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THE UNITY OF *THE ONLY POSSIBLE ARGUMENT*: THEOLOGY AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHY[1]

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1. Introduction

"The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God" (hereafter abbreviated as *OPA*) articulates two themes which will play a central role in the doctrine of God as the Ideal of pure reason in the *Critique of Pure Reason*: the meaning which Kant ascribes to the Idea of God is reflected in the synthesis of *the totality of the thinkable*; this Idea is substantively linked to the concept of *the order of nature*. The second part of the text is devoted to order; the first part presents the fundamental notions of modality that will help further an analysis of order and its relation to God in the second part as well as the distinction between *necessary* order and *contingent* order, a distinction which will later prove decisive. Kant's relatively novel reformulation of these notions, relative, that is, to Leibniz, will allow him to develop his new and radical argument for the existence of God in 1763. In this paper, I foreground the link that this radical argument enjoys with the cosmological and physico-theological arguments, and I further point out the underlying reasons why in either instance this argument remains essentially the same, situated on two different trajectories—one in line with Kant's redefinition of theology, and the other with his reconception of natural history and the laws of nature. A final consequence of my account is that it sheds a light on the perplexing absence of the argument designed in the OPA from the section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* devoted to theological arguments.

2. The Argument for the Existence of God Revised: The Radical Proof

2.1 The Nerve of the Argument

We know that in *OPA* (1763) Kant formulates for the first time the crux of his refutation of the ontological proof for the existence of God: existence is not a real predicate, it adds nothing to the concept of a thing, it is only an absolute positing of a thing (BDG, 2:75).[2] However, in *OPA* Kant also provides a new foundation for the proof of the existence of God based on an analysis of

[1] For the French version of this essay, see Huneman (2007).

[2] On the subject of the tradition of critical thought since Thomas Aquinas that treats of Anselm's ontological argument, especially in regards to the pointed issue of an implicit presupposition, the reader is referred to (Scribano, 2002: chs. 2 and 3).

possibility as such.

He first introduces a distinction between the *formal element* and the *material element* in possibility (BDG, 2:77). The formal element in impossibility results from two contradictory determinations; however, this contradiction occurs *between* two determinations, which can therefore be said to constitute the material element in impossibility. Similarly, the agreement between two determinations is the formal element in possibility, whereas the determinations which so agree make up the material element in possibility. Kant speaks of "transcendental matter" in this regard:

> Matter in the physical sense is the substrate of extended objects, the possibility of the bodies. But in the transcendental sense, any given is a matter, whilst the relation of/between the given(s) is the form. The transcendental matter is the determinable, but the transcendental form is the determination or the act of determining. (Refl, 28:575)[3]

Every possibility, therefore, has as its form the agreement of a subject with an attribute (a triangle and a right angle, in the example provided by Kant), and as its matter this same subject and this same attribute. Prefiguring some of the terminology that will be fundamental to his critical philosophy beginning with *Negative Magnitudes*, Kant also labels the former as the "logical element in possibility", "for the comparison of the predicates with their subjects, according to the rule of truth, is nothing other than a logical relation" (BDG, 2:78). And "the something, or that which stands in this agreement"—in other words, the determinations themselves in so far as they *are*, in keeping with their being as pure possibilities—is also labeled "the real element of possibility". Thus, "the transcendental matter is the reality or the given (*datum*) for all things" (Refl, 28:575). The proof for the existence of God according to Kant—which is sometimes referred to as the "radical argument" insofar as it aims at no less than the root of all possibility—will consist in meeting with the requirements of this reality of possibility as possibility. Throughout *OPA* the term "real" designates the concept used by Kant when he states that being (existence) is not a "real predicate", that is, being does not count among the cognized meanings that determine a concept.

There are two ways for possibility to disappear: it can vanish both at the disappearance of its form—and indeed this is the logical impossibility, the contradiction, that the principle of non-contradiction, the ultimate foundation of logic, helps us avoid—as well as "when there exists no material element, no *datum*, to be thought" (BDG, 2:78). In other words, in this latter case, if we cancel out all thinkable determinations, no possibility remains. Clearly, however, that "all possibility whatever is cancelled out (*aufgehoben*), is absolutely impossible, for the two expressions [the cancellation of all possibility/impossibility] are synonymous" (BDG, 2:79). Or, in other words: it's impossible that no possibility remains. So, if we cancel out possibility itself by cancelling all existence in thought—which is impossible given that this is the very definition of impossibility, as I just said—then "it is absolutely impossible that nothing at all should *exist"* (BDG, 2:79). It, therefore, follows that *something* necessarily exists, since this is the opposite of impossibility as defined in *OPA*. And Kant crucially remarks that this argument, which will make it possible to prove the existence of God, "treats of the first grounds of the thinkable (*denkliches*)" (BDG, 2:81).

The argument thus far leads to the conclusion that:

[3] Translations from the *Reflexionen* are my own. For an examination of Kant's changing conception of reality as it appears throughout the *Reflexionen*, see (Grapotte, 2004, 2011).

> Accordingly, there is a certain reality, the cancellation of which would itself cancel all internal possibility whatever. But *that, the cancellation of which eradicates all possibility, is absolutely necessary*. (BDG, 2: 83, italics added)

There is therefore a necessary being. This necessary being is unique (§3) given that it is the "ultimate real ground of all possibility" (BDG, 2:84), such that every other being has its possibility grounded in it. It is "absolutely necessary, because it is the condition of all necessity" (Refl, 28:324).[4]

We are therefore left with a unique necessary existence. Necessity, however, should be understood in terms of both logical necessity—which governs the principle of non-contradiction and which therefore concerns the only formal element in possibility with respect to "the attributes of merely possible things" (BDG, 2:76)—and "absolute real necessity", that is, the necessity of existence. These two forms of necessity overlap, so to speak, with two uses of the verb "to be" (third person singular), understood either in the predicative sense ("P *is* Q") or as an absolute positing of a thing ("there *is* A"), and indeed Kant was able to reject the conflation of existence with a real predicate precisely on the basis of this distinction. here, the necessary being is necessary of a *real* necessity, and is thereby in this sense clearly a reality. Kant's argument, therefore, enables one to zero in on an existence, whereas the traditional ontological proof remained confined to the domain of logic, that is, the domain of predicates used independently of positings. Kant's radical proof, in the OPA, is immune to the later critique of the ontological argument, mostly expressed in the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*, and according to which Anselme's and Descartes's ontological argument doesn't express pure logics, precisely insofar as they only consider "real predicates" and cannot posit anything into existence.[5]

Here, our radical argument "is constructed only because something is possible" (BDG, 2:91). For Kant in OPA only the possible is possible insofar as it can be thought (in contrast with the concept of God according to the ontological argument) : "For if nothing exists, *then nothing which could be thought is given either*" (BDG, 2:78). This essential point will help to distinguish Kant's argument from a similar argument advanced by Leibniz, even if the cosmological argument will lay bare this difference more fully. But this radical argument raises also another issue, in relation to the history of Kant's thought, namely, its abandonment in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where the traditional ontological argument is refuted: this sounds strange since one would expect the radical proof, which is the only proof of the existence of God according to the OPA, to be scrutinized in the first *Critique*, whereas Kant directs all his efforts to debunking a proof (the ontological argument) that the OPA had already discredited. I'll offer later on an answer to this question in the end of this paper ; but for now I want to explore the difference between this radical proof and the idea of God involved in it, and the more traditional, Leibnizian view of God, the existence and the possibles.

2.2 A New Concept of God and Features Proper to Kant's Radical Argument

A new concept of God is thus formulated, a concept that will be later incorporated, albeit in considerably modified form, within the definition of the Idea of God as the regulative idea behind the disjunctive synthesis of thinkables according to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and in

[4] The notion of "real ground", *Realgrund*, is borrowed from Crusius, as noted by Michel Puech who analyses this influence in relation to Kant's reworking of the principle of reason c. 1765 (Puech, 1990:267-269).

[5] For a reflection on the sense in which the radical argument is the only possible argument, see (Theis, 1997).

spite of Kant's rejection of all ontological arguments. This necessary being is the foundation of all possibility, "The data of all possibility must be found in the necessary being either as determinations of it, or as consequences which are given through the necessary being as the ultimate real ground" (BDG, 2:86). The expression "the data of all possibility" here refers to the reality of the possible, or in other words thinkables themselves in as much as they can enter into relations of agreement or disagreement at a subsequent stage. Bearing in itself all determinations as realities, this being therefore holds "the greatest possible reality capable of being contained in a being as a determination inheres in the necessary being (*Wesen*)" (BDG, 2:87). As the real ground of all possibilities, this being is the principle of its own possibility, as well as that of other beings. These possibilities should be distinguished from this being's own proper possibility, and indeed are distinguished from it by virtue of negations, Thus, in a given thing there is both a real part, which depends "upon the necessary being as a real ground" (BDG, 2:87), and a negative part made up of the missing possibles, and which rests on the necessary being "as on a logical ground" (BDG, 2:87).

The "matter of possibilities" as Kant defines it, undoubtedly refers to the divine understanding according to Leibniz. The upshot of this notion is that one must assign a certain type of being to possibility as possibility. But for Leibniz, in fact, eternal truths call for a certain existence which is itself the locus of these eternal truths. This existence is necessarily necessary, given that necessary truths exist "prior to the existences of contingent beings" as conditional propositions that have not yet posited the existence of possible beings about which these truths are confirmed. Thus, concludes Leibniz, "these necessary truths being anterior to the existence of contingent beings, must be grounded in the existence of a necessary substance" (Leibniz, 1996, ch. 11). According to the *Monadology*,

> if there is any reality in the essences or possibilities, this reality must be grounded in something existing and actual; and therefore in the existence of the necessary being, in which the essence includes the existences, or in which it suffices to be possible in order to be actual." (Leibniz, 1989:§44, my translation)[6]

Nevertheless, unlike Leibniz, Kant does not equate this real ground (namely for him, the first ground of the possible) with a divine understanding. God is to be understood not so much as the *locus of essences*, but rather, as *the foundation of possibilities*.[7]

3. On the Cosmological Argument

The cosmological argument alluded to by Kant in OPA corresponds with the "physico-theological" argument from the unity and finality of nature, which will later be discussed in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It does not, however, correspond with the argument from the contingency of the world, adduced, for example, in §7 of Leibniz's *Theodicy*, and according to which the contingent

[6] According to the *Twenty-Four Metaphysical Theses*, "the truths that concern possibilities or the necessities (that is, possibilities that are negated by their contraries) would be of no effect if the possibilities were not grounded in something that actually exists (Leibniz, 1998:C533, 467, my translation). On this argument for God's existence see (Martin, 1966:§38, 216).

[7] This rather substantive difference has been remarked on by Gérard Lebrun: where Leibniz sees essences, and by extension possible beings, Kant chiefly discerns thinkable things, that is, meanings (Lebrun, 1977:132).

existence of what is assumes a necessary being. The *Critique of Pure Reason* will demonstrate that such a proof makes surreptitious use of the ontological argument in that it fails to demonstrate on its own terms, once necessary existence has been proved, that it is identical with the concept of God—i.e., the concept of the most perfect reality (A606/B 634)—such that only appeals to the ontological argument, which subsumes a notion of perfection, can legitimize this last step. But in 1763, the OPA treats this cosmological argument on its own, not yet named "physico-theological" in this context, and proposes a philosophical examination of the notion of order, which stands at its core. I now turn to such an examination.

3.1 Mathematical Order

Kant inverts traditional practice in his examination of the notion of order by drawing on examples of mathematical order rather than of order as observed in nature. Noticeably, this will be a first major move he'll make later on in the *Critique of Judgement* where the exposition of the notion of purposiveness according to the teleological judgement will start by an example taken from mathematics (§62).[8]

Here is Kant's example in the OPA: the complex problem of proportioning the lengths of inclined surfaces such that freely falling weights rolling down them will, for each inclined surface, reach the bottom at the same time can be solved using an extremely simple geometric figure: one has only to embed these surfaces lengthwise within a circle as one would with chords drawn from one of the extremities of a diameter. The myriad maneuverings seemingly required have therefore been reduced to a simple formula, the equation of the circle. Indeed, numerous properties of the circle allow us to solve a variety of complex problems. Space itself, understood geometrically and independently of nature, exhibits numerous "harmonious relations" revealed by mathematical science.

This harmony discerned within space itself is almost more surprising than the "arrangements (*Anordnungen*) in nature" (BDG, 2:95). In writing these sentences, Kant aims above all to undermine our more usual conception of order. The harmonious arrangement of nature ordinarily leads to the idea of an all-powerful and all-intelligent designer; however, by handling this idea as if it were on equal terms with the order found in mathematical properties, Kant severs the link between the otherwise solidary notions of the perception of order and an orderer.

3.2 System and Technique

Kant distinguishes two types of purposiveness according to the kind of order in question: one that we might label *technique*, in so far as it refers to an intentional arrangement of materials in view of a certain end; and the other, which could be labeled finality as *system*, in so far as the purposive manifestations and properties depend on a "relationship [...] to order and convenience" (BDG, 2:98) that naturally and unintentionally follows from the necessary laws of movement.[9]

However, clearly the second type of purposiveness—the system—is more relevant to the

[8] I have elsewhere argued in detail that this reference to an usual field of examples, namely mathematics, serves the rhetorical aim of decoupling the notion of purposiveness from the connotations of utility; see (Huneman, 2015, 2008, 2007a, 2007b).

[9] The notion of systematicity is of considerable importance for Leibniz, especially in regards to physics. Systematicity is at once a feature of science and an ontological property of nature. M. Fichant has analyzed the various stages leading to the legitimization for Leibniz of a system's identity as bearing two meanings (Fichant, 1997: 266). See also (Rescher, 1981).

study of nature. Suppose, for example, that I am in search of a finality capable of providing a reason for a particular manifestation of nature such as the atmosphere. I might say that it is designed so that men can breathe, but at the same time, it also allows for pumps, breastfeeding in mammals, etc. How am I to choose that one end, from among these particular ends, that presided over the intentions of the author of nature in his creation of the atmosphere? If, on the contrary, I interpret the atmosphere, a particular manifestation of nature, as a necessary effect of natural laws, all its utilities can be seen as instances of the necessary order that follows from the application of natural laws, much in the same way the solutions to a variety of problems in geometry can be derived from the form of a circle.

On the other hand purposiveness understood as technique refers to the "contingent order of nature" (BDG, 2:106). This order occurs when "the ground of the effects of a certain kind, which are similar, according to one law, is not at the same time the ground of effects of a different kind in the same being, according to another law"(BDG, 2:106). The examples advanced by Kant are gleaned from the biological domain: in man the "properties" that make up the principles of sight and of taste are not the same. This coming together of properties is therefore contingent and furthermore reveals itself to be "artistic" (*künstlich*) in nature, given that it generates perfection. A plant is "a great manifold, where none is capable of producing the effects of the others, and where their combination into a unified and perfect (*Vollkommenheit***)** whole is artificially devised, so that the plant itself, which is related to such a diversity of purposes, constitutes a unity which is contingent in character and the product of choice" (BDG, 2:106). Thematic coherence is established here for the first time between the notion of life and that of the unity of the empirical laws of nature, which will be both considered later in the *Critique of Judgment,* respectively in the introduction and the second part of it.

The OPA's originality therefore consists in disengaging the physico-theological proof from the technical thrust that had traditionally characterized it. As I'll indicate now, Kant achieves this by demonstrating that the contingent order of nature is insufficient basis for the proof of the existence of God (in keeping with his refutation of the heuristic utility of finality as technique established earlier in the work).

Clearly, the orders of nature, whether they be necessary or contingent, "point to the existence of an Intelligent Author (*Urheber*)" (BDG, 2:123). Nevertheless, in light of the contingent order of nature one is only entitled to conclude that exists an "intelligent plan"or design—one that harmonises independent laws and the parts of animals—or in other words an intelligent God, or an "Architect"; and such notion of an "architect" is opposed to a "Creator" of the world as Kant will later qualify this opposition in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Indeed, these portions of matter that constitute a living being with their necessary laws might well preexist the very God who assembles them (BDG, 2:125). Thus considering the contingent order of nature doesn't prove any Creator or intelligent creation by a necessary being.

In contrast, the *necessary* order, as implied by systematic purposiveness, is included in the laws of motion themselves, which involve the possibility of things and not their existence, given that whatever is the existing matter, it conforms to these laws of possible matter. In this sense, the ground of necessary order is the ground of the possible and not that of the existence.

The radical proof began from *all possibility whatever* (BDG, 2:85) as the basis from which to proceed to *the real ground of all possibility* (BDG, 2:84); in turn, the cosmological argument will proceed from the *necessary agreement at the heart of the laws that govern the possible*—an agreement that must be found *a posteriori* in nature, hence its truly cosmological and not a priori

character—to a *single principle* behind this agreement. This latter argument can be summarized as follows:

> The fruitfulness of a single ground in generating many consequences, the harmony and adaptedness of natures to harmonise in a regular scheme of things (*zusammen zu passen*) in accordance with universal laws and without frequent conflict - these are characteristics which must, in the first place, be found in the possibilities of things. It is only afterwards that wisdom can then become active in choosing them. (BDG, 2:151)

Kant's method therefore consists in transposing the very concept of order from the domain of existence to the domain of the possible, thereby connecting the philosophical observation of nature to the effectiveness of his radical argument previously exposed.

3.3 Divine Will Eclipsed

For Leibniz, logical necessity governs possibilities and presides over divine understanding (and mathematics). In contrast, *moral* necessity designates the "*maximes de convenance*" (rules of convenience), in other words, those principles chosen by God as the very best and that regiment what exists: contingent relative to logical necessity, they are necessary in relation to the will of God, whose governing principle always consist in choosing the best.

For Kant also,

> [i]nsofar as God contains the ground of the existence (*Dasein*) of things, I admit that this dependency is always moral; in other words, things exist (*existieren*) because God willed that they should exist. (BDG, 2:100).

To the extent that the necessary order of things refers to the laws that regiment possibilities, this order does not belong to the will of God, and maintains a *non-moral dependency* in relation to him. *The existence* of things certainly traces back to the divine will; but the fact that, by virtue of simple principles, their multiplicity harmonises – and indeed this is the definition of necessary order—this fact, from which the harmony of nature results, "can only come from the very possibility of the things "(BDG, 2:103).

For Leibniz, the very fact of the existence of the world betrayed a necessary being, and, according to the principle of reason, the fact that the world is as it is and is not otherwise was dependent on a choice made by this necessary being and therefore depended on the divine will.[10] For Kant, the argument for the existence of God is based on *that which does not belong to the divine will*: the harmonising of the essences, the necessity that governs possibles in as much as it contains, in itself, an order. From a Kantian perspective, the multiplicity of possible worlds has little place. There is no other possible matter or nature, present in God's understanding, that his will would have rejected in deference to our own, better ordered matter and nature. Necessary order, that is, the system, is based on the very essence of nature: what is in need of a foundation, is not the coming into existence of the actual nature to the detriment of other possible natures (as in the Leibnizian theory of possible worlds), but rather, its possibility.

[10] Cf. (Leibniz, 2004:§7). On the divine criteria of the best see Rescher, "Leibniz on Creation and the Evaluation of Possible Worlds", in *op. cit.*, p. 1-28.

Whereas Leibniz juxtaposed an *a priori* argument from *divine understanding* and an *a posteriori* argument that proceeds from contingency to the *divine will*, Kant advanced a single proof that consisted in explicating the requirements for the possibility of the possibles—considered either in their own right, or as a set of compossibles instantiated in the laws of nature in all their variety. This also demonstrates that the "possible" for Kant is no longer an "idea" or an "essence" in the divine understanding.

3.4 The Argument from Contingent Order

Contingency is a cardinal problem for Leibnizian metaphysics, which had to resort to the concept of "moral necessity", as distinct from logical necessity, in order to account for it. For Leibniz, the events of this world are devoid of any logical necessity, given that their opposites are conceivable—and at the same time, these events must necessarily occur once God has chosen our world in order to bring it into existence in so far as these events are concatenated and have been tied between themselves since the beginning of the world by an infinite number of mediations such that any of them can only be imagined different by radically modifying the chain of all other events, that is, by imagining another world. The contingency of the events of this world is in this sense a *hypothetical* necessity: if God has chosen our world, these events must occur.

Any reference to divine will has been in some way elided from OPA. The act of God consists, by the very fact that he is, in bringing into existence the *laws* that govern the matter of possibility (as opposed to the singular, existing *things* themselves). The Leibnizian problem of contingency, which was a byproduct of the philosopher's appeal to divine will and the attendant difficulties, vanishes in 1763. The question of contingency is now recast within the context of the difference between necessary and contingent order and is therefore severed from rigorous theology in so far as the cosmological proof depends on necessary order (and not contingent order). But it is precisely the strength of this cosmological argument that will enable us to once again bring the problem of contingency into focus.[11]

For if God is all-powerful, it is certainly easy for Him to produce the work of art that is an organism. But "it is astonishing that something like an animal body should even be *possible*"(BDG, 2:152). Consequently, the question and the enigma of divinity are *shifted from the forging of existence to the foundation of the possible*. The divine technique, which grounds *existence*, still presupposes an agreement at the level of the *possibilities* that it will usher into existence.

> all the unity and harmony I observe around me is only possible because a Being exists which contains within it the grounds not only of reality (*Wirklichkeit*) but also of all possibility. (BDG, 2:153).

As a result, like the necessary order, the contingent order also lends itself to a cosmological proof and, more specifically, one that no longer resembles the traditional proof—in its deference to or tracing back to the divine engineer—overlapping instead with the cosmological proof developed above.[12]

[11] Kant writes in a time where the question of the contingency or the necessity of the laws of nature was a crucial debate. For an overview see (Charrak, 2006).

[12] For another interpretation of Kant's cosmology of worlds, which considers actual universes in cosmology rather than possible worlds, and a contrast with Leibniz, see (Lequan, 2017).

The idea of God on offer here no longer lends itself to the more habitual language that Leibniz made systematic use of, a language that referenced notions of choice, understanding, divine will, etc. Kant explicitly emphasizes the obsolete nature of such language:

> For although it is true that, employing the analogy of human behaviour, one can form some concept of how such a Being could be the cause of something real (*Wirklichkeit*), one cannot form any concept of how that Being should contain the ground of the internal possibility of other things. It is as if this thought rises far higher than mortal creatures can reach." (BDG, 2:153)

In instances where the relationship of God to the world is conceived as a position of existence, the language of human action—choice, will, reflection, etc.—proves conducive to expressing one such relationship. But to the extent that the only rigorous cosmological argument must situate itself relative to possibilities rather than to existence, we suddenly find ourselves deprived of any comparable vocabulary for articulating the relationship of God to the world.

In summary, in order to adduce a rigorous cosmological argument, Kant gave precedence to necessary order over and above contingent order. And indeed, this compels us to conceive of God as the foundation of the possible rather than as the source of existence; and, subsequently, contingent order can also on this basis be seen to lead to the cosmological proof. However, this latter approach deprives us of the technical language that was needed in order to grasp God's role as creator in relation to the world when we proceeded from the order present in existence in keeping with the traditional physico-theological proof from the perfection of organisms.

Consequently, after the OPA, the cosmological proof from contingent order admits of two degrees of explanation: the first—more traditional and ultimately insufficient—does not extend beyond the contingent and artistic order of nature, while the other— Kantian and radical—traces back to the order at the heart of possibilities (but can no longer make use of the technical analogy).

3.5 Theology and the Establishment of a History of Nature

By transforming the concept of order, metaphysics and physics are in turn transformed. The primacy of necessary order over contingent order invites us *to re-examine all that looks like an ostensibly contingent order*:

> one will always seek the cause of such advantageous dispositions (*Verfassungen*) among those *universal laws* which, in addition to producing other appropriate consequences, are also related, and related with a necessary unity, to the production of these particular effects as well. (BDG, 2:126)

This approach is made possible by a new type of physical consideration established by Kant shortly before in his *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens,* and which I will here refer to as "Kantian genetic epistemology". Kant provides an example of the tendency to regularity of the flow of rivers, which proves highly useful to both men and animals, as well as the correlative rarity of any flooding of the surrounding land. This tendency, far from being the work of divine providence, can be explained in terms of *the continual action of the laws of nature on an initial state* characterized by large bodies of water dispersed over depressions in the land, leading Kant to remark that "[r]egularity and order emerged from wild chaos"(BDG, 2:129).

The ostensibly contingent order cannot emerge from the immediate, contemporary and present application of the laws of nature. And it is for this reason that we believe in a divine

technique, and that Newton himself had recourse to such a divine technique when he chose to locate the planets on coplanar orbits. But if one supposes a relatively long period of time during which the "play of general laws" can be allowed to unfold, the same ordered configuration will emerge via the unhindered workings of necessity alone, and without appeals to extramundane artifice. This approach is elaborated upon within the context of Kant's so-called "nebular hypothesis" as pursued in the *Universal Natural History*.[13] According to this hypothesis—sometimes also labelled "the Kant-Laplace hypohesis"—all the planets of the solar system progressively emerged from a homogeneous mass of matter governed by the laws of motion and imprinted with a circular movement leading to the apparition of several rotating rings, finally solidifying into planets. Consequently, Kant's genetic epistemology oftentimes allows one to reduce an apparent contingent order to a necessary order. This revised physico-theology proposed by Kant therefore presupposes such new physical methodology according to which Nature is seized upon as the product of a specific lawlike becoming. Ultimately, the genetic epistemology outlined in *Universal Natural History* and OPA's theology are thoroughly complementary.

4. Conclusion

The OPA's two primary philosophical foci include an argument for the existence of God from *possibilities*, and an analysis of order in which *contingent order* reduces resignedly to necessary order. Their unity ultimately lies in the question of possibility.

Since in the end, Kant does not provide (like Leibniz) an argument from possibilities that would lead to divine understanding *coupled with* a cosmological argument that would lead to divine will, both of these arguments refer to the being of the possible, and to its possibility as a thinkable. Thus, the unity of the two proofs is no longer founded on the unity of divine will and divine understanding, but rather, on *the unity of what constitutes the foundation of the possible as thinkable*. Possibilities are no longer to be conceived as ideas present in divine understanding—in contradistinction to the position held by Leibniz and in some respects Malebranche. In order for the radical (ontological) argument to be understood, recourse must be made to the second (cosmological) version because it alone helps us understand that Kant does not ultimately rewrite the argument from divine understanding, but rather, reframes it such that the distinction between divine understanding and divine will is no longer valid, and that "possible" for him refers to the whole of the thinkable as such, independently of a divine understanding (hence Kant's remark concerning "first grounds of the thinkable" (BDG, 2 :81) quoted above). Admittedly, Kant leaves here another important question unanswered, namely: what is meant by "possible"? Kant's critical answer in the first *Critique*, linking the possible as such to the possibility of experience, will destabilize OPA through and through, for if experience itself is possible, ultimately, the whole of the thinkable is possible and we do not need to trace back to the foundation of the possible—hence, the radical argument for God is neutralized. For this reason, our previous perplexity, about the disparition of the radical argument in the section of the first *Critique* devoted to theology, gets its answer: the shift in the conception of the possible, within the Critical philosophy, makes a radical argument for the existence of God—which was in essence an argument about the notion of possibility—wholly unconceivable. That's why the Transcendental Dialectic of the *Critique of Pure Reason* won't even consider it, and focuses solely on the three traditional metaphysical proofs of the existence of God.

This radical argument, elaborated for a short moment just at the dawn of the Critical

[13] On the question of the scientific character of a history of the universe and the earth by Kant, see (Bouton, 2012, 2011).

philosophy, uses the same inference from the possible to the real that Leibniz used in his more traditional theological argument, but no longer treats essences (or possibles) and ideas as if they were one and the same in divine understanding—an approach that made the Leibnizian argument an argument from divine understanding. Moreover, by abrogating the use of technical language, first initiated during Kant's reevaluation of the argument from contingent order in line with the question of the agreement and unity among possibles, the OPA overturns the classical motif of the architect which united natural history (revelation of the plan) and theology (inference to the designer).

To sum up, the Kantian approach in the OPA combines four components: scaling back up to the possible in both arguments; the abrogation of the technical motif as a means of understanding the created world; the distinction between contingent order and necessary order; and finally genetic epistemology. Kant therefore joins theology and natural history together without having to leverage, as with the more conventional physico-theology, natural history as the baseline from which to scale back up to God; but rather, in marked contrast, Kant's method establishes the fundamental distinction in natural philosophy between necessary and contingent order as a foundation for the theological plan, and integrates his novel genetic epistemology into the very argumentative procedures that make it possible to generalize the proof from necessary order.

Traditionally, the unity of natural history and theology has been tantamount to the unity of the divine understanding (which includes the ideas of all things), and the technical motif (which apprehends God in terms of the architect of the world as revealed by natural history), in such a way such that, conversely, one could also have recourse to God in an effort to understand nature. These two points are disputed in Kant's radical proof by virtue of the manner in which it incorporates natural philosophy into the development of a single argument about the first grounds of the possible and the compossible.

This explains *OPA's* retrospectively unstable character: to insist on the project of a proof from the first grounds of the possible assures its status as the very paradigm of dogmatic metaphysics; to insist on the rupture between possible and divine understanding, on the correlation between the thinkable and the possible, leads us—provided that we add this specifically critical nuance according to which the thinkable is the thinkable by means of a finite thought — to Kant founder of our modernity, for which *The One Possible Argument* would now appear to emerge as an early symptom.

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