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ON EXISTENCE

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~ 1979

§1. A fundamental question of Ontology concerns the putative distinction between predicative being and existential being or existence. This distinction is emphatically insisted on by modern Philosophy – sometimes based on mathematical logic; for it is there focal indeed, as it ^{however} relates to the difference of the signs and functions for the existential operator and predication. In effect we have ^{here} a denial to account for existence. The existential operator is an ultimate irreducible notion. ~~But we~~ ^{the very} can not rest content in this predicament; at ^{least} we require some more thorough articulation.

That formal logic can solve philosophical problems is a singular contention characteristic of certain tendencies in 20th century. In truth, Logic can solve nothing; it is just an organon, the means of handling philosophical problems – or perhaps not even a weapon, rather the bare skeleton of a weapon, or the most abstract and general principles of construction for a weapon – *the most general conditions of argumentation*.

§2. Besides, one can show that such violent separation of existence from predication is erroneous, on philosophical grounds. For, to begin with, *the one necessarily entails the other*, in that way: if something has properties then it exists; and if it exists, then it has properties.

The second proposition will be, I suppose, readily admitted. For if something exists as something or other, it must possess some nature which constitutes it as the thing it is, i.e. it must have an essence; and also, it may and if it is a physical concrete thing it must exhibit various non-essential properties as well. We cannot frame the *conception of an existent totally destitute of any conceivable character*, and therefore without any property broadly conceived. (We shall see the full significance of this truth later on when we shall develop the theme further).

But what of the converse? Does possession of properties really entail existence on the part of the subject to which properties are attributed? It might seem that *not*; and as supporting examples the case of *imagined objects* (like Pegasus) and of figures or things in literary work might be adduced. It may be said that such objects certainly possess various properties, indeed they even have a nature or essence peculiarly their own; still they cannot be taken as *existing*.

But why not? They do *exist* – in imagination; and their properties are predicated of them not *in* reality, but *in* imagination, though *really* in the imagination. Thus, the fact that we should be able to differentiate between true and false ascriptions of properties to imaginary objects (for we want to be able to say that it is false that harpy is a horse, and true that Pegasus is such an one) does *not* require of us to maintain that imaginary objects possess attributes *in reality*, but only that they *really* possess attributes – *in imagination*. *In fact there is always an exact correspondence between the mode of an object's existence and the mode in which properties are predicated of it:* physical existence, physical predication; imaginary existence, imaginary predication; and so on with all other modes of reality.

It may be objected that we ordinarily would say that imaginary objects, like illusions and hallucinations, do not exist at all; therefore that they cannot exist even in imagination; what common sense can admit as existing is only our *imagining* them, as an act of our faculty of imagination. When we misperceive, we do not really perceive – we *imagine* that we perceive. On account of the important general issue involved in this objection, let us examine it a little closer. The general issue is this: in all such objections where common sense and ordinary thinking is adduced as the ground and warrant of the objection against a certain view, it is to be observed that not common sense itself, but only an alleged inference from it is brought against the opposed view; for common sense and ordinary thinking *cannot* pronounce judgement on any really *philosophical* question, otherwise they

would not have been *common* sense and *ordinary* thinking. It is always a supposedly valid inference from common sense which is adduced by its self-appointed adherents against any speculative doctrine; they pretend to be able to say what common sense *would have said*, was it confronted with a question which falls absolutely outside its field of operation. In truth, they are not even entitled to claim to answer the *uncommon* question on the analogy of what common sense answers to *common* question; for this can only hold good when the uncommon question is *commonly* uncommon, to put it thus; not when we have moved to an entirely different level of thinking.

But to leave these generalities, let me substantiate them by an examination of the objection at hand. I agree that ordinary thinking would pronounce imaginary and illusory objects as non-existent. But does this mean that common sense would deny the existence of such objects as *contents* of our imagination? To answer this question with any plausibility (I mean by no mere affirmation or denial), we should previously ask what is the *point* of the commonsensical refusal to admit their existence.

For feelings and emotions (and sensation and perceptions) do exist, I suppose, according to common sense. And yet their existential mode and status is very similar, and ultimately the same, with that of imagined objects etc.: for they all exist in the mind (in various “parts” or faculties of mind). Besides, the status of true perceptions is again the same with that of illusions inasmuch as they all are affections of the faculties of sensation; and yet commonsense would be inclined to say that the former exist whereas the latter not. What is the point of such divergence in judgement with respect to at bottom similar classes of objects? The answer to this question is indeed obvious: when one denies the existence of a misperception or illusion, one really wants to deny the objective existence of the content of that illusion and not the existence of the subjective affection as such in which that content exists. And the same holds good for imagined objects.

They do not exist – i.e. they do not exist independently of the imagination which shaped and conjured them up. And further, one can also see *why* the subjective existence of imagined objects and illusions does not suffice to make us ordinarily ascribe to them existence, whereas the same kind of existence for feelings does not in the least incline us to withhold our ascription of existence to them. The reason is simply that the feelings are not *meant* to represent external objects; therefore there is no point in denying existence of them if they fail, as they always do of course, to so represent such external objects. On the other hand, objects in our various (sensuous, i.e. non-discursive and non-intuitive) representative faculties are “*intended*” as representations of extra-mental physical reality; and so it is natural to deny existence of those among them which fail to function as they are constitutively meant to do.

From this, it also follows that there is no real opposition, nor any contradiction between common-sense’s motive in passing judgement against the existence of such objects as I mentioned above on the one hand and the point of my wish to reverse that judgement. Common sense says such objects have no existence – outside the mind; and I am saying: these objects do truly exist – in the mind.

For *to exist* does not mean to *be self-subsistent* in some way; otherwise not even the properties of sensible things would exist; and I take it, this nobody would want to maintain.

We conclude therefore that imaginary objects do exist as contents in our acts of imagining them.

Having thus disposed of the above question we maintain *that predicative being necessarily entails existence, just as existence necessarily entails predication.*

§3. This necessary mutual involvement suggests a first plausible account of existence. If to exist entails to have properties and to have

properties entails to exist, then can it not be that existence is just *blank-predication*, that is predication with vacant the place of the predicate? On such an account *to exist means to be predicatively something or other*; when we say that something exists, we mean that it *is* (the copulative or predicative “is”) something which we are not interested to mention, or perhaps even do not know exactly; in any case what we wish to affirm is that it is – *something or other*.

This account first of all gives a satisfactory explanation of the *fact* of the mutual entailment above insisted on. Then it accords well with our primary intuitions to the effect that simple predication is the form of the elementary proposition and represents the form of atomic facts, that predication (ontological and propositional) is the fundamental, irreducible basic cell in the vast network of the structure of the World. It also, further, aptly explains our intuitive feeling – that existence is in some way presupposed by the having and displaying of properties, without introducing a rupture between existence and predication, or making of them two virtually totally unconnected things *more moderno*. For to have *this* or *that* determinate property presupposes *having some property or other*, and so the presupposition is interpreted within the nexus of predicative being. Finally it provides the justification of classical metaphysics or better, it is in perfect harmony with it: the verb *to exist* covers just one function of the verb *to be*, a function which is most intimately connected with the latter's fundamental function – that of signifying predication.

To add the necessary historical perspective, one may say that such a kind of view underlies the metaphysics of classical Greek philosophy.

§4. The above account is no doubt attractive. But is it a true, is it an accurate and adequate, final, account of existence? It would seem not, for the following mainly reason. In predication we should distinguish the property predicated, from the fact that it *is* predicated, the *what* is

predicated from the *that* it is predicated, the *what* an object is from the *that* it is what it is; the formulation may be varied at will in order to make clear that distinction, which, besides, is brought to the surface by the very formulation of the above proposed account of existence: blank predication presupposes a distinction between the form and force of predication (whose abstraction, we proposed, is existence) on the one hand and that which call *fill* that form thereby completing a full, real predication. This latter item is nothing else than the scholastic *forma essendi*, as contradistinguished from the *actus essendi*, the *what-it-is*, as distinct from the *that-it-is*. We may render this distinction by the use of the terms *act* and *content of being*. In every predication a certain *content* of being is actually manifested and exhibited by a subject, this very manifestation and exhibition constituting *the act* in accordance with which the subject *actually is* determined so as to be that content.

I am well aware that this distinction is not such as to be immediately accepted upon presentation. It requires a long process before one is deeply convinced of its validity. I cannot, of course, pursue such a line here, but perhaps it might help if one were to approach it from the following side. Take any elementary fact, say that *a* is *F*. and ask for a complete inventory of the elements *and components* that go in to constitute this fact as such. If you mention only *a* and *F-ness*, you have not exhausted the constitution of the given fact; for *a* and *F-ness* might well exist *without there obtaining the fact that a is F*; hence we require a third evanescent component and this is what in the proposition is expressed by the copula – it is the ontological foundation of copulative being; this is the desired act of being.

Again in the case of any existent you can suppress its existence; the essence (formerly existing but now withdrawn from the sphere of existence) remains – the *what-the-thing-was* remains in availability for re-occurrence in the existing World. There is clearly a *prima-facie* very real distinction to be made here. We may, and I shall, correct this *prima facie*

result subsequently if our development will necessitate such correction; but we cannot deny the validity of the distinction, at the beginning; it is valid at a certain level of analysis, to say the least.

But, as I said, I cannot stay here for more. I shall assume that distinction and see how it affects the above proposed account of existence. It obviously affects it thus: Predicative Being is thereby decomposed into two components; it cannot serve as the fundamental irreducible element in terms of which existence is comprehended and accounted for. Further, one of the two components into which the analysis of predicative being has led us is evidently most intimately connected, if not identical, with existence – I mean the act of Being. For, given the above rough explanation of the distinction, what is for something to exist other than to *act* (in the sense of the act of being) in accordance with (that is, exhibiting or displaying) the contents of being corresponding to what is ordinarily called its character, nature and properties? *It is this act by which it exists; this act is its very existence* [1].

It would seem then that by this development we have come across this account of existence – that it is *the act of being as such*, as contrasted to the content of being. It must be noticed, that this account also preserves the necessary connection between existence and predication; for there cannot be any act of being without some form which “acts”, nor can there be any acting content without an act. Indeed there is a close connection between existence and content of being as such (and not merely with (composite) predication); for the act of being can only obtain by being attached to a content; and a content is “naturally apt” to receive the existential act.

Again to add historical perspective, this type of theory of existence was upheld by St. Thomas Aquinas and Aegidius Romanus – to give only two eminent scholastic philosophers – based on the famous doctrine of the real

distinction between essence and existence. Nor was the influence of this view restricted to scholastic philosophy. The great opponent of that philosophy, Descartes himself, held to the same view – betraying the influence on him of the abused philosophy, in this, as in many other respects.

§4. Before appreciating the value of this type of account offered for existence, I shall, at this point, introduce another condition which any theory of existence ought to satisfy – the former condition being that of the necessary connection between existential and predicative being.

This second condition can perhaps be brought to light in the following way. Suppose we wish to strictly distinguish between this “content” of an existent thing and its existence; we can surely, easily enough *conceive* of this distinction; in fact I have urged for its acceptance above, and utilized it in the statement of our second account to existence. But now we are not asking for the *formal correctness* of the distinction, which I think is indisputable; we rather ask about its *real validity*, or in other words and in better formulation, we ask about the precise nature of that distinction, for there are kinds and kinds of distinction; separate entities are distinct one from another; co-existent attributes, even *necessarily* co-existent attributes may be distinct one from another; merely formally diverse aspects of one and the same attribute can be distinct one from another; indeed *identical* items can be distinct in as far as they can be considered as identical *items* in the plural; and there is subtle variation within each one of these major kinds of distinctness. So we now ask, what is the accurate conception of the distinction between the *What* and the *That* of Being? They no doubt are *necessarily* interconnected in the sense above indicated, i.e. that act necessarily is attached to content and content is at least naturally apt to exist (to cover the case where content can be found which does not exist). But what is the precise nature of their connectedness?

Necessity is really of various kinds contrary to the neat schemes and simplifying assumptions of much modern philosophy.

One way to get clearer about the connection and distinction between the act and the content of being is to proceed with the following inquiry. The natural way (and indeed this was in fact the way in which the exponents of the theory of the real distinction between essence and existence considered the relationship between the distinguished items) of considering that distinction is to isolate mentally the content and then consider the act as being added upon it, as “accruing” on it, making it an existing content, an existent entity. This isolation and, as it were, addition from without, is essential to our distinguishing them; so much is involved in our very idea of distinction as applied to cases of analysing a complex but unified entity even when we distinguish something from itself in order to affirm its self-identity, even, that is, in such trivial statements like that A is A, even here we consider identity to A as *accruing* in some way to A, as being superimposed upon it. And this *a fortiori* happens in cases of stronger distinction: when we distinguish an accidental property from another co-inherent in a given subject, or when we distinguish either of them from the subject itself, or when we distinguish an essential feature of a thing from the rest of its essence and from the thing itself – even when we distinguish the total entire essence of a thing from its substratum or matter, – – in all these cases and in every conceivable one we consider that which we distinguish as *accruing* in some way to that from which we distinguish it (I repeat again, I have in mind cases of analysing a complex unity). What we take as the basis and what as accretion is a very delicate question. Roughly the former is that which is considered as in some sense *prior*.

But in order for this logic of “addition” or “*accretion*”, to work at all, the *existence* of that on which the accretion falls must be *presupposed* – as is evident. Indeed the existence of both what is added and that to which it is added is presupposed; but one might say that in some cases the added item

may exist only “*in*” that to which it is added and therefore need not exist “previously” (of course not in a temporal sense) to the addition. In any case and irrespective of whether this allegedly excepting circumstance is really such, the presupposed existence of that to which the addition is made cannot be denied. Of course, one must keep in mind that I mean *existence of whatever sort is appropriate to the kind of object to which that which suffers the addition belongs*.

But if we turn now to the case in question, that of the adding of existence to essence to make an existing thing, we shall observe that this condition cannot be satisfied. For the content of being, considered apart from its existence *cannot* exist in whatever way, if it is precisely by that existence that it exists. There is nothing in our case on which to add existence – there *can* be nothing; for if there were, it would already exist in some fashion or other and the addition of (some mode of) existence could only alter its mode of existing – not add existence to the absolutely non-existent. Nothing can be added to the absolute Nothing; or rather the result of such addition would be the added item itself alone again. We treat of existence in general not of a particular mode; so suppression of it leaves nothing and not merely a different mode of existence.

One may feel that this reasoning is sophistical. But I do not think that it really is. Why it is not, the ultimate foundation on which it reposes, will be a little clearer at the end of this paper. But I may emphasize here that attempts to convict it of sophistry can easily be repulsed. Take for instance St. Thomas Aquinas’ position. For him the essence is a real, objective potentiality which is realized in actuality when existence is added; this may be all right if we were looking after a notion of specifically actual existence; but we are bold enough to search for some account of *existence in general*, of what is common to whatever sort, fashion or mode of existence [2], of that of which even physical existence is just a particular mode. And with such an object in view, obviously St. Thomas’ solution does not avail itself.

We count potential existence as a mode of existence – if it is construed as an objective reality. – Or consider another attempt to evade our conclusion: essence, it may be said, is not absolute Nothing; it does not exist, all right, but it is a *determinate non-existent*, a *determinate Nothing* if you like; and it is to such a nothing that, existence being added, an existent entity results. Why *at bottom* this endeavour misfires, too, will be seen again after I have finished; but, anticipating, I can here ask, what is it that *separates*, as it were, this definite non-existent from Absolute Nothing; surely anything that can raise something out of the nullity of Absolute Nothing is some sort of existence, however weak – and faint. Not to mention that, under what form could we conceive of such a definite non-existent other than that of potential existence – thus falling back on St. Thomas' type of solution? (And in fact this identification was expressly made by Aristotle).

§5. There is then no escape from the above conclusion. Unless one tries to distinguish between *esse essentiae* and *esse existentiae*, as with Henricus a Gandavo; but this is really a distinction for the sake of distinction, if I may say so, a scholastic distinction in the negative sense of the word according to which it is implied that mere *classification* can yield satisfactory *explanation*. For what is that *esse essentiae* but an evanescent existential being pertaining to essences as such, as distinct, that is, from truly existing essences?

it follows, thus, that existence and content of being are not only necessarily connected in a stronger sense than that admitted above (namely that the act naturally attaches itself to content, and the content is naturally apt to act); not only they are inseparable one from the other; it is not only that suppression of the one annihilates the other and occurrence of the one carries with it an occurrence of the other; but, what is something more than all this, it is that even in our very distinguishing them we cannot but involve the one in the other. The model of addition, applicable to all similar

distinctions of a unified but divisible complex-entity, is strictly inapplicable here. In the very nature of essence (or content of being) as such we discern involved existence of some kind or other; and in the very root of existence we see inherent content of being as such. For, in the first place, existence itself is able to emerge out of absolute Nothing only by a peculiarity of its own, a character definitive of it as something, and so as some content of being of a sort. And secondly, particular existences, if I may speak thus, are no mere indifferent and undifferentiated extraneous adjuncts to the things whose existences they are, but are made to carry inscribed in themselves the very natures which they “formally” cause or make to exist; *for every particular existent, by containing its existence in its own content, draws that existence upon, or rather in, the content and thus assimilates the former to the later.*

§6. This being the case then, an account of existence which reposes on a proper ultimate distinction between existential act and content of being cannot be final, to say the least. It needs to be superseded. The distinction is not denied; it is valid, and useful, in an extended indeed area. But it is of a very singular kind [3]: you distinguish A from B in the complex AB; but then you find out that A, as distinguished from B, must necessarily involve B in order to be distinguishable from B, and similarly conversely for B. To add historical illustration I may remind of a strikingly similar case (indeed in the end the cases are identical as one may see when I have finished); in the dialogue *Parmenides*, Plato at the beginning of the second hypothesis analyses *the-Existent-One* (the ἔν ὄν), the One-Being, into its two moments (as we should rather say, than elements), namely the one and the being; but then he finds that the One which he has distinguished from being must be a being, if it is not Nothing; and the Being which was contrasted in distinction from the One, must be itself one, if it is to be something (i.e. some-*one*-thing).

§7. Let us see where we have been led. We begun by emphasizing the necessary mutual entailment between existence and predication; this was our first condition which ought to be satisfied by any acceptable account of existence. We thus rejected any view which renders them virtually unconnected. In the light of that condition, we then proceeded to reduce existence to blank predication; and upon finding that predicative being is analyzable into two components, act and content of being, we revised our account and proposed to identify existence with one of the moments into which we saw predicative being to decompose itself. But now we again have found that, after all, the connection between existence and content of being is more intimate than any merely external necessary connection can be. It cannot be sufficiently emphasized how wonderfully singular the discovered intimacy is. For it is not simply the, so to speak, mechanical connectedness of AB to B. I repeat, we distinguish something from something else; and then we find that which we have distinguished, already lying in that from which we distinguished it, not simply contained in the initial complex, the subject of our distinguishing operation – in which indeed would have been only too natural to be found.

It follows from all this that the account of existence for which we are looking, must satisfy that latest condition of the peculiar intimacy subsisting between essence and existence, between content and act of being.

§8. It is advisable that one more preparatory step be taken in the interests of a less inhibited reception of the account to follow. This step concerns the *extension* in the field of the idea of existence, which idea we try to circumscribe and, in a sense, “define”. I premised some general remarks on this topic at the beginning of the paper, but now we are to approach it somehow more deeply, that is more abstractly. The step consists in apprehending that existence, in the fundamental sense intended here,

cannot, as such and of its own, stand in contradiction to *any* object, or kind of object, whatsoever. In other words that *everything exists* (in some fashion or other – this qualification is of course always to be understood). Or, in still different words to the same import, that *anything conceivable is also real*, in some way and degree or other, that it is *a part of total reality*.

I cannot in strictness justify this apparently paradoxical claim; but nor do I think that it stands in need of justification properly so-called, since I take it to be self-evident, to be seen as such as soon as its true meaning and import are correctly grasped. And it is with the purpose of removing some of the obstacles that may stand in the way of a direct apprehension of its self-evidence, that I append the following few brief remarks on it.

Firstly, by “conceivable”, I mean, of course, *correctly* conceivable. Obviously, if a conception suffers from defects proper to conceptions (say unclarity, or indistinctness) there is no reason why an exactly corresponding reality should answer to it – though *some* reality would somehow correspond to it, by being obscurely and defectively comprehended by the defective conception. For instance, there are vague conceptions; but there are no vague realities – because a vague conception is one which *vaguely* conceives its object, and not one which clearly conceives a *vague object*. And the same holds in general: In a certain sense there are no *defective realities* (though again there are various grades and kinds of reality) – and this simply because there can be no reality which does not satisfy, so to speak, the conditions of abstract reality in general (though there *can* be a reality failing to satisfy the condition of a particular kind or grade of reality); whereas there can very well be, alas, conceptions which do not satisfy the general condition of a correct conception *as representation*, that is, conceptions which do not adequately represent the reality “intended” by them – though again there can be obviously no conceptions which fail to satisfy the conditions of conception in general, not *as representation*, but as inherent state or act of mind.

But if this is so, it is thus made evident that we can never show that an object, that something, is totally unreal, that it lacks every sort and grade of reality. Instead, what we can indeed show is that a putative object is not really an object because the conception in which it is embedded is, in one way or another, defective. In short, arguments against the reality of an assumed object are *eo ipso* arguments against the correctness of its conception, a conception whose content *purports* to correctly represent an object, but, if the arguments are valid and conclusive, fails to do so.

Secondly, and in order to approach the above propounded paradoxical claim from a different angle, let that be observed in this connection which is as old as metaphysical thinking itself; namely that in order to deny the existence of anything, you must presuppose its existence; for what is it of which you wish to deny existence? Obviously not Absolute Nothing; for then you are not denying existence of anything. There must *be* something, which you desire to condemn to non-existence.

Much has been written against this assertion; with what effect, one may judge from the fact that the idea recurs again and again, through the history of Philosophy, each time being supposed to have been disposed of, and each time being surprisingly resurrected.

From what has been already said, one may perceive my position respecting that proposition. This position, I think, both dispels the self-contradictory aspect which the proposition presents under its usual formulations and preserves the indisputable core of truth that it contains. For, as I said, existence in general cannot be denied of *anything*; only particular modes of existence can be thus denied; and so when we deny existence of a certain sort of something, we clearly presuppose its existence, *simpliciter*, we implicitly ascribe to it existence in general and as such, that is existence without qualification.

Therefore, it is true, that in order to deny existence of something, it must exist; in fact, and in order to push the matter into its most seemingly

absurd extremities, even the fact that something *cannot* exist presupposes its existence. In other words we must always construe such claims in a way that the alleged impossibility should be impossibility on the part of the object in question to exist in a particular mode of existence. *Nothing could be incapable of existing simpliciter; everything exists.* So it is impossible for a square circle to exist in *rerum natura*; but even the square-circle does exist, in the conception conceiving it.

Obviously there is much need of further elaboration; but I hope that the intuitive force of the proposition I asserted has been rendered clear enough.

§9. I have proposed, and sketchily argued that everything exists, that existence intrinsically pertains to everything conceivable [4]. Now observe that this is in absolute conformity with the previously ascertained fact that however strongly one may distinguish existence from essence, act from content of being, at bottom existence is found included in essence; for what else is a *content of being* than *something*, or at least something without its existence dependent on our precision of the notion of "something"? A content of being is a definite, specific determination of being, *something* definite, determinate; and "something" means in its turn a definite determinateness, a certain determinate character or other. (Needless to be said "something" is not meant to be geared to the ordinary notion of thing; it is not even ordinarily so fixated).

Thus, from different routes, we have achieved the same result; which fact may go some additional way towards confirming the result's validity and truth. And the final result is this: *an adequate account of existence ought to satisfy the condition that the existential act must be found in the very content of being from which it is, at a certain level of analysis, distinguished.* This is the outcome of the foregoing development, and this must be our guide and our criterion in satisfactorily accounting in a more final way for existence.

§10. Having arrived at this point, I may briefly give some indication of the direction in which such an adequate analysis of existence may proceed; the elaboration of the details is, of course, extremely complicated and will not be attempted here. It requires Damascian labours.

We abstract from any particular mode of existence, and try to concentrate, in abstracto, in existence as such, attempting to form some accurate and precise conception out of our most general notion of existence. We are thus expected to prescind from everything in our unphilosophical notion of existence which comes from particular modes of existence, especially from those modes with which we are ordinarily acquainted. We cannot, therefore introduce into our reasonings considerations relating, for example, to physical existence qua physical. Not that the existence for which we are looking pertains to some outlandish, rarefied kind of object *alone*; on the contrary, this existence is the absolutely universal existence in which everything has a *share*, material things and their properties, space and time and matter and force, numbers and abstract things and their connections, God and angels and separate souls, illusions and feelings and mental states or acts, and even self-contradictions. We must get rid of the notion that by abstracting we become removed from reality; that utter abstraction means absolute meaninglessness. On the contrary, abstract thought, *if* correctly manipulated and conducted (and everyone versed in Metaphysics knows only too well the awful magnitude of that *if*) discloses the very core (*simple* and unpretentious at bottom, as every core is) of even common reality, i.e. of that reality with which being acquainted directly and continuously we think that we understand better than any other. Thus, only when we have a satisfactory answer to the most abstract question: What is existence *simpliciter*, could we possibly begin to really understand physical existence; for then only we would know what it means for a physical thing to exist, *just to exist*, prescinding the physicalness

of its existence; and on such a knowledge we might then build securely the constitutive characters of *physical* existence as physical now and ~~not as~~ ^{that} merely existence. Which is what it means / the metaphysical Ontology precedes, and is presupposed by, physical Cosmology.

This then existence in general is tantamount to reality; to exist is to be real in some way or other, to be part of total Reality, to be present in reality: existence is presence in reality, it consists, we may say, in a certain positing, it is an ontological affirmation.

§11. What is then *to exist*, in the most abstract acceptance of the term?

I think there is a very simple answer to this question: *To exist is not to be absolute Nothing*. Positing, presence in reality is contrasted to absolute cancellation, entire absence as such (and not merely absence of something from something). To say that anything is real, that it exists, is to say that it is not absolute Nothing; by affirming existence of anything at all we affirm that it has been raised from the total nullity of the Absolute Nothing.

But what is it not to be Absolute Nothing? What is contradictorily opposed to Absolute Nothing? Indeed *everything* is opposed to Absolute Nothing, and it is in this opposition that, as it were, it raises itself above Total Darkness into the World of Reality. So it may be thought that *something* is the required contradictory opposite to Nothing. But this, although it equally well serves my purpose here and besides is not entirely false, yet it is not exactly and precisely correct. For, no doubt, to be something entails not to be Nothing. But whether the converse holds also good depends on certain subtle speculative considerations which would be inappropriate to discuss in such an introductory paper. Be that as it may, we might perhaps agree that the proper contradictory opposition to *Nothing* is furnished by the *One*; and that to be something opposes absolute Nothing *immediately*, through the fact that “to be something” presupposes being

One (at least formally: since somethinghood consists in a certain determination, and to be one is “prior” to being *one* determination).

Thus not to be Absolute Nothing is to be One [5].

But to exist was seen to be equivalent to not be Absolute Nothing.

Therefore to exist is, in ultimate analysis, to be One; *Existence and Oneness ultimately coincide*. And this is the account of existence towards which I was driving all along. Historically speaking, after indicating successively general accounts of existence in the spirit of modern, Classical Greek and scholastic philosophy, we have concluded with a neoplatonically orientated account, indeed with a credibly Platonic one.

§12. Since, as I said at the beginning, I did not propose to elaborate in some details a full theory of existence, but only to indicate the most characteristic feature of such a theory and its fundamental proposition, together with the thought-movement which pushes, if I am right, towards it; since this was what I proposed, there only remains now to observe how fittingly the above indicated account complies with the more advanced condition whose satisfaction we found imperatively enjoined on any prospective attempt at a correct understanding of existence; indeed how well it explains that condition.

The requirement was, to repeat, “that the existential act must be found in the very content of being from which it is, at a certain level of analysis, distinguished”. And so it *is* found. For the content of being, as above remarked, is nothing but something in its “somethinghood” – if you will allow me the expression. And “somethinghood” or being something consists in the display or exhibition of a peculiarity, a distinctive character, a definite in content distinguishability – by means of which the something in question manifests its character as the specific and definite something which it is, and also simultaneously renders itself capable of being picked up and mentally or conceptually identified and distinguished from everything else. But such a

definiteness in character or content presupposes unity; definiteness and “limitation” (in the sense in which the limited is what is definite in contour and circumscription) come necessarily with unity, presupposing unity. And to be *unified* is to enjoy in one way or another the presence of One – to be one.

There is a complication here with regard to the indeterminate objects, or objects characteristically consisting in an indeterminateness, like matter, say, or potentiality, or movement, or what generally pertains to the Philebian indefinite infinity. But any possible worry is dispelled as soon as it is observed that such indeterminatenesses are really *determinate*, definite in their indetermination. They do have a character, a definite character, which consists in an indeterminateness of a specifically defined sort. And thus they form no real exception; their determinateness of character ensures that they fall under the conception of the One, thereby automatically safeguarding their existence.

What is required in the nature of “Somethinghood” is that there be a definite peculiarity in absolute abstraction from what this peculiarity should specifically be. This doctrine can be pushed, and has been pushed, to wild extremities, but such abstruse complications need not perplex us here. For it is evident from what has been said that, existence being oneness in the last analysis, and essence, content, “whatness” or “somethinghood” presupposing oneness – these being so, it is evident that to affirm of something that it exists *does not* add anything over and above what is already involved in the somethinghood of the something in question. And thus one sees in an exactly reverse sense, we conclude with Kant that existence does not add anything to the notion of the existing subject, and that existence is not a real predicate.

NOTIONS

- [1] The only distinction would be that an act of being can be "addressed", as it were, to a particular property, whereas existence can only be the *total* act, so to speak, of an object towards all its (at least essential) properties. But such distinction is evidently trivial. Existence is the act of being as such in its abstraction; it is thus involved even in a single act of being. Strictly also, let it be noted, it is not the subject which existentially *acts*, but a content of being (character, property or nature), a form (*forma essendi*), which *acts* thereby constituting the subject-thing in existence.
- [2] I assume, ~~you~~ will note, the ultimate "univocalness" or synonymy of existence.
- [3] Whether, on view of this paramount singularity, one would be rather inclined to deny that there is a distinction at all here to be made, is partly a verbal question; partly it is incorrect to say so, since, as I argued before, we can clearly and distinctly distinguish the items which one would claim to be indistinguishable if he were to deny the existence of any distinction here.
- [4] Indeed "everything conceivable" is a redundancy: everything is conceivable; and the correctly conceived is something, some real object.
- [5] *Oneness* does not properly contrast contradictorily with *multiplicity*; in fact the many instead of excluding oneness, they really *presuppose* it, and cannot thus *contradict* it. Herein manifests itself the superiority of Plato's construal of the ultimate First Principles over the Speusippean one.