



## Value and Reality in the Metaphysics of Spinoza

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## THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

### VALUE AND REALITY IN THE METAPHYSICS OF SPINOZA\*

ONE of the major problems in the study of metaphysics is the relation of value to reality. The question occurs, is value inseparable from reality? Is it prior in nature to reality or is the converse the case? Can it be defined internally, as an attribute of being, or is it ultimately to be defined externally as an independent category of thought which transcends being? My object in this paper will be to show that Spinoza attempts to combine the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions in dealing with this problem, and that this accounts for the equivocal nature of his theory and methods. As any discussion of Spinoza's metaphysics must centre about his conception of God or infinite substance, I propose to begin my analysis with an exposition of the main points in his proofs of the existence of God, and then proceed to show the implications of his thought in relation to the 'perennial' traditions.

In his first proof Spinoza attempts to demonstrate the existence of an infinite substance from the nature of substance, whose essence involves existence.<sup>1</sup> It is important that we stop for a moment to consider the significance of the statement that "the essence of substance involves its existence". Spinoza begins the *Ethics* by defining the Scholastic notion, *causa sui*, as "that whose essence involves existence; or that whose nature cannot be conceived unless existing". In defining *causa sui* in this way, Spinoza broke with the Scholastic and Aristotelian tradition. For the latter *causa sui* meant that which was not caused by another. The Latin term, though stated positively, had an entirely negative significance. The notion arose

\* This article is based on a doctoral dissertation accepted by Yale University in 1932 entitled "The Idea of Value in the Metaphysics of Spinoza".

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics* I 7, 11.

from the thought that finite, contingent things, which required a cause for their existence, must ultimately be produced by something which was not itself caused by anything else. Spinoza, on the contrary, makes his definition entirely positive in significance even though he states it in a negative form.<sup>2</sup> A *causa sui* is not merely that which is not produced by another; it means, positively, that existence is an attribute or perfection of the essence of substance, so that its essence cannot be conceived without including its existence. The reader will easily recognize that this notion is fundamentally the same as that of St. Anselm, who claimed that the attribute of existence is inseparable from the idea of a most perfect being.<sup>3</sup> Spinoza differs from Anselm in that the latter makes existence an essential attribute of the most perfect being, whereas Spinoza maintains that this relation holds for any *causa sui*—though of course he soon tries to show that there is only one such cause. Spinoza, like St. Anselm, has not shown why existence is inseparable from essence in the case of a *causa sui*; he simply asserts dogmatically that such is his definition of anything which is a cause of itself.

The transition from the negative to the positive meaning of *causa sui* is clearly illustrated in the first six propositions of the *Ethics*. Spinoza demonstrates first of all that one substance cannot produce another (negative) and from this he immediately infers the positive proposition that "It pertains to the nature of substance to exist".<sup>4</sup> Logically, from the mere negative notion that something is not produced by another, we cannot infer the positive conclusion that its essence involves existence, so that its essence

<sup>2</sup> I cannot find any valid reason for Professor Wolfson's assertion (in his *Philosophy of Spinoza* I 127) that "*Causa sui* like the medieval 'necessary existence' is primarily nothing but a negation meaning causelessness, and to Spinoza it is only a shorter way of saying that the essence of substance involves existence". He admits, strangely enough, that the later or negative part of Spinoza's definition is positive in meaning! He says (129): "The term *causa sui* similarly in Spinoza is not a mere negation meaning causelessness; it means also something positive: it is an assertion of self-sufficiency and hence actual existence. He thus says in the second part of his definition of *causa sui*, 'or that whose nature cannot be conceived unless existing'." I see no justification at all for interpreting Spinoza's definition in these two contrary ways. The definition is entirely positive in meaning, and, as I shall explain later, is the basis of his first 'ontological' proof. It is because Professor Wolfson does not realize that Spinoza's definition is entirely contrary to the Aristotelian definition, that he fails to see the real significance of the ontological proof.

<sup>3</sup> *Proslog.* ch. iii.

<sup>4</sup> *Ethics* I 6, 7.

cannot be thought apart from its existence. We must first show how or why the essence of substance involves existence.

This fallacy, so it seems to me, underlies Spinoza's first demonstration of the existence of God. He appears to prove that substance is a *causa sui*,<sup>5</sup> and that God or a substance consisting of infinite attributes necessarily exists,<sup>6</sup> or, what is the same, that the essence and existence of God are identical.<sup>7</sup> It is evident to the reader that this is only a nominal proof, because what needs proving is the validity of the definition of *causa sui*; otherwise we are assuming the whole proof at the outset. It is as if one were to say syllogistically: "That is a *causa sui* whose essence cannot be defined without attributing existence to it. God is a *causa sui*. Therefore God necessarily exists." Obviously the necessity here is purely formal and without any existential import.

But, aside from the fact that Spinoza's proof from the nature of substance is not valid, his argument is not even directly a proof of an absolutely perfect substance. From his major premise one can appear to prove the existence of any substance whatever. Spinoza's fourth proof is however a special proof for the existence of a most perfect being. The process of thought is somewhat as follows. The perfection of a thing gives it power of being, and therefore perfection is the efficient cause of things or that which gives them existence. Each thing has power of being according to its degree of perfection, and therefore a being of absolutely infinite perfection cannot be conceived otherwise than as existing, since it lacks no power which might negate its existence. Thus, according to this argument, only a most perfect substance can exist as a substance to whose essence existence necessarily pertains. There can be no substance infinite only in its kind. This proof is most clearly stated by Spinoza in the *Principles of Cartesian Philosophy*.<sup>8</sup>

An object of a higher degree of perfection involves a fuller existence and a greater necessity of existence. Conversely, that which by nature involves a greater necessity of existence is more perfect. For as we cannot affirm the existence of nothing as we detract from the perfection of a concept and conceive its content to approach zero as its limit, so much do we detract from its possible existence. If we conceive this degree of perfection to be infinitely diminished even to zero, it will contain no existence or but an absolutely impossible one. On the other

<sup>5</sup> I 7.

<sup>7</sup> I 20.

<sup>6</sup> I 11.

<sup>8</sup> Lemma 1 after prop. 7.

hand, if we increase the degree of perfection to infinity, we conceive that it has the highest possible existence, and so to be absolutely necessary.—Hence it follows that that which absolutely involves a necessity of existence is perfect being or substance.

The fundamental presupposition of this proposition is that the perfection of a thing is the efficient cause of its existence, or that which makes a thing practically possible. The whole force of the argument depends on the notion that a thing may be its own internal efficient cause. We have Spinoza's explicit statement to this effect in his correspondence<sup>9</sup> where he writes: "In order that I may know from which idea of a thing out of many, all the properties of the object may be deduced, I observe one thing only, that the idea or definition of the thing should express its efficient cause.—So also when I define God as the supremely perfect being, since this definition does not express the efficient cause (*for I conceive that an efficient cause can be internal as well as external*) I shall not be able to discover all the properties of God from it. But when I define God as a being absolutely infinite",<sup>10</sup> then Spinoza believes he can deduce all the properties that follow from the definition. Similarly he writes: "Finally it is to be observed that the cause by reason of which a thing exists must either be contained in the nature itself and definition of the existing thing, or it must exist outside the thing."<sup>11</sup>

It is clear from the above that Spinoza identifies the essence of a thing with its efficient cause. Finite things should be defined through their proximate external efficient cause; and God, whose essence is conceived through Himself, must be defined through himself alone, as if he were his own internal efficient cause. In the last analysis, what Spinoza is trying to do is to explain the practical possibility of being by saying that its perfection is what gives it existence. In other words, he is trying to show why there is being rather than non-being, and his reason is that perfection is the efficient cause of things. The same point is stated more explicitly by Leibniz in the following passage of his Essay on *The Ultimate Origination of Things*.

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

<sup>9</sup> Letter 60 to Tschirnhaus.

<sup>10</sup> See *Ethics* I def. 6.

<sup>11</sup> I 8, schol. 2.

need of existence, in a word, that essence tends of itself towards existence.—Whence it further follows that all possible things tend by equal right toward existence according to their quantity of essence or according to the degree of perfection which they contain. Hence among the infinite combinations of possibles one actually exists by which the most essence is brought into existence.

I have lingered over the above passage because I wished to make it clear that in all (*a priori*) proofs from the priority of perfection, one reasons from the possible or conceivable to the actual. Perfection is something conceived by the intellect, and yet it is regarded as making actual things practically possible through its tendency to realize itself. The perfection of a thing is the reason for its existence. This argument is fundamentally Platonic; for Plato tries to explain the world of things as originating from the Ideas or norms of perfection.

As against this the Aristotelians maintain that we can only explain being by actual being, that actuality is prior to potentiality or possibility. What is possible can be inferred only from what is actual. There can be no *a priori* proof for the existence of being from a consideration of potency or possibility. We infer the actual existence of a being of whom we predicate eternal existence because we postulate that there are actual things whose existence is temporal and contingent. *A priori* the non-existence of God is inconceivable only to God Himself, as St. Thomas points out.<sup>12</sup> From our human point of view we can only reason *a posteriori* from our observation of finite things. Spinoza himself seems to suggest this mode of argument when he writes in his correspondence<sup>13</sup> concerning "the impossibility of supposing that things which do not exist necessarily in virtue of their own nature, are not determined to exist by something which does exist in virtue of its own nature, and which is a cause not an effect".

It is instructive to observe here that the Aristotelians, such as Maimonides and St. Thomas, agree with Spinoza in saying that the essence and existence of God are one and the same (I 20) but differ in the use they make of the conception. The Aristotelians

<sup>12</sup> *Summa Theologica*, Pt. I, Q. 2, #1. The proposition 'God exists' of itself is self-evident; for the predicate is the same as the subject. Forasmuch as we do not know the essence of God the proposition is not self-evident to us.

<sup>13</sup> Let. 12.

argue that we infer the existence of God or a being whose essence is inseparable from his existence only *a posteriori*. Our human mind conceives the existence of God as necessary in relation to things whose existence is contingent. That is to say, there is a logical necessity for inferring the existence of God, but we do not conceive *a priori* why it is practically necessary for Him to exist. All we can show from an analysis of the idea of God is that logically His essence is inseparable from His existence. But we can infer the actual existence of a being whose essence and existence are inseparable, or, in logical terms, we can give existential import to the idea of God, only by postulating the existence of finite things whose presence involves God as the cause of their existence. In brief, although the Aristotelians agree that the essence and existence of God are identical, they nevertheless find it necessary to separate the proof for the existence of God from the proof of His essence. They first prove that God is, and then proceed to show what He is in terms of attributes.

Spinoza, on the contrary, believes that the human mind is capable of showing *a priori*, or from an analysis of the idea of God, that God actually exists. From the idea of God's essence, or what He is, we can infer His existence, or that He is. This Spinoza tries to show in two ways; first, by saying with Anselm that actual existence is an attribute of a most perfect substance, so that the idea of its essence involves belief in its actual existence; secondly, by maintaining that the essence of God is, so to speak, the internal, efficient cause of His existence. In this second argument, existence is not an attribute or perfection of substance; existence is an effect of perfection.

In short, my point is that Spinoza and the Aristotelians affirm that the essence and existence of God are identical. But Spinoza proceeds to demonstrate the existence of God from the idea of His essence, whereas the Aristotelians maintain that logically, in relation to our mind, they must be separated. According to the Scholastics, we must first show that God is and then explain what He is analogically by negation of finite things. It is instructive to note that Spinoza himself, in the *Short Treatise*, explicitly separates his chapters in the Scholastic manner by first explaining that God is and then stating what He is. This however is only a nominal simi-

larity—the result of habit. The real logic involved is entirely different.<sup>14</sup>

There is another type of proof implicit in Spinoza's works which deserves attention, even though Spinoza himself does not explicitly introduce it as a special proof. This proof is suggested in the treatise on *The Improvement of the Understanding*, and I should call it the proof from the judgment of value. His argument is that the knowledge of a most perfect being is prior to every other kind of knowledge, because we can only estimate the truth-value or degree of truth of our ideas, if we have an innate knowledge of the most perfect being who reveals himself directly to the mind. Thus Spinoza writes at the beginning of the *De Emendatione*: "A true idea must necessarily first of all exist in us as an innate instrument (*innatum instrumentum*) and when this idea is apprehended by the mind, it enables us to understand the difference between itself and all other perceptions.—That method will be most perfect which affords the standard of the given idea of the most perfect being whereby we may direct our mind."

The above argument is essentially Platonic. We begin with the fact that we make value-judgments or estimate the degree of truth of our ideas, and the perfection of things. From this we infer (as Plato does in the *Phaedo*) that such judgments would be impossible unless there were an innate absolute norm of truth and perfection in relation to which all things are conceived. The idea of absolute perfection can never be derived by abstraction from the perceived sense-qualities of imperfect things. We can judge things as more or less truly what they ought to be, because we have an innate knowledge of the standard of all perfection, which is God (Plato's Idea of the Good). A variation of this proof occurs

<sup>14</sup> Spinoza was conscious of the difference between himself and the Aristotelians. Thus we find him saying in the *Short Treatise* (ch. 1): "God however who is the first cause of all things and also the cause of himself (*causa sui*) makes himself known through himself. Hence one need not attach much importance to the saying of Thomas Aquinas, namely, that God could not be proved *a priori* because He has no cause." According to Spinoza, existence is necessary to the essence of God, so that we no sooner conceive the idea or essence of God than we acknowledge His existence. According to St. Thomas, the existence of God cannot be proved *a priori* because then we should have to conceive of God as producing Himself; we should have to show why the existence is practically necessary. Spinoza attempted to get around the difficulty by regarding perfection as the internal efficient cause of existence.



in the *Short Treatise* where he writes: "If a man has an idea of God then God must exist *formaliter*. Now man has an idea of God. Therefore. . . ." "This implies that a finite understanding, unless it is determined by something external, cannot through itself know anything. . . . If then man has the idea of God, it is clear that God must exist *formaliter*. . . . Now that man has the idea of God this is clear, because he knows His Attributes, which attributes cannot be derived from man himself because he is imperfect. And that he knows these attributes is evident from this, namely, that he knows that the infinite cannot be obtained by putting together diverse finite parts."

We should bear in mind here that the argument from the value-judgment differs essentially from the ontological argument previously explained. In the ontological argument we try to prove *a priori* from the idea of an absolutely infinite substance that its essence involves existence. Spinoza's main argument is that essence conceived as quantity of perfection determines existence, and therefore God or an absolutely perfect being necessarily exists. The argument from the value-judgment however is really *a posteriori*, and is a variation of the cosmological argument.<sup>15</sup> We begin with the fact that we make value-judgments, and seek for an ultimate cause which will explain their possibility. Similarly, we have the idea of a most perfect being and seek for a cause of the idea in something infinite. In both instances, the argument is *a posteriori*. The use of the term 'perfection' in the ontological argument and in the value-judgment should not mislead us into ignoring the fundamental difference between them.

Now that I have completed my brief exposition of Spinoza's proofs of God, we are in a position to analyse his theory and see what bearing it has on the problem of value. So far our main concern was to discover the logic of his argument and the facts

<sup>15</sup>The argument from the value-judgment is similar to St. Thomas' Fourth Proof for the Existence of God in the *Summa Theologica*. St. Thomas' argument rests on the principle that there are observable degrees of truth and being and this involves approximation to an absolutely perfect being. Professor Gilson in his book, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas* (ch. v) shows convincingly that this argument is different from the ontological argument of St. Anselm, and is really a special form of the cosmological or causal proof.

of his position as we were able to interpret them. In what follows I shall attempt to estimate the validity of his procedure.

The first point I wish to emphasize is that Spinoza goes contrary to his own assertion that we must derive all ideas from the knowledge of God, by beginning his *Ethics* with propositions about substance and attributes. As a consistent Platonist he should have begun his *Ethics* like the *Short Treatise* with proofs of the existence of a most perfect being. If perfection is the efficient cause of being, and if it is also the norm of truth in relation to which all things are conceived, then the starting-point of all deduction should be the idea of absolute perfection. Spinoza's proofs from the priority of perfection are quite intelligible by themselves and require no references to substance and attributes—as is shown by the fact that he himself does not refer to the earlier propositions in these proofs. Furthermore, we have his own explicit statement to the effect in the *Ethics* where he writes: "For although the divine nature ought to be studied first because it is first in the order of knowledge and the order of things, they think it last".<sup>16</sup> Yet in spite of this declaration we find that he devotes the first ten propositions of his *Ethics* to a consideration of substance in general without referring to the idea of God.

The question may well be raised; what is the reason for Spinoza's irregular procedure? The answer I believe is that he was working with two contrary theories, namely, the Platonic and Aristotelian. In order to illustrate this contradiction explicitly I shall endeavor to make clear some of the fundamental principles of Platonism and Aristotelianism and show their application to Spinoza's argument.

The basic Platonic thesis is that a thing is real in virtue of the perfection of its form. The forms themselves are incapable of activity because action involves change and becoming, and the ideas as forms of being are not subject to change. There is one implication of Platonic theory that is not frequently drawn, namely, that for Plato, as later for Aristotle and Spinoza, perfection and reality are one and the same thing. It is the completeness and the precise mathematical ratios of the forms which gives them being; and hence the various forms of perfection are

<sup>16</sup> *Ethics* II 10 note.

also forms of being. Perfection is not prior to being and being is not prior to perfection; they are identical and mutually involve one another.

There is however another aspect to Plato's metaphysics, namely, that the Idea of the Good, or in modern terms, the Idea of Value, is prior in nature to being. This I take it is the significance of his statement in *Republic* VI:

Now that which imparts truth to the known and the power of knowing to the knower is what I would have you term the Idea of the Good, and this you will deem to be the cause of science and of truth insofar as the latter becomes the subject of knowledge; and as in the previous instance, light and sight may be truly said to be like the sun and yet not to be the sun, so in this other sphere, science and truth may be deemed to be like the good but not the good; the Good has a place of honour yet higher. Now you would say, would you not, that the sun is not only the author of visibility in all visible things but of generation and nourishment and growth though he himself is not generation. . . . In like manner the good may be said to be not only the author of knowledge to all things known, but of their being and essence and yet the good is not essence but far exceeds essence in dignity and power.

Here it seems evident that Plato is maintaining that the Idea of the Good is prior to all forms of being and, like the sun, is the cause of being and becoming. From Plato's words I think we can legitimately draw the inference—though he himself did not formulate the problem—that value is external to or transcends reality. That is to say, the Idea of Value is an ultimate concept which must be conceived through itself and not through something else, as an attribute is conceived in relation to a substance. The Idea of the Good is not itself a form or attribute of being. In the last analysis forms of being are conceived as good by reference to an Idea of the Good from which they derive their worth and being.

It seems to me that the above conception is basically different from Plato's other notion, namely, that the being and perfection of a thing are one and the same. If we consider the forms of being by themselves their perfection and reality are identical. The perfection of the form is not prior to its being and in no way determines it. That is to say, the value of a form of being is conceived internally or entirely with reference to that being itself. It is not

necessary to transcend the form of being in order to conceive its value. Value and being are aspects of one and the same thing. Whether Plato himself ever reconciled these two theories we may leave open to question. Our main object at present is to point out the problem involved.

Let us now proceed to analyse the Aristotelian theory. As said, both Plato and Aristotle agree that perfection and reality are one and the same thing, but they differ as to their interpretation of reality. Aristotle's main criticism of Plato is that the latter does not explain how the Ideas can be unmoved and yet be the cause of the becoming of things. As against Plato, Aristotle points out that what makes a thing real is its power of activity or movement. The reality of a thing does not depend on its perfection of form but on its perfection of activity or realization of potencies. The form or shape is indeed necessary for the definition, but what distinguishes the real thing from the appearance is its power of activity; *e.g.*, a picture of a man is an imitation of a man because it lacks the living individual's power of activity even though its form or shape be more perfect than that of any living man. In brief, we must distinguish between perfection of form and perfection of power of activity. For Aristotle a thing has perfection of being when it is most completely actual or active. God or Pure Form is most perfect because, being free from all potency or matter, He is most completely actual or active.

So far then we can say that for Aristotle the value or degree of perfection of anything is to be explained internally or with reference to the things themselves. Perfection is, as Spinoza would say, an attribute of being and is yet one and the same thing as being. Perfection is being considered in relation to the mind which estimates its quantity.

There is, however, as Von Rintilen points out,<sup>17</sup> another part of Aristotle's theory where he conceives of value as external or transcendent. This notion is introduced when he comes to consider the status of final causes. The final cause is conceived as something which determines the course of development of a thing; it is the entelechy, that which makes the thing what it is in the end. From this point of view, the final cause is prior in nature

<sup>17</sup> *Der Wertgedanke in der europäischen Geistesentwicklung* I.

to the actual thing. The final cause is that which the thing realizes or actualizes. This explains the important rôle of final causes in Aristotle's epistemology. As a biologist he is always explaining the nature and function of things with reference to their end or purpose. It is this aspect of his thought which Francis Bacon, Hobbes, and Spinoza, oppose.

I have tried to make it clear in the foregoing that the thought of both Plato and Aristotle offers us evidence of the same problem concerning the relation of value and reality. They both agree that perfection and reality are identical or inseparable, although they differ as to how reality is to be conceived. Plato urges that Reality is to be interpreted mathematically in terms of forms of being, and Aristotle maintains that reality is to be interpreted biologically, as that which has power of activity. But, in spite of their differences, I find that they both leave the ultimate problem unsolved. Both imply that value and reality are identical and yet maintain that Value must be conceived as prior to being. Plato finds it necessary to introduce the Idea of the Good and Aristotle thinks the facts require the notion of the entelechy and the theory of the Unmoved Mover, or cosmic final cause.

The above analysis of the value-problem in Plato and Aristotle will enable us, I believe, to appreciate the conflict of traditions in Spinoza's thought. Let us consider. As explained, Spinoza conceived of perfection as prior in nature to being, and hence he tried to prove that from the Idea of what God is we can infer that He is. Value ultimately may be regarded as the efficient cause of being, that which makes being practically possible. But then again, as with Plato and Aristotle, there is also another aspect to Spinoza's thought, namely, that reality and perfection are one and the same thing.<sup>18</sup> On this basis it would appear that the ontological proof of God is impossible. Perfection is not prior to reality and reality is not prior to perfection; they are one and the same thing judged from different points of view in relation to the human mind. Reality is perfection insofar as the mind conceives substance as constituted by infinite attributes each of which expresses its reality in a different way.

Here, as I interpret the history of philosophy, the argument of

<sup>18</sup> II def. 6.

St. Anselm comes to the rescue. St. Anselm submitted, as a proof for the existence of a most perfect being, the fact that we have the idea of such a being. If the most perfect being existed only as a possible notion in the mind and not as something actually independent of it, then a greater than he would be conceivable, namely, one who had the perfection of actual existence.<sup>19</sup> What Anselm had done was to make existence itself a perfection, and in this way he confused the category of substance with the category of value. Perfection, the good or value, which originally in Plato denoted a distinct Idea with a validity of its own, became a term used to designate some character of being. This initial error of Anselm was I believe, the source of confusion in the thought of Descartes and Spinoza. Spinoza, for example, states a variation of this proof in the *Short Treatise* when he writes: "Whatever we clearly and distinctly know to belong to the nature of a thing, we can also truly affirm of that thing. Now we can know clearly and distinctly that existence belongs to the nature of God. Therefore." Similarly, as explained, Anselm's argument is implied by Spinoza in his first proof in the *Ethics*. The definition of *causa sui*<sup>20</sup> already involves the Anselmian notion that we can attribute existence to a thing just as we do any other attribute, so that the attribute of existence is inseparable from the definition of the essence. In terms of value, this implies that values can be defined internally or entirely with reference to being. Value or perfection is not prior to being and the cause of its existence. Being is primary and all perfections are attributes thereof.

It is only fair to point out that the inference I make here is the exact opposite of what Anselm himself intended to make. He had in mind the Platonic theory that the Ideas as norms of perfection were more real than the objects of sense-perception which were only imitations of the Ideas. From this he inferred that the greater the degree of perfection of a thing, the greater was its degree of reality. Then, thinking about religious problems, he conceived the brilliant idea that the Idea of the most perfect being involved the greatest reality, so that one could not think of God without acknowledging His being. From the Platonic point of

<sup>19</sup> *Proslogium*, ch. iii. (Open Court Edition.)

<sup>20</sup> I def. i.

view this was a valid procedure. But the chief difficulty with the Platonic theory is that Plato does not show what the exact relation is between the Ideas and actual things. He denies all power of activity to the Ideas (in the *Sophist*) because action involves change and becoming, and the Ideas as forms of being are not subject to change. Hence the Ideas do not "save the appearances", as Aristotle points out. *In other words, Plato does not tell us what the relation between essence and existence is.* He appears to assume in the case of the Ideas that they are one and the same. Now when Anselm tried to prove the existence of God, he came upon this difficulty. The only way out that he could see, was to make existence itself a perfection of a most perfect being. But this, as explained, was an illogical procedure and implied a metaphysics exactly contrary to the one with which he started. He began with the Platonic theory that perfection was prior in nature to actual existence; but, in trying to be more Platonic than Plato, in regarding existence itself as a perfection, he undermined his whole position. This error, I believe, Descartes, Spinoza and Leibniz corrected by trying to prove *a priori* from the idea of perfection why there is being rather than non-being. This they did by maintaining that Value is prior in nature to being and existence and is the cause of the latter.

One would imagine that it would be superfluous to point out that the ontological proof of God is essentially a value-argument based upon the doctrine of the inseparability of value and reality. Yet we find that the learned Professor H. A. Wolfson in his scholarly work on *The Philosophy of Spinoza* has failed to perceive this. Instead he informs us that "the ontological proof must ultimately rest upon a psychological basis".<sup>21</sup> The proof, he claims, may be reduced to the following form: "Everything which is immediately perceived to exist, exists. God is immediately perceived to exist. Therefore God exists".<sup>22</sup> This interpretation I maintain is entirely contrary to the whole great tradition in philosophy. Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Leibniz, all have one great theme in common, namely, the inseparability of value or perfection and reality. The ontological proof is essentially metaphysical, not epistemological. In

<sup>21</sup> *Op. cit.* I 172.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 176.

interpreting the proof in terms of 'clear and distinct ideas' Professor Wolfson is giving undue emphasis to Descartes' epistemology and neglecting his metaphysics. In brief, I should say that to interpret the ontological proof as an argument based on epistemology and psychology is to miss one of the main insights of traditional philosophy.

To return now to our analysis of Spinoza. The reader will recall that we became involved in a discussion of Plato and Aristotle when we attempted to solve the problem why Spinoza began his *Ethics* with the notion of substance instead of beginning with the idea of God. The above considerations should enable us to solve the problem now.

In brief, I should say that the reason why Spinoza began the *Ethics* with the notion of substance was that he agreed with Aristotle that substance or reality is that which has power of being.<sup>23</sup> This implies that perfection and reality and power of activity are identical, and hence that perfection or value can only be defined internally or as an attribute of being. This meant that he could only attempt to prove the existence of God by adopting Anselm's method of defining existence as an attribute of essence. He did not realize that in making existence a perfection or attribute of essence, he had denatured the term perfection of its primary significance and thereby confused the category of value with that of substance. Now in the fourth proof of the *Ethics* he introduces the Cartesian proof and makes perfection prior in nature to being and the cause of its existence. Had he held to this view consistently he would have begun his *Ethics* with the fourth proof of the seventh proposition, as that proof requires no reference to the earlier propositions.

By way of answering the problems we raised at the beginning of this paper, we can say that Spinoza, like Plato and Aristotle, maintains that value and reality are inseparable. But when it comes to stating precisely wherein their relation consists, I believe he involves himself in contradiction. Explicitly he wishes to follow the Aristotelian doctrine that reality is power of existence and action,<sup>24</sup> and hence he implicitly defines value internally, as an attribute of being, by adopting the Anselmian definition that ex-

<sup>23</sup> I 34.

<sup>24</sup> I 34.



istence is an attribute of essence in the case of the most perfect being. But later we find him thinking with Plato that the value-category is separate from all forms of being and is the cause of being. It is true that he does not make perfection something which transcends being as Plato conceives the Idea of the Good. But the fact that he regards value or perfection as logically prior implies the notion that the value-character is other than the category of being or substance, so that being is understood or conceived through value.

As Professor Urban has pointed out in his *Intelligible World*, the relation of value to reality constitutes the ultimate metaphysical mystery. Plato, Aristotle, and Spinoza, agree that value and reality are inseparable. But when it comes to showing the precise relation between them, we find that they are all maintaining apparently contradictory theses. They begin by identifying value or perfection with reality, but sooner or later they feel forced to separate the category of value from the category of being. Both Plato and Aristotle are forced to separate value from being, because they recognize the validity of the final cause as an ultimate explanation. And Spinoza, although he explicitly grants only efficient causes, agrees with Plato and Aristotle that being in itself is not ultimately intelligible, and introduces perfection as the reason or cause of being. Spinoza did not realize, as Plato and Aristotle did, that perfection insofar as it is prior to being is incapable of efficient activity, and can act only as a final cause.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> One could go on to demonstrate the conflict of traditions in Spinoza's conception of ethical values, but as this is not my purpose here I shall draw this paper to a close. In a treatise which I am preparing for publication entitled "The Conflict of Traditions in the Philosophy of Spinoza" I am developing this thesis in detail.