths about their possible relations, modifications, and exemplifications; and each of those necessary truths requires an ontological grounding.

It might be thought that as long as all the basic qualitative possibilities are ontologically grounded, that is enough grounding for the whole family of necessary truths arising from them, and therefore that if each of the basic possibilities is individually grounded in a different existing being, without any one existing being in which all of them are grounded, that would ground the whole system; but that will not satisfy Leibniz. He argues as follows:

> The cause why the ... proposition [that a circle is larger in area than a square of the same perimeter] is true is not in the nature of the circle alone nor in the nature of the square alone, but also in other natures that enter into it—for instance, of the equal and of the perimeter. The proximate cause of one thing is single. And its cause must be in some [thing] [*in aliqua*]. Therefore [it must be] in that in which the nature of the circle, the square, and the others is; that is, in the subject of ideas, or God.[25]

The indicated necessary truth about a relation between the circle and the square is single enough to require a single "proximate cause," according to Leibniz. That single cause, I take it, will be a relation between the natures of the circle and the square. That relation, Leibniz argues, must be ontologically grounded in some one existing thing, if the necessary truth is to have

the ontological grounding it needs; and because the relation depends on the natures of circle, square, equality, and perimeter, and so forth, it can be grounded only in something in which all those natures are represented so as to be grounded too. And since in general, as he notes, "a plurality of truths joined with each other produce new truths,"[26] any two natures or fundamental possibilities will jointly give rise to some necessary truth, which will require for its ontological grounding that both natures be represented and grounded in some one existing thing. Thus, taking all the interrelations into account, all the natures must be grounded in a single existing thing, which Leibniz identifies with God.

The most debatable premise in this argument, I suppose, is that the necessary truth about the circle and the square requires an ontological grounding for the relation that is its "proximate cause," in addition to the ontological grounding for the natures that constitute the terms of the relation. Why is it not enough for the relation to be implicit in the natures of its terms, even if they are represented only in different existing things, so that the relation itself is not represented in anything? I do not know of a knockdown argument at this point, but I do find Leibniz's assumptions and argument plausible. They correspond to the intuition that when we follow out logical connections in our minds, we are riding on rails that have already been laid down somewhere in reality.

It is time to take stock of Kant's precritical argument. It suffers from two deficiencies in comparison with Leibniz's argument. The first is that we have found in it no solid reason to suppose that in order to be ontologically grounded in God's existence the most fundamental possibilities must be exemplified and not just thought by God. The second is that, as I have just argued, Leibniz has more justification for the claim that all the possibilities must be grounded in some *single* existing being, which can be identified with God. Leibniz's justification for this crucial claim, moreover, is one that is not available to Kant. For it depends on the assumption that not only the most fundamental natures, but also all their interrelations and possible modifications, must be ontologically grounded, and concludes that they must have that grounding in God. But neither Leibniz nor Kant will grant that all those interrelations and modifications are *exemplifed* in God, though both will affirm that they are all *thought* by God. This speaks for Leibniz's metaphysical machinery of divine thought, as opposed to Kant's metaphysical machinery of divine exemplification.

There are other points at which both Leibniz's and Kant's arguments could be questioned,[27] but I will not pursue those questions here. Rather than trying here to establish a proof of the existence of God, I wish to employ the rest of this paper in exploring ways in which possibility may be grounded in God. For that purpose we need a reasonably well developed and plausible metaphysical account, but not necessarily a conclusive proof of divine existence.

V. How the Precritical Kant May Have Been Right After All

Despite what I have just said about the superiority of Leibniz's argument for God's *thinking* all possibilities, by comparison with Kant's argument for

God's *exemplifying* all the most fundamental possibilities, I believe that Kant may have been right in holding that the ontological grounding of the material of possibility requires that at least the most fundamental qualitative possibilities be exemplified in God. My reasons for thinking this begin with Leibniz's argument, and thus avoid the deficiencies that I have noted in Kant's own reasoning. It will be obvious that this stage of the argument is mine and not Kant's. In it I assume, as a starting point, that Leibniz is right in holding that the ontological grounding of possibilities depends on their all being thought by God.

This means that all of them must be *represented* in the divine mind. But *how* are they represented? In particular, how are the most fundamental qualitative possibilities represented there? The prime example I have in mind as I consider this question is one that that Kant would not like—namely, qualities of consciousness, such as phenomenal color or the felt quality of a pain—because I believe they are the clearest cases of occurrent, intrinsic qualities known to us.

The nature of mental representation is a very large subject, on which whole books have been written, and are still being written. This is certainly not the place to develop a complete theory of the subject. In a general way we can say that representation involves an appropriate relation between the representation and the content represented. Most attempts at an explanatory account of mental representation involve either a relation of resemblance or a causal relation, and I believe that a relation of one of these types must be involved in mental representation of fundamental qualities.

This is not to propose that representation, or its intentionality, be *reduced* in these cases to resemblance or causation. The representation of possible qualities by a similar quality in my mind involves the thought that there could be other instances resembling this one that is now present in my consciousness. That thought is something in my mind over and above the quality I have in my consciousness that is like what the other instances would be; and also I don't believe (though some do) that that thought is reducible to causal relations.

It may still be the case, however, that mental representation of qualities requires resemblance or a causal relation even if it also requires something more. It may be that the representation requires a matter or content depending on resemblance or causal relation, as well as a representational form that has some other basis. In fact I believe that resemblance or causal relationship is required in some such way for mental representation of fundamental qualities.

It should be emphasized that this is a claim about *fundamental* qualities—by which I mean qualities whose role in the representation and grounding of possibilities is fundamental. If we have representations of an adequate stock of fundamental qualities, it may be possible to construct from them representations, and thus possibilities, of other qualities. I will not try to determine here just which qualities are fundamental in this way, but clearly some are and some are not. A contrasting pair of examples will suffice. Is every shade of *phenomenal color* fundamental? Or can some of them be constructed from others? I am not confident of any construction that would adequately give the content of a shade of phenomenal color

without its actually being present in anyone's consciousness; so God may need to be conscious of every possible shade of phenomenal color. (And why shouldn't an omniscient deity have that consciousness?) With regard to *angularity*, on the other hand, even phenomenal angularity, it seems that a being who has a conscious image of a single angle, and understands how the sides of an angle may in geometrical principle be rotated around the point of origin, has a concept of every possible size of angle, a concept that can ground the possibility of all possible sizes of angle.

The conception of representations as images resembling what they represent is ancient and has never ceased to be influential. It is plausible to suppose that we typically represent structures by means of analogous structures of thought. Here we are concerned with the qualitative rather than the structural aspect of things, but it seems at least desirable to represent qualities too by some resembling image. Sometimes we represent qualities by physical images. The paint dealer represents colors of paint by samples that are supposed to resemble the painted surface in color. But God surely does not rely on anything like paint chips in conceiving of qualities; and in any event physical images are contingent beings that cannot provide the kind of necessary grounding of possibilities that both Leibniz and Kant are after. So the resembling images that particularly concern us here will be *mental* images (and God's mental images, at that). If a *quality* is represented by a resembling mental image, the image will presumably be a quality of consciousness, a quality actually exemplified in some consciousness, a quality actually belonging to that consciousness, or at least to a part or aspect of some state of it. The qualities represented in this way must therefore have some likeness to a quality of consciousness.

This line of thought leads in philosophical theology from a representation thesis like Leibniz's to an exemplification thesis like Kant's. If God's representation of qualities is by resemblance, a version of the qualities must be present in God's thought, as qualities of some aspect of God's consciousness (if that is not too anthropomorphic a way of putting it). But in that case a version of the qualities is actually exemplified in God's consciousness. Representation of qualities by resemblance requires actual exemplification of enough "representative" members of families of resembling qualities.

Qualities are more satisfyingly represented by resemblance, I think, than in any other way. In the case of mental representation we are most apt to think we know "what [a quality] is like" when a resembling image of it is present to our minds. If you believe I have never felt anything like what you are feeling, you will probably think I cannot adequately understand the quality of your experience; I cannot know what it is like.

Still we do represent qualities, even qualities of consciousness, of which we have never had any resembling image in our minds. A congenitally blind person, for example, can have a concept of color, and can even know a lot of facts about experiences of color. By studying the physiology and psychology of perception a person who has never seen can know things about color perception that most sighted people probably do not know. How are particular phenomenal colors represented in the mind of a person who has never seen? How is the congenitally blind person's mental representation

of them connected with the qualities themselves as they occur in vision? The most plausible answer, I think, is that the representation in this case is connected with its object by a *causal* relation. It is doubtless a very complex causal relation, involving the participation of many people in various visual and linguistic events, interacting causally with each other and with visible objects. But without some causal chain, complex as it may be, leading from an actual experience of the color to the blind person's thought, there would be nothing to connect that thought with particular phenomenal colors.

Insofar as we are concerned with qualities of consciousness, there is no clear need for a causal account of God's representing them, since they, or something sufficiently resembling them, can be exemplified in God's consciousness. But we may still need a causal account of how God represents some other types of property, and constitutes their possibility. Powers and dispositions, for instance, can hardly be represented by resemblance by any occurrent quality of consciousness. But God's ideas of powers and dispositions presumably stand in a close enough causal or quasi-causal relation to God's own powers and dispositions to derive from them whatever content they need to represent powers and dispositions as such.

For our argument the crucial point about this way of representing a property by virtue of a causal chain is that it presupposes that the property represented has actually been exemplified in some existing thing; for properties that are only possibly exemplified do not in the relevant way originate causal chains.[28] So if God actually represents a property by virtue of a causal relation to it, the property must exist, actually, in something. And if God so represents the property necessarily, and it is not necessary that anything exists outside of God, then the conclusion is near at hand that the property exists, necessarily, in God.

An alternative way of grounding possibilities in causal properties of an actually existing being would not entail the actual exemplification of the possible properties, but I think there are serious objections to it. According to this alternative, all that is needed to ground the possibility of an occurrent property is a power to produce it, whether the occurrent property is actually instantiated or not. Some might claim that phenomenal blueness, for example, would have been possible even if no sentient being had ever experienced it, provided at least one actual being had the power to experience it under suitable stimulation. On this view, the postulation of an intuitively complete range of metaphysical possibilities will lead to an argument for an omnipotent being (or something close to it) rather than an argument for a conceptually omniscient being.

Divine omnipotence can hardly provide the ontological grounding for possibilities in this way, however, if omnipotence is conceived as an all-purpose power to produce anything metaphysically possible. For the scope of that absolutely general power depends on, and cannot determine, what is metaphysically possible. The content of metaphysical possibilities must come from somewhere else. One might try to solve the problem by thinking of divine omnipotence in a different way, as a bundle of specific powers to produce specific effects, so that the scope of omnipotence might define what is metaphysically possible; but is not obvious that this would yield an acceptable conception of omnipotence.

Even if it does, a more decisive problem remains. Any positive qualitative content that powers have, connected with what they are powers to produce, they get from the qualities of the things or states resulting from them. There would therefore be a vicious circle in supposing that possibilities of qualities can derive their content from a power to produce them, even (I think) if the power is God's. Since this content is the main thing that needs to be grounded in an ontological grounding of a qualitative possibility, we cannot in the most fundamental cases find the ontological grounding of qualitative possibilities in powers to produce the qualities. Such a grounding must already be given if the power is to have the relevant content; and I have suggested reasons for thinking it would have to be given by God's possession of relevant archetypal qualities.

I have not offered a conclusive proof of theological conclusions, but I have presented a rationale that has, I hope, some force to commend a way of seeing the possibility of qualities as ontologically grounded in similar or related qualities exemplified as well as represented in God, in line, at least broadly, with central theses of Kant's precritical argument.[29]

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NOTES

1. Trans. by David Walford, with Ralf Meerbote, in Immanuel Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. This is now the standard English translation of Immanuel Kant, *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes*. I cite this work, as is customary, by volume and page of the Prussian Academy edition of Kant's works, which is given also in the margins of the Cambridge Edition. The work is also available (currently at a reasonable price) under the title, *The One Possible Basis for a Demonstration of the Existence of God*, with a photoreproduction of the German text of the Academy edition (my usual immediate source) and a facing English translation by Gordon Treash (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1994). My translations from this work are my own, but do not diverge widely from Walford's. I normally use Walford's English version of the work's title.

In working on this subject I have been helped by Mark Fisher and Eric Watkins, "Kant on the Material Ground of Possibility: From *The Only Possible Argument* to the *Critique of Pure Reason*," *The Review of Metaphysics*, 52 (1998): 369-95; but my agreements and disagreements with them are not discussed here.

2. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.2, a.3. For the last point Aquinas cites book 2 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, perhaps 993b30 at the end of chapter 1.

3. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q.2, a.3. For the example of heat and fire Aquinas cites book 2 of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, presumably 993b25-26 in chapter 1.

4. See Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, trans. by Allen W. Wood, in Immanuel Kant, *Religion and Rational Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*. Kant says, "We cannot in the least think how a reality could be in an effect without already being in its cause—how beings with understanding could be derived from an original source which is dead and without a faculty of cognition. We do not have the least concept of the way in which one reality could produce other realities without having any similarity to them" (Ak

28:1050). (I cite by the pagination of the German Academy edition, which is given in the margins of the Cambridge edition.) In this text from the critical period, however, Kant does not think this grounds an "apodictic" proof of the divine intelligence, because he allows that among things in themselves, causality might work in ways of which we cannot conceive.

5. Leibniz, *Monadology*, sec. 43.
6. Leibniz, *Monadology*, sec. 44.
7. Robert Merrihew Adams, *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 179-83.
8. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (A577f./B605f.).
9. Ak 28:1036. See note 4 for a full reference to these *Lectures.*
10. Ak 28:1034.
11. Ak 2,77f.
12. Ak 2:78.
13. Ak 2:78-79.
14. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 592-620/ B 620-48; *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*, Ak 28:1031-33.
15. On the divine necessity see, for instance, Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A 639-42/ B 667-70.
16. Ak 28:1036.
17. Ak 2:78.
18. Ak 2:79.
19. What I think Kant *ought* to have meant at this point is that the "consequences" are logically or metaphysically constructed from the more fundamental possibilities; but the text does not make it clear that he did mean that.
20. Ak 2:85-87.
21. Not the happiest example from my point of view, since extension is a geometrical form rather than fully "material" or qualitative; for related argument, see Adams, *Leibniz*, pp. 326-33, especially pp. 332-33.
22. Ak 2:80-81.
23. Ak 2:84. The talk about "parts" here reflects the fact that Kant supposes the plurality of contingently existing substances are conceived as jointly making up a composite necessary being.
24. Ak 2:84.
25. VE (No. 20), p. 67 (Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Vorausedition zur Reihe VI— Philosophische Schriften—in der Ausgabe der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR*, bearbeitet von der Leibniz-Forschungsstelle der Universität Münster. Fascicles 1-9, 1982-1990).
26. VE (No. 20), p. 67.
27. With regard to Leibniz's argument, I have discussed some of them in Adams, *Leibniz*, chapter 7.
28. I believe in fact that nonexistent intentional objects may have causal properties—but only insofar as representations of them have causal properties. So an unexemplified property could not originate a causal chain unless it is actually *represented*. But in that case we still need an explanation of how the property was represented in the first place; and therefore the case lacks relevance in the present context.
29. Most of the material in this paper is drawn from two of the Gifford Lectures on "God and Being" that I delivered at the University of St. Andrews in November 1999. The paper was read to a session of the North American Kant Society at the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association, 28 December 1999. I am grateful to my audiences on those occasions for helpful questions and comments.