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# Is 'Proving' God Still Relevant?

JOSEPH L. ROCHE, S.J.

**I**N today's climate of post-modern atheism, of Christian secularization and death-of-God theology, the question of 'proofs' for the existence of God may seem rather quaint and old fashioned.<sup>1</sup> Yet it is surprising how this question keeps popping up in any mature, intelligent attempt to relate pre-Vatican II faith with today's post-Conciliar, complex situation. Surprisingly enough too, it makes little difference whether the discussions take place on a non-sectarian college campus such as that of the University of the Philippines, or in a CFM discussion group, or even at a Cursillo ultreya. The amount of confusion and positive misunderstanding surrounding this question seems to be rather equally distributed.

For rightly or wrongly, the position affirming the possibility of rationally 'proving' God's existence typified for many the teaching they had received and held to be, paradoxically enough, part of their faith.<sup>2</sup> There were good grounds for this common sense grasp of Catholic teaching: the clear statement of Vatican I on the power of natural reason to know God with certitude; the oath against the Modernists,

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this essay, whenever the word proof is used in relation to God's existence, it will always be put in quotes, 'proof', to signify the special meaning it connotes when thus used.

<sup>2</sup> This paradox is brought out in E. Gilson's *The Philosopher and Theology* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 76ff.



and more recently, the encyclical of Pius XII, *Humani Generis*.<sup>3</sup>

Yet in today's ferment when everything is being questioned, few traditional positions are more open to sharper criticism than this idea of 'proving' God's existence. Any present day discussion about God is bound to include the question: "Do you still hold that you can *prove* the existence of God?", or "What's the new position about proving God?" These questions indicate that a certain amount of change is expected, even taken for granted, by anyone alive to recent developments in philosophy-theology; but a certain amount of continuity is also expected—some link with the position commonly held before the post World War II renewal and Vatican II.<sup>4</sup>

This essay is a very modest attempt to present one, coherent view of the 'proofs' for God's existence, which represents the general approach, if not every detail, of what is currently proposed by some of the more prominent, contemporary philosophers and theologians. The emphasis will be on certain aspects which this author considers important and new, both in the sense of constituting a better, more developed understanding of essential elements in the Christian tradition, as well as valid additional dimensions and insights brought to light in contemporary studies. No attempt will be made to provide a model 'proof', guaranteed to work for every type of person, in any occasion, everywhere. On the contrary, one of the principal ideas proposed here consists in denying the possibility of a 'proof' so conceived. Nevertheless, some indications of the broad lines of an approach towards God more in keeping with the contemporary intellectual climate, will be sketched.

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<sup>3</sup> See Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 33rd ed. (Herder, 1965), #3004 and 3026 for Vatican I; #3538 for the Oath against the Modernists; and #3875 and 3892 for *Humani Generis*.

<sup>4</sup> There has been an almost incredible stream of books and articles, both Catholic and non-catholic, in recent years on this question of 'proofs' for God. An attempt is made in this article to indicate in the notes some of the more valuable contributions.



The particular motivation for this essay has come from the almost universal confusion over the meaning and significance of the 'proofs' for God, encountered by the author during the past five years of teaching a course in philosophy of God, as well as in various private discussions in the university milieu of Manila and the provinces. There clearly seems to be a definite need to clarify some basic aspects of the question, especially here in the Philippines, perhaps, where a traditional Catholic intellectual milieu finds itself confronting all the new, unsettling, intellectual currents that are sweeping the world over.<sup>5</sup>

A second motive has been supplied by the extremely technical and specialized character of so much of the work which Catholic philosophers and theologians have devoted to this question of 'proofs' for God. While the very possibility of such 'proofs' is seriously questioned on all sides, — a questioning involving basic issues such as the conception of human rationality, the nature and validity of first principles, the inter-relation of intellect and will, — the majority of articles and books on this question are still engaged in technical disputes over subjects like the notion of contingency in the third way of St. Thomas, or the proper notion of *esse* involved in the five ways.<sup>6</sup> These studies are undoubtedly important for scholarly progress; yet in the present context, there are more basic issues that are perhaps more in need of clarification and elucidation. For most of the traditional 'proofs' are elaborated with principles and within a whole intellectual

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<sup>5</sup> After a lecture in a Manila university on dialog as an approach to contemporary atheism, the present author was asked to provide a sure-fire argument that would force the atheist to believe. This pragmatic, rather simplist conception of the problem seems quite widespread.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, the recently published proceedings of the sixth International Thomistic Congress, *De Deo in Philosophia S. Thomae et in hodierni philosophia*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1965-67). See also the long commentary of M. Corvez, O.P., "Le problème de Dieu," *Revue Thomiste*, 67 (Jan.-Mar. 1967), pp. 65-104. Contrast these with J. Smith, "The Experience of the Holy and the Idea of God," in *Phenomenology in America*, ed. J. Edie (Quadrangle, 1967), pp. 295-306.



system that is certainly not indicative of present day thought; hence the arguments tend to appear as little more than chains of verbal deductions.<sup>7</sup>

Now if there is anything Vatican II should have taught us, it is the absolute necessity for any vital philosophy or theology to be engaged, relevant, 'pastoral'. True scholarship is not esoteric; it is the outcome of the human demand for understanding in depth.<sup>8</sup> The main purpose of this essay, then, is, by coming to grips with the contemporary 'state of the question', to provide a basic, up-to-date frame of reference for treating the 'proofs' for God, a background against which particular specialized efforts could be placed.<sup>9</sup> With this in mind, we shall first sketch some of the underlying issues that ground the importance and relevance of the 'proofs', and then proceed to an attempt at clarifying to some degree the proper meaning of the term 'proof' when applied to God's existence;

<sup>7</sup> This is well developed in the excellent article of D. Dubarle, "Pensée scientifique et preuves traditionnelles de l'existence de Dieu," in *De la connaissance de Dieu (Recherches de Philosophie, III-IV, Desclée de Brouwer, 1958)*, pp. 35-112; especially pp. 36-39, 49-53, 72-75, 88-93. P. Ricoeur contrasts the scientific attitude with that of faith in his penetrating contribution to *Science et Foi* (Paris: Fayard, 1962), pp. 83-95.

<sup>8</sup> M. Adler, in his work, *The Conditions of Philosophy*, (New York: Atheneum, 1965), p. 68, explains how philosophy must avoid being esoteric. Some work has been done on these broader lines, for example, S. Breton, "Crise de la raison et philosophie contemporaine," in *La crise de la raison dans la pensée contemporaine (Recherches de Philosophie, V, Desclée de Brouwer, 1960)*, pp. 117-206. For more bibliographical indications see my "The Aggiornamento in Catholic Philosophy," *Philippine Studies*, 13 (1965), 232-57.

<sup>9</sup> To some extent, the work of M. Novak, *Belief and Unbelief* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), tries to fulfill this function, principally in presenting a basic theory of knowledge founded on B. Lonergan's work. *The Estranged God* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1966) by A. Padovano, on the other hand, works mainly on contemporary literature and existential philosophy as a means for providing the context of today's search for God. But perhaps the most valuable work in this line today are the pertinent volumes of *Concilium*; see, for example, vol. 6, *The Church and the World*, 1965; vol. 16, *Is God Dead?* 1966; vol. 21, *Man as Man and Believer*, 1966; and vol. 23, *The Pastoral Approach to Atheism*, 1967.



and finally enter in some detail into an examination of the starting point, form of argumentation and conclusion of the 'proofs' themselves. An outline of a suggested, contemporary approach towards 'proving' God will conclude the essay.

#### BASIC ISSUES UNDERLYING 'PROOFS' FOR GOD

It has become quite fashionable in recent years not only for professed atheists and agnostics, but for many theists as well, to flatly deny that God's existence can be 'proved'. Often their denial is based on solid philosophical and theological grounds, and is intended to express a very limited, technically sound position which would actually be admitted by those who intelligently favor the possibility of 'proofs' for God. Unfortunately, however, a flat, categorical denial of this kind actually goes far beyond the limited, technical *status quaestionis* in which it was framed, and implies consequences that are not always foreseen, or at least properly guarded against.

The primary consequence *implied* by categorically denying all possibility of 'proving' God's existence is that a man's belief in God, and his commitment as a mature, responsible person, have nothing to do with his reason.<sup>10</sup> His act of affirming God would be a blind leap, a question of personal, private preference; there would be ultimately little or nothing to reason about or to try to understand. This 'fideist' position, admittedly rarely held in such a pure form, is nevertheless not the chimera some authors have pictured it. For when the notion of 'proof' is sufficiently nuanced — as it must be simply to understand the various dimensions of 'proof' operative in human life—then a categorical denial of all possibility of 'proofs' for God can scarcely avoid such an implication. This seems to be confirmed in actual fact by much of the non-Christian secularism being proclaimed these days.

But besides the implication that the act of affirming God is a-rational if not irrational, and that growth in faith in no

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<sup>10</sup> See the very perceptive, up-to-date article of J.-J. Latour, "L'idée traditionnelle de Dieu est-elle périmée?" in *L'histoire et l'historien*, (*Recherches et Débats*, no. 47, Juin 1964), pp. 189-222; on this point, see pp. 190-91.



way implies any growth in understanding, there is a second underlying implication of a more general, social nature: no longer would there be any common grounds for reasonable discussion between believer and unbeliever.<sup>11</sup> If the theist position that God actually does exist is nothing but a private, personal preference, then there is nothing to discuss: *de gustibus non est disputandum*—you do not argue over personal tastes. Consequently all grounds for an intellectual apostolate, for intelligent preaching and hearing the Word (or message, L. Dewart notwithstanding), for responsible conversions, would simply evaporate.

The effort at this initial stage, then, of dispelling confusion consists in pointing out that the ultimate basis for favoring the possibility of some kind of 'proofs' for God is not some unconscious rationalistic presupposition, but rather the position, first, that man's affirmation of God is not a completely blind leap, but includes a positive role of his reason; there is definitely something to *understand* in the proper sense, not just will, or feel, or experience emotionally or imaginatively, when affirming God.<sup>12</sup> And secondly, that as a result there *are* grounds for reasonable discussion between theist and non-theist.<sup>13</sup> This basis for faith's essential intelligibility would seem to be a perennially valid element of

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<sup>11</sup> See J. Macdonald Smith, "How Do We Prove That God Exists?" *Downside Review*, 79 (1961), 217-31, especially 218.

<sup>12</sup> This work of reason within faith is strikingly manifested in Augustine's *Confession*, Bk. X, c. 6f. "What is it then that I love when I love my God?" See R. Guardini's development of the necessity for a proper intellectual conception of God in order to advance in faith, in his *The Conversion of St. Augustine* (Chicago: Regnery, 1966), pp. 138, 153-54, 169-80 *et passim*. See also J.A. Mohler, S.J., "Thinking with Assent: The Theology of Faith of St. Augustine," in *Speaking of God*, ed. D. Dirscherl, S.J. (Bruce, 1967), pp. 1-13.

<sup>13</sup> See J. Cogley's forceful article, "God and the Professors," *Commonweal* vol. 78 #20 (Sept. 6, 1963), pp. 525-26. Cogley writes: "To be 'committed' is neither to forswear reason nor turn one's back on intelligence. . . . Purely on its intellectual merits, the 'religious hypothesis' remains worthy of serious investigation." J. Levie, S.J. develops this role of reason in faith in his "Faith and Intellectual Sincerity," *Faith, Reason and the Gospels*, ed. J. Heany, S.J. (Newman, 1961), pp. 42-67.



cerning them. This is simply what is demanded for the living of a mature, responsible human life. In regard to belief in God, this reasonableness is affirmed both from the side of the subject's act of affirming God, and from the side of the objective truth affirmed. For the former, the problem or mystery of God demands the use, and the highest use, of man's reason, both speculative and practical. Objectively considered, the affirmation of God and the other articles of the Creed are objects of genuine intellectual investigation.<sup>16</sup>

Though the foregoing is sometimes forgotten in today's debate, it is rarely denied by those who nevertheless reject any value in speaking of 'proofs' for God. The real difficulty, therefore, has not yet been met, namely, precisely what can 'proof' mean in the context of affirming God's existence.

#### NOTION OF PROOF

There is no doubt but that most of the confusion surrounding the question of 'proof' for God directly concerns the precise meaning of the term 'proof'.<sup>17</sup> Now there are at least three levels to the commonly accepted meaning of proof

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<sup>16</sup> This is one of the basic underlying themes of J. C. Murray's *The Problem of God* (Yale, 1965). Murray has been criticized with some justice by E. Fontinell for his overly traditional metaphysics and lack of appreciation for the new, evolutionary philosophies, ("Reflections on Faith and Metaphysics," *Cross Currents*, [Winter, 1966], pp. 22-26), but the book remains an extraordinary statement of the God-question in terms of the Christian tradition.

<sup>17</sup> This confusion is shared by some experts in the field. See, for example, D. R. Burrill, *The Cosmological Arguments* (Doubleday, 1967), pp. 11-14, in which he treats of 'proof', concluding: "I judge, then, that the arguments are regarded as having, in some degree, both the self-evidence of mathematical propositions, and the factual confirmation of empirical experience. But it is precisely the conditions of analytic necessity and probable occurrence that cannot be fulfilled simultaneously." *Ibid.*, p. 14. This approach to philosophical argument, based on Hume's distinction with certain Kantian overtones, is subjected to clear and constructive criticism in M. Adler's work (cf. n. 8), pp. 95ff. The positive proposals of Adler on the proper basis for philosophic argument, and his strictures against overstress on the ancient ideal of *episteme*, seem worthy of more extensive discussion.



today.<sup>18</sup> The first level would be that of the *perceptual*: seeing is believing! This level would also include even much of the highly sophisticated experimentation of the physical sciences. The second level is the *mathematical* proof, also common in contemporary science wherein conclusions are deduced from self-evident premises. A third and more general type is that of the *explanatory hypothesis* which is confirmed by relevant, factual data. All three combined tend to afford some insight into today's man-of-the-street, common sense notion of proof.

So ingrained is this attitude of mind, often completely unconscious, in the contemporary intellectual climate, that it is questionable if the term 'proof' can realistically be used to refer to anything else than an empirical, scientific proof, without at the very least incurring the greatest danger of ambiguity and misunderstanding. At any rate, it should be clear that *no proof for God* could ever be of the types described above: God is not a perceptual object, nor a mathematical conclusion, nor a scientific hypothesis confirmed by empirical data. Any claim to a 'scientific proof' for God along any of these lines, should produce one clear certainty: whatever is proved is certainly not God!<sup>19</sup>

But there is another level where the term proof is still rather commonly used, namely, proof as handled by contemporary philosophers. Through the stimulation provided by linguistic analysis and modern mathematical logic, there has been decided advances made in this area of philosophy which

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<sup>18</sup> This handy approach to proofs is borrowed from W. Matson, *The Existence of God* (Cornell Univ. Press, 1965), pp. xiii-xiv.

<sup>19</sup> An exception to this rejection is the type of book that argues from the act of the *scientist* himself, from his creativity, etc. For example, J-D Robert, O.P., *Approche contemporaine d'une affirmation de Dieu: Essai sur le fondement ultime de l'acte scientifique*, (Desclée de Brouwer, 1962), 250 pp. This same positive approach to modern science on the part of the philosopher, (discarding the commonplace distinction: science only works on the physical plane; philosophers go beyond to the metaphysical), gives full sway to science's proper liberty, and to the creativity of science itself as the spirit of explanation going on to the infinite. See D. Dubarle, *art. cit.*, (n. 7), pp. 105-11.



until fairly recently had been completely dominated by Aristotle.<sup>20</sup> This new progress regarding the philosophical conception of the nature and function of language in general, and of philosophical argument and demonstration in particular, cannot help but exert a profound and lasting influence on the proper evaluation of 'proofs' for God.<sup>21</sup> Though much of the field is still dominated by logical positivism, there is a growing awareness of the inadequacy of previous positivistic structures to explain the actual 'word games' used by men.<sup>22</sup> As applied to the question of God, there is a rather widespread recognition of the fact that if theism is reasonable (and it is the function of the 'proofs' to show that it is), it would not have the reasonableness of a scientific outlook.<sup>23</sup> Rather it must in some way involve what has variously been termed the 'logic of options', or 'over-beliefs', or more generally, a 'lived logic.'<sup>24</sup> This brings

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, R. Bambrough, *The Philosophy of Aristotle* (New American Library, 1963), p. 11: "All studies in formal logic until very recent times were footnotes to his work."

<sup>21</sup> An example of this influence is illustrated by articles like J. W. Swanson's "Religious Discourse and Rational Preference Rankings," *Am. Philos. Quart.*, 4 (Jl., 1967), pp. 245-50 — which treats of the crucial area of informal logic of non-experimental hypotheses — and F. Sontag's detailed "The Meaning of Argument in Anselm's Ontological Proof," *Journal of Philos.*, 64 #15 (Aug. 10, 1967), pp. 459-85. Even the understanding of traditional explanations of argument has been under careful study; see R. J. Burke, "Aristotle on the Limits of Argument," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Res.*, 27 (Mar., 1967), pp. 386-400.

<sup>22</sup> This new awareness is exemplified in *Exploring the Logic of Faith*, by K. Bendall and F. Ferré (Association Press, 1962), and W. Hordern, *Speaking of God* (Macmillan, 1964). Among articles on the subject, see D. H. Freeman's "Some Recent Developments in Philosophical Theology," *Philosophy Today*, 6 (1962), pp. 101-12, and Sleeper, "Linguistic Philosophy and Religious Belief," *Cross Currents*, 17 (Summer, 1964) 335-59.

<sup>23</sup> See J. Ramsey's review of Matson's book (cf. n. 18), *Journal of Phil.*, 64 #4 (Mar. 2, 1967), pp. 128-33.

<sup>24</sup> See Ramsey's book, *Religious Language* (Macmillan, 1963); also the stimulating article of A. Dondeyne, "L'expérience préphilosophique et les conditions anthropologiques de l'affirmation de Dieu," in *L'Existence de Dieu* (Casterman, 1961), pp. 147-66, and especially the discussion, pp. 353-62; the article of Swanson, cited in n. 21, illustrates one new area of approach in this line. This logical 'new look'



us to the specific nature of the question of God and consequent special function of the 'proofs' for God.

#### PECULIAR NATURE OF THE GOD-QUESTION

The demonstration or proof of anything will obviously depend in part on the nature of what has to be proved. Now it is the peculiar nature of the God-question to be a 'limit problem': God constitutes at once the ultimate object and boundary, the supreme end and the question mark, of man's quest to understand.<sup>25</sup> In his effort to comprehend himself and all the reality he experiences, man can rise to God as the first principle of intelligibility; yet in the effort to understand God Himself, to define Him, to get a hold of what makes God to be God, man's reason loses out. For God is not found within the ambit of intelligible things as one more object of knowledge, one more being to understand alongside of all the others. Rather God is their principle, that which constitutes all beings as beings and as intelligible. He transcends the subject that I am and the objects that I know.<sup>26</sup> He is never reached directly, therefore, but only indirectly, by reasoning from human experience of self and the world to their necessary principle. He is not so much that which is known, but more that through which we know all that we know.<sup>27</sup>

fits into the wider perspective of a 'new look' at philosophy itself, exemplified in Adler's book (cf. nn. 8, 17) and in S. Strasser's "After Scientific Philosophy: Myth or Wisdom," *Internat. Philos. Quart.*, 3 (Feb., 1963) pp. 37-54, which points out: i) the fallacy of 'presuppositionless' philosophy; ii) the fallacy of one, unique philosophical method; iii) the fallacy of one system encompassing the truth.

<sup>25</sup> See J. Danielou, *op. cit.* (n. 14), pp. 59 ff. as well as the superb, small work of J. Delanglade, *Le problème de Dieu* (Aubier, 1960), pp. 27-50.

<sup>26</sup> See L. DeRaemaeker, "Le caractère spécial de la preuve de Dieu," in *Analecta Gregor.*, Series Philos., vol. 67 (1954), entitled *Studi filosofici intorno all' "esistenza", al modo, al Trascendente*, pp. 243-56. See also P. Evdokimov, "L'aspect apophatique de l'argument de saint Anselme," in *Spicilegium Beccense*, I (Vrin, 1959), pp. 233-58, especially p. 237.

<sup>27</sup> This is the underlying principle in any transcendental approach to God. See the best single, brief presentation of this approach known to this author, H. Ebert, "Man as the Way of God," *Philos. Today*, 10 (Summer, 1966), pp. 88-106, esp. p. 93.



This aspect of God as a limit problem also means that the God-question entails a total outlook, a real existential conversion, since it involves the very being of the inquirer, engaging his very existence. In the familiar terms of Marcel, the God-question is not a problem but a *mystery*: God's reality cannot but put into question the reality and value of man's self-experience, as well as his experience and evaluation of all about him.<sup>28</sup> Once the reality of God is admitted, then two consequences immediately follow: the world is not everything, not ultimate, but derivative; and secondly, man is not responsible to himself alone, but also to an 'Other' called God.<sup>29</sup>

Given this peculiar nature of the question of God, what then is the function of the 'proofs' for God? The first thing that must be said is that their function is not one of conveying new information or knowledge; it is not a question of newly 'discovering' God, or deriving Him from some fact or other.<sup>30</sup> The evidence which man's reason uses in affirming God works not in the sense of attaining God as a *consequence*, but in reaching God as reason's *exigence*.<sup>31</sup> Neither is there any claim that the 'proofs' render God Himself evident, as if they worked like some sort of special X-Ray searchlight that could pick out the 'form' of God from sensible experience. The God affirmed always remains a hidden God, whom no one has ever seen, whose essence no man comprehends.

Fundamentally, from a personal Christian approach, the 'proofs' for God are a means of showing that our insight, our

<sup>28</sup> See G. Marcel, *Creative Fidelity* (Noonday Press, 1964), Chap. 9: "Meditations on the Idea of a Proof for the Existence of God," pp. 175-83. The same idea is expressed in Danielou, *op. cit.*, (cf. n. 14), and Delanglade, *loc. cit.* (cf. n. 25).

<sup>29</sup> See Latour, *art. cit.* (cf. n. 10), pp. 213-15.

<sup>30</sup> This point is insisted upon in Rahner and Vorgrimler, *Theological Dictionary* (Herder & Herder 1965), "Proof of the Existence of God," pp. 381-83. Also see H.-D. Robert, "Connaissance et in-connaissance de Dieu, au plan de la raison," in *L'Existence de Dieu* (Casterman, 1961), pp. 331-51, esp. pp. 332-33; and J. Maritain, *Approaches to God* (Collier, 1962), pp. 22-24.

<sup>31</sup> See D. Dubarle, *art. cit.* (cf. nn. 7, 19), pp. 40-41.



conviction of God's existence, is justified and true.<sup>32</sup> We know that God exists before we start, by insight into the intelligibility of our experience and what this demands. That God exists is perceived through seeing creation in a certain way; why He exists, that is to say, why there must be a God, we understand by reflecting on the way we've viewed creation. It is through this reflection, which put into some logical form constitutes the various 'proofs', that we justify our initial insight and certainty of God's existence. We now see, and can explain to others, that our apperception of God was no mistake, that it is reasonable.

This does not mean, however, that the 'proofs' cannot be used to trigger off the same moment of insight in others. To prove something is always, in the phenomenological order, to prove *to someone*—either to oneself or to another. Marcel describes the function of a proof as widening the field of a man's apperception — getting him to focus his attention, his natural, intellectual light, on an area which formerly had been left in shadow.<sup>33</sup> Proof in this context takes on the character of a call, an invocation, to look over my shoulder, as it were, and see things from my vantage point. This is what I see—do you see it this way too? The purpose of the proof, however, does not remain on the phenomenological level, but moves beyond to the level of validity in which it seeks to illumine an organic unity where before there were only disconnected elements—to show how things fit together. This would seem to be the basic drive of human understanding: to see the elements of our experience in a certain unity, coherence, and to integrate them into a dynamic whole.

But even in the case when a 'proof' for God is used to trigger off in others the same insight into creation as demand-

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<sup>32</sup> These ideas are based on the article of J. Macdonald Smith (cf. n. 11), but the same approach is employed by Delanglade (cf. n. 25). Latour, *art. cit.* (cf. nn. 10,29), pp. 220-21 distinguishes in a similar manner between the 'proof' and the affirmation of God. The 'proof' is a certain intelligible structure or form whose function is to show the affirmation is reasonable; but the affirmation of God is "more than a form, it is a spiritual act, a personal commitment."

<sup>33</sup> Marcel, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-76.



ing a Creator, these others are *not compelled* or constrained by the force of the 'proof'.<sup>34</sup> This non-constraining quality of 'proofs' for God has always been admitted in the sense that 'proofs' for God were not mathematical nor scientific, empirical proofs. But today we wish to say more: it is now a question of a more refined notion of rationality itself, and hence of the necessity proper to metaphysical reasoning. For on the one hand there is a growing consensus that there is a place for option and the exercise of free will *within* rational, philosophical, metaphysical demonstration, and on the other, that such a role of free will does not detract from the intellectual force proper to such reasoning. In other words, by admitting the need for a certain option within the reasonable proof, such a proof does not become by that very fact an intellectual guessing game.<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, the traditional stress on the moral dispositions necessary to properly understand and appreciate the force of the 'proofs' for God, is now spelled out in greater detail and interiorized, as it were, within our very conception of rationality.<sup>36</sup> Specifically concerning the 'proofs' for God, this role of free will is involved in the starting point of the 'proofs', that is, in the value judgment presupposed as a hidden, often subconscious basis for any 'proof', in the type of

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<sup>34</sup> Against D. Burrill's judgment that the defenders of the 'proofs' have always stressed their "supposed irresistibility [sic.]" (cf. *op. cit.* [n. 17], p. 12), there is widespread agreement today on the non-compelling nature of the 'proofs'. See, for example, J. Macdonald Smith, *art. cit.* (cf. n. 11), p. 228, and J.-D. Robert, O.P., *op. cit.* (cf. n. 19), pp. 15, 45ff. Evdokimov notes that the more the evidence for something is of a *spiritual* nature, the less it constrains; evidence always has its presuppositions, and the more evident a thing is, the less demonstrable it will be. Cf. *op. cit.*, (n. 26), pp. 234-35.

<sup>35</sup> See J. T. Ramsey's review (cf. n. 23), p. 132.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, the excellent article of E. Schillebeeckx, "Faith Functioning in Human Self-Understanding," in *The Word in History*, ed. T. Patrick Burke (Sheed & Ward, 1966), pp. 41-59. Man can find God only in his meaningful human experience and since he finds himself only in self-giving to others in love, hence only in love, in self-giving, will he be able to truly find God. *Ibid.*, p. 49.



reasoning employed, and finally relative to the term of the 'proof', God. We shall develop briefly each of these points.

#### STARTING POINT OF THE 'PROOFS' FOR GOD

Any 'proof' for God must start from a concrete human situation, well defined and limited, otherwise it will turn into mere verbal play. This concrete situation, moreover, should be developed in the form of an interrogation, so that the 'proof' for God takes on the quality and value of a response.<sup>37</sup> It is not enough to show how God is reached at the term of a reasonable process; there must be a certain *need* and *taste* for God aroused which can only come from showing the relevance of God to the concrete human situation.<sup>38</sup>

Two main points must be stressed here. The first is the ambiguity of the 'proofs' precise function depending upon whether it is addressed to a believer or to a non-believer. For a believer who, looking back and reflecting on his belief and its reasonableness, formulates these reflections into a 'proof', the 'proof' represents one major aspect of his total attitude towards God. It elucidates the role his intelligence plays in his affirmation of God, but explicitly, nothing else. Moreover it represents this role of reason only in so far as he has been able to express it *conceptually*, thus failing to include the indirect methods through which alone the subjective personal dimension of his knowledge of God can be communicated.<sup>39</sup>

But to a non-believer, the function of the 'proof' is *not* merely one aspect of a larger whole. The non-believer is asked to assent to the conclusion that God exists. Now this affir-

<sup>37</sup> See Marcel, *op. cit.*, p. 180; J.-D Robert, *op. cit.* (cf. n. 19), pp. 45ff.

<sup>38</sup> Ebert points out that the will must be recognized as the ultimate driving power at the basis of the 'proofs'. Cf. *art. cit.* (n. 27), pp. 96-97. That this was fundamentally Augustine's position is shown by Mohler, *art. cit.* (n. 12), pp. 6-7.

<sup>39</sup> See Schillebeeckx, *art. cit.* (n. 36), pp. 54-55; also S. Tugwell, O.P., "Contemplation and Knowledge of God." *New Blackfriars*, 48 #567 (Aug., 1967) 585-91, where the author brings out the subjective dimension of a man's knowledge of God by comparing it with his knowledge of his human father.



mation by its very nature engages the whole man, because it calls into question the being and the value of the whole man.<sup>40</sup> Hence any 'proof' that restricts itself to abstract speculative reasoning, can only conclude with a statement of abstract, formal speculation, never to an affirmation of the living God. Consequently any 'proof' that wishes to truly come to grips with an authentic affirmation of God by an existing, concrete man, must somehow include in its argumentation what is demanded in the conclusion. If an affirmation of the whole man is demanded in the conclusion, then the whole man must somehow be involved in the premises. There is ample evidence today, unfortunately, that the traditional 'proofs' as a rule are less than adequate to fulfill this requirement for contemporary man.<sup>41</sup>

This brings us to the second point: the factors that must be considered in properly evaluating the wider function of the 'proofs' regarding the non-believer. The key to this whole question is the notion of *value*. The affirmation of God is not a mere statement of speculative truth; rather, it is a value judgment — in fact the greatest value judgment, since it supersedes all other value judgments, and constitutes the base upon which man's total value scheme is ultimately founded. Therefore the insistence that the starting point of any 'proof' for God must be compatible with the value system of the other — that there must be a minimum of mutual appreciation of the same values — is not basically a question of mere efficacy of the 'proof' (will it work?), but rather of the intrinsic nature of the rationality involved.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover it is important to realize that the role value perception plays in the 'proofs' for God is not limited to some

<sup>40</sup> This notion is stressed by all the contemporary authors; see the works of Latour, Danielou, Delanglade, J.-D. Robert, O.P., cited above.

<sup>41</sup> D. R. Burrill, for example, concludes his personal evaluation with: "The traditional forms of philosophical argumentation do not provide the 'reasons' that will bring us nearer to a knowledge of God. God must be found in some other way." Cf. *op. cit.* (n. 17), p. 21.

<sup>42</sup> Borne, *art. cit.* (n. 14), pp. 87-91; G. Marcel, *Creative Fidelity*, pp. 178-79; also his *The Mystery of Being* (Regnery, 1960), vol. II, pp. 196-97.



initial agreement. The grasp of meaningful values is always a dynamic act. Values have to be constantly renewed, re-vivified, incessantly adopted to the fluctuations of life. To 'prove' the reasonableness of affirming God, then, is a never completed task that has to be literally exercised in commitment to action, for only then can man's 'bodily knowledge', indicative of him as an incarnate spirit, be activated.<sup>43</sup> This entails action in *community* where the total response of man, imaginative, emotional as well as intellectual, alone finds an adequate outlet.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, personal concrete activity is necessary to exercise a counteractive force against the powerful influence of evil and sin, which tends to cloud and obscure the clarity of man's spiritual, intellectual insight. For the God-question, once more, is not concerned with speculative truth alone, but rather with the basic *meaning* of a man's life.<sup>45</sup>

This general question of value perception can be broken down into various factors: *sociological* — the intellectual, cultural milieu which provides the basic principles and images, the 'climate' in which we move; the area of semantics and *language* — which today perhaps more than ever before is captivating the attention of philosophers and anthropologists, and precisely in this area of 'god-talk'; the *psychological* — the level of maturity and development attained by the individual, as well as the general psychological climate of opinion in which he moves.<sup>46</sup> But in all this, we are concerned with the intrinsic place of value perception within metaphysical rea-

<sup>43</sup> See E. Borne, *art. cit.*; J.-D. Robert, *op. cit.* (n. 19), pp. 45-54; the major modern author who has focused attention on man's action is, of course, M. Blondel, whose influence on many of the authors cited here is explicitly acknowledged.

<sup>44</sup> See D. K. O'Rourke, O.P., "The Personal Response: A Theological Reality," *Worship*, 40 (Feb., 1966), pp. 91-96.

<sup>45</sup> This is the basic theme of E. Borne, *art. cit.* (n. 14), Ebert (n. 27), Delanglade (n. 25), etc.

<sup>46</sup> See R. W. Gleason, S.J., *The Search for God* (Sheed & Ward, 1964), p. 263. Fr. Gleason's work is valuable particularly for his chap. 10: "The Way of the Heart to God," in which he explains the approach to God of Newman and Pascal with fine insight. Also valuable for understanding Pascal is R. Guardini's *Pascal For Our Times* (Herder and Herder, 1966) especially chaps. 4 & 5.



soning, not with *ad hoc* formulas for better, more efficient 'proofs'.

What this in practice means is that there is a certain reciprocity between metaphysics and morality; the two can never be completely separated from each other, at least if metaphysics is to be that pursuit for ultimate meaning and value that is claimed to be proper to philosophical understanding. An explanation of the world by the physical sciences can (and usually does) abstract from morality, but any philosophical understanding that claims to be morally neutral remains below the level of the intelligibility man seeks. It simply does not answer the fundamental exigence in man for meaning and value in his life.

Hence the problem of God is ultimately and philosophically the question of a Supreme Value and ultimate meaning. A God of reason who is not also a God of man's *conscience* is not truly a God of reason, for man's reason is as much a search for meaning and value as for abstract, speculative truth.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it has been well pointed out that the good or value has a peculiar characteristic: to think of any value is already to believe in it, as well as to will its real existence. Believe in, think, and will the good are three expressions of the same profound intentionality, an active natural faith which is the living force at the base of any 'proof' for God.<sup>48</sup>

'Proving' God as grounding the value and intelligibility of man's experience of himself and of all reality, presupposes recognition of this intelligibility and value. For someone who denies or refuses to take a position on this, there seems little chance in reasonably discussing the God-question.<sup>49</sup> It is one

<sup>47</sup> See E. Borne, *art. cit.* (n. 14), and H. Bouillard, "Autonomie humaine et présence de Dieu," *Etudes* (Mai, 1967), pp. 689-707.

<sup>48</sup> Borne, *art. cit.*, pp. 90-91; Ebert, *art. cit.* (n. 27), p. 102.

<sup>49</sup> See J. Hick, *The Existence of God* (Macmillan, 1964), p. 6: "Clearly the force of these arguments depends upon the decisive ruling out of one alternative, namely the conclusion that the world is ultimately inexplicable . . . But it is precisely this excluding of the non-theistic alternative that is not, and cannot be accomplished by logical considerations alone. For it rests upon a fundamental act of faith, faith in the ultimate 'rationality' of existence." This has long been



of the 'signs of the times' that there are people who hold this position, at least during certain periods of their lives, and apparently in appreciable numbers.

A certain paradox, therefore, is being proposed here, namely, that human reason has to turn to some sort of faith in order to remain faithful to itself. Reason needs faith just to be reasonable! This, of course does not initially nor necessarily refer to faith in God, but to some basic faith that life 'makes sense', that it's worthwhile.<sup>50</sup> In regard to 'proofs' for God, there can be shown a real if limited reciprocity between 'proof' and belief, without at the same time detracting from the true nature of each. For outside of that reasonableness which the 'proofs' attempt to manifest, belief remains blind and ultimately unworthy of a man; yet without a certain belief, the 'proofs' remain empty word games. In short, the 'proofs' make manifest the *truth* of belief; belief in turn constitutes the *reality* of the proof.<sup>51</sup>

#### TYPE OF ARGUMENTATION

A good number of recent studies have brought out the fact that despite the external syllogistic form in which the 'proofs' for God are usually couched, such 'proofs' cannot properly be strict deductions.<sup>52</sup> This applies particularly to St.

the theme of Dom Iltyd Trethowan, O.S.B.; see his *The Basis of Belief* (Burns & Oates, 1961), and his reply to E. A. Sillem's objection. in *Irish Theological Quart.*, 31 (1964), 328-32.

<sup>50</sup> Borne, *art. cit.*; also see J. L. Walsh, "The Confrontation Between Belief and Unbelief." *Cross Current*, 15 (Winter, 1965), pp. 43-56, in which the author develops this notion of 'natural faith' as manifested in the works of such varied personalities as R. Jolivet, H. de Lubac, J. Maritain, and A. Camus, A. Einstein, J. Huxley.

<sup>51</sup> Borne, *art. cit.* See also D. Dubarle, *art. cit.*, (n.7), pp. 39-41, where he points out that the truth of the 'proofs' for God cannot be anything but an elevation of man's spirit toward recognizing God, and that the 'proofs' are really ways for reason to 'conquer itself', through recognizing by degrees the weight of its own proper exigence, and the source to which must be attributed the comprehension of the real presented by experience.

<sup>52</sup> See M.D. Chenu, O.P. *Is Theology a Science?* (Burns & Oates, 1959), pp. 72-73; W. Norris Clarke, S.J., "Impressionistic Reflections on the 13th International Congress of Philosophy," *Internat.*



Thomas' famous Five Ways, which are invariably presented along strict syllogistic lines. Some prominent Thomistic scholars have pointed out that St. Thomas' mode of argumentation here is really a *reductio* or *resolutio* which reduces data of experience to their ultimate conditions of possibility, beyond the reach of direct, sensitive experience. While expressible in syllogisms, this movement of thought is actually much more complex and of much wider, more profound application. Based on the principle of intelligibility which itself is indemonstrable (essentially an object of the 'natural faith' described above), the argument proceeds to its conclusion by eliminating all less rich, less adequate explanatory hypotheses as either not in harmony with a truly profound grasp of the facts, or inadequate to explain their full intelligibility, or at least less capable of illuminating each individual fact in its relation with the whole.<sup>53</sup>

Now in the standard *a posteriori* 'proofs' for God, their common major premise would be some form of the principle of intelligibility or principle of causality. Such principles represent a definite view of reality, a view which by its very all-embracing nature allows no possibility of strict deductive demonstration. (There simply are no more universal principles from which these could be deduced.) The 'proofs' for God consist essentially in showing that "the world is intrinsically unintelligible apart from the existence of God", based on the general view, thematized in these principles, that the finite without the infinite, the contingent without the necessary, the caused without the uncaused, cannot stand.<sup>54</sup> This, of course, is precisely what today's agnostic does not accept; nor does it seem that there is any strictly logical argument possible that could make him accept.<sup>55</sup> That there exists causality in the world does not necessarily imply in logic that there is

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*Philos. Quart.* (4 Feb., 1964), p. 153; J. Delanglade, *op. cit.*, (n. 25), pp. 94-96, 175, 182-83; also J. Donceel, S.J., *Natural Theology* (Sheed & Ward, 1962), pp. 23-24, 56-57.

<sup>53</sup> W. N. Clarke, *loc. cit.*

<sup>54</sup> See F. Copleston, in his debate with B. Russell, reproduced in Hick, *op. cit.* (cf. n. 49), pp. 167-91, especially, p. 174.

<sup>55</sup> From reply of Trethowan, cited in n. 49.



causality of the world; there is no *logical* proof that the world as a whole does not exist 'of itself'.<sup>56</sup>

We might note here that in today's intellectual climate many are seriously asking whether the idea of *necessity* itself may be a pseudo-idea, the fruit of something like Kant's transcendental illusion. To show that, contrary to Merleau-Ponty, man's metaphysical and moral conscience does not disintegrate at the touch of the Absolute, does not go far enough. What must be grappled with today is whether or not it is true that such conscience of man necessarily dies in the *absence* of all absolutes.<sup>57</sup> In other words, is God necessary for man to live a moral life? It is the considered judgment of many today that a theory of pure contingency, eliminating all ultimate necessity and absolutes, cannot be branded as an out-and-out hidden absurdity.<sup>58</sup> Rather it must be faced as a serious, sober, intellectual position which can be met adequately only by equally serious, painstaking work and research into precisely what is meant in affirming absolutes, and into the force and quality of our arguments for them.<sup>59</sup> Any such research

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<sup>56</sup> This is not a new distinction. See the unheralded work of A. Grégoire, S.J., *Immanence et transcendance* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1939), pp. 26, 87-93. This attitude was clearly expressed by B. Russell in his debate with Fr. Copleston: "That's always assuming that not only every particular thing in the world, but the world as a whole must have a cause. For that assumption I see no ground whatever." And earlier, "I should say that the universe is just there, and that's all." See Hick, *op. cit.* (n.49), pp. 175-76.

<sup>57</sup> See Latour, *art. cit.* (n.10), p. 202. See also the pertinent studies, A. Vergote, "L'accès à Dieu par la conscience morale," in *Foi et réflexion philosophique. Mélanges Franz Grégoire* (Louvain, 1961), pp. 97-118, and Th. Steeman, O.F.M., "The Study of Atheism, Sociological Approach," *Information Documentation, Docc.*, 66-20/21, Publ. 10-14-66.

<sup>58</sup> Latour, *loc. cit.* See notes 49 and 56 above. Walsh, *art. cit.* (n.50) also treats of the possibility of a radical contingency, a subject that the new stress on secularization has made prominent. Cf. W. R. Comstock, "Theology After the 'Death of God'," *Cross Currents*, 16 (Summer, 1966), reprinted in *The Meaning of the Death of God*, ed. B. Murchland (Random House, 1967), pp. 212-65.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example, the excellent little work of H. P. Owens, *The Moral Argument for Christian Theism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), pp. 32-48, where the author declares that we must admit that



must take into account the new conception of God which contemporary man seems gradually to be forming: not a God of security, of an established religion, of a sacred order of life, but rather a God of 'call to commitment,' of challenge and creativity.<sup>60</sup>

To return to the 'proofs' argumentation, if the foregoing is basically sound, then in the common syllogistic forms of the 'proofs' for God the major premise (principle of causality) and the conclusion (God exists) are really *successive enuntiations* of the same truth which is more an intuition, a certain insight into reality as experienced, than a strict reasoned process.<sup>61</sup> Consequently the syllogistic 'proof' of God cannot be a strict deduction but rather an explication, a development of this original insight or apperception of the necessity for God. The function of such a 'proof', then, is to help toward an interior penetration into, and reflexive consciousness of, the fact that God is implied in man's total experience.<sup>62</sup>

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moral values can have a certain validity and meaning outside a context of religious faith," (p. 32) yet "moral facts are not in the last resort self-authenticating; they require religious justification." (pp. 33-34). J.-H. Walgrave, in his "La Preuve de l'existence de Dieu par la conscience moral et l'expérience des valeurs," *L'Existence de Dieu* (Casterman, 1961), pp. 109-32, confirms this position, showing how grasping God is a free act by nature, supposing certain personal conditions such as serious moral commitment, free wish to respond to duty, and a fundamental option of generosity. See *ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>60</sup> Besides the long article of Steeman cited in n. 57, see his "What's Wrong with God?" *New Blackfriars*, 47 (July, 1966), pp. 502-24, and his "Psychological and Sociological Aspects of Modern Atheism," in *The Pastoral Approach to Atheism, Concilium*, vol. 23, (Paulist Press, 1967), pp. 46-59.

<sup>61</sup> See the references given to Delanglade, Donceel in n. 52. Ebert, *art. cit.* (n.27), p. 95, states: "Thus the principle of causality which lies at the basis of the proofs for the existence of God does not really intend the relation of one entity to another, but the relation of entities to Being which comes to light and comes to itself in human knowledge. So viewed, the principle of causality is not only the pre-supposition of our knowledge of God, but contains our knowledge of God."

<sup>62</sup> This is the basic approach of H. de Lubac in his meditative *The Discovery of God* (Kenedy, 1960), and of J. Mouroux, "Présence de la raison dans la foi," *Sciences Ecclésiastiques*, 17 (1965),



This calls for a re-education of outlook in many cases today, as part of that total existential conversion of the whole man mentioned above as demanded of the non-believer by any 'proof' for God.

Today, in this anthropological age of man's new awareness of himself, such an interior penetration into the gratuity of being must be effected by stressing the unique role of man as free subject.<sup>63</sup> The need for man to interpret the cosmos in order to find the *vestigia Dei*, the footprints of God, has, of course, always been prominent in the Christian tradition. But today there is an added dimension, which resembles, while perhaps going beyond, the basically Augustinian insight into the need of man's spirit as a necessary mediating moment in the passage from sensible reality to God. Here man is not only the interpreter of the cosmos, he must also be part of that which is interpreted.<sup>64</sup>

It is important to understand the true dimensions of this new stress, for it is basically not pedagogical nor apologetic, but truly *ontological*, grounded directly on contemporary philosophy's new appreciation for what it means to be a man. For man is that being who alone asks the question of being; his very existential structure can be defined by this unique characteristic: an openness to all being. Only he is consciously present to himself, consciously aware he exists; thus 'to be' in the strong sense means 'to be self-present' self-aware. What being really is, therefore, can only be recognized in man himself, who alone exercises this self-awareness. Conse-

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pp. 181-200, summarized in English in *Theology Digest*, 14 #3 (Autumn, 1966) pp. 228-31.

<sup>63</sup> This means that the work of Schillebeeckx (n.36), Ebert (n.27), Delanglade (n. 25) and Borne (n.14) adds a new dimension to the still sound but incomplete, more traditional approach of showing the 'gratuity of being' found in Maritain's *Approaches to God*, or E. Sillem, *Ways of Thinking About God* (Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961), or D. De Petter's otherwise excellent "Le caractère métaphysique de la preuve de l'existence de Dieu et la pensée contemporaine," in *L'Existence de Dieu* (Casterman, 1961), pp. 167-78.

<sup>64</sup> This is one of the main points made by A. Solignac in his extended review of *L'Existence de Dieu*, in *Archives de Philosophie*, 27 #2 (Avr.-Jl, 1964), pp. 299-309.



quently God, as Absolute Being, can only be read in man himself, for only in man do we find the true meaning of 'to be' mirrored. This is the ontological explanation of the Biblical description of man as the *image* of God. Man is thus not only on the way to God, he is himself the way to God.<sup>65</sup>

The basis for this anthropological stress can also be seen in comparing the philosophical with the positive scientific approach. For the philosophical investigation of the cosmos, as distinct from the purely scientific, always includes the personal aspect of man; it always investigates the *mystery* rather than the *problem* of things.<sup>66</sup> Yet in today's anti-metaphysical context, it is doubtful if this goes far enough; contemporary intellectual inquiry is directed at particular problems, within limited contexts, aimed at particular solutions. Any claim of inferring God from the intelligibility of reality as a whole cannot avoid sounding like an over-claim. The malaise felt in handling Greek philosophical categories in the present day evolutionary, non-dualistic world, only reinforces the irrelevance of the classical metaphysical theism.

Yet the naturalistic, agnostic humanism asserting itself as the mark of today's secular world come-of-age, seems to have failed to account for today's secular man's manifest preoccupation with problems such as the insurmountable limits to his freedom, the hopeless suffering encountered everywhere, the irrationality of evil. Man is still looking for meaning in his life. Perhaps the least that can be said here is that the basis for this meaning may ultimately be found in a type of metaphysics appreciably different from that of the tradition — whether it be some form of process philosophy or

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<sup>65</sup> Ebert, *art. cit.* (n. 27), pp. 102, 97-98.

<sup>66</sup> For the essential connection between the person and ontology, see Lotz, "Person and Ontology," *Philosophy Today*, 7 (1963), pp. 279-97; also R. Jolivet, *Man and Metaphysics* (Burns & Oates, 1961). This stress is dominant in the theological works of J. Mouroux, *I Believe* (Chapman, 1959); C. Cirne-Lima, *Personal Faith* (Herder & Herder, 1965) and J. Alfaro, "Person and Grace," in *Man Before God* (Kenedy, 1966), pp. 174-98.



structural philosophy, or something which has not yet appeared on the scene.<sup>67</sup>

Even within the traditional metaphysics there is a new appreciation for the proper function of philosophy relative to the God-question. Previously the expression *ancilla theologiae*, handmaid of theology, well described the place of scholastic philosophy vis-à-vis theology; the theologian always exerted sovereign influence and dominion. Philosophy was judged incapable of reaching God as God, since its proper role was to act as a preliminary to faith, and to 'prove' God under the guise of First Cause of all being.<sup>68</sup> This limitation is not recognized today; the free and new philosophy that has developed outside scholasticism is not the *handmaid* of theology, but perhaps her *sister*.<sup>69</sup> Philosophy today claims the right to play a constitutive, efficacious role in man's total relation to God. Concrete human experience, and thus man's philosophic self-understanding, become a *locus theologicus*, a theological source, for the believer, when measured with the normative human existence of Christ.<sup>70</sup>

This section, in treating of the type of argumentation indicative of 'proofs' for God, has tried to bring out the place of free will, a certain option and value perception, within the argumentation itself, and not just as a necessary prelude. This role of option or commitment is evident in the use of 'open', metaphysical concepts such as contingency, intelligibility, causality, even moral conscience — all analogous terms

<sup>67</sup> See Fontinell's article, cited in n.16; also republished in the collected work, *Speaking of God* (cf. n. 12) pp. 94-127; also E. Baltasar, *Teilhard and the Supernatural* (Helicon, 1966).

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, H.-D. Robert, *art. cit.* (n.30), pp. 340-41.

<sup>69</sup> M. Nédoncelle, "Philosophy, Handmaid of Theology?", in *The Church and the World, Concilium*, vol. 6 (Paulist Press, 1965), pp. 93-104, esp. p. 98.

<sup>70</sup> See Solignac, *art. cit.* (n. 64), and Schillebeeckx, *art. cit.* (n.36), pp. 53-54; Schillebeeckx is careful to develop the radical difference separating the knowledge of God in faith's response to Revelation, the *theological* experience of mutual communion between God and man, from the strictly philosophical grasp of God as the absolute ground, the *transcendental* depth-dimension, of man's self-understanding. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-52, 59, n.l.



which ultimately express a certain intentional vision or insight which has to be filled out, verified, by actual experience.<sup>71</sup> The point is that such concepts express far more than a brute, 'hard' fact; they already contain within themselves a definite point of view.

What, then, is the ultimate reasonableness of opting for the point of view enshrined in these metaphysical concepts, in face of their rejection by atheists and agnostic? This pushes the question of option within the 'proof' back to the concrete, existential human base of man's total experience. Herein lies the ultimate ground for the non-constraining quality of metaphysical proofs. For concrete human experience is always capable of a variety of interpretations. Every human situation, for the person living it, is essentially ambiguous — no one particular meaning for it can be given which absolutely excludes all other possible meanings. This is the case because of the depth of human existence: man is ultimately a mystery to himself.<sup>72</sup> The very plurality of metaphysical systems and world views confirms this hypothesis, and the current themes of evolution of human thought, of man's essential historicity and relativity, provide a background against which to situate this more nuanced view of human rationality.<sup>73</sup>

On the other hand, all this does *not* add up to historical relativism, as if the role of free will and of man's historicity removes all rational, intellectual necessity. There is definitely

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<sup>71</sup> See A. Dondeyne, *art. cit.* (n. 24), pp. 156 ff. Dubarle, *art. cit.* (n.7), pp. 67-75 explains how the scientist conceives the notion of contingency in terms of relativized necessity, and opposes the Aristotelian *anagke stenai* with his spirit of never stopping, of always going on, in principle. B. Russell forcefully states: "First, as to the metaphysical argument: I don't admit the connotations of such a term as 'contingent' or the possibility of explanation in Fr. Copleston's sense...nor is there any meaning in calling things 'contingent' because there isn't anything else they could be." Hick, *op. cit.* (n.49), p. 190.

<sup>72</sup> See J.-D. Robert, *op. cit.* (n.19), p. 47; Schillebeeckx, *art. cit.* (n.36), pp. 48-49; See also Gleason, *op. cit.* (n. 46), p. 264, explaining how "signs are always equivocal, able to be read in two directions."

<sup>73</sup> See the interesting article of J.-Y. Jolif, "Rémarques sur la signification philosophique de l'athéisme," in *L'Existence de Dieu* (Casterman, 1961), pp. 13-18, and the article of Strasser, cited in n. 24.



a question here of man's use of reason at its highest level, the properly personal level. Now there is a distinctive type of intellectual necessity proper to this level of intellectuality, a type that surpasses the rigidity of formal logic, while based on a certain logic already implied in man's ante-predicative experience. It is a logic of the originating experience of the presence of things and of persons, of the *en-soi-pour-nous* of contemporary phenomenologists.<sup>74</sup>

The basis for this new appreciation of the intellectual necessity proper to metaphysical proofs, — of a new conception of objectivity, — is again the *primacy of the personal*. Contrary to common sense, the really real is not material, sensible things, but persons. For the highest, strongest, deepest reality in our world is not material things, but the human person; only he exists in the full sense as conscious self-presence. Only he has the subjective dimension of being operative in every act of the 'I'. Thus what constitutes the real, and hence too our knowledge of the real, must be personal reality. Genuine objectivity is subjectivity.<sup>75</sup> Nature has to be explained through the person, not vice-versa. But to know persons demands commitment, option, willed openness. Hence to know objective reality demands the same.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> See W. Luijpen, *Existential Phenomenology* (Duquesne Univ. Press, 1960), Chap. 2: The Phenomenology of Knowledge, especially pp. 146-49, 151-52, 155-58. Basic to this new dimension in epistemology are the ff.: B. Lonergan, "Cognitive Structure," *Continuum*, 2 (Aut., 1964), pp. 530-42; G. McCool, "The Primacy of Intuition," *Thought*, 37 (Spr., 1962), pp. 57-73, and Johann, "Knowledge, Commitment and the Real" in *Wisdom in Depth* (Bruce, 1966), pp. 112-25. Johann has also explained this new approach in shorter pieces; cf. "Fidelity to Truth," *America*, 110 (Mar. 21, 1964), p. 370, and "Subjectivism," *America*, 114 (June 25, 1966), p. 876.

<sup>75</sup> Ebert, *art. cit.* (n.27), p. 97 and p. 105, n. 16.

<sup>76</sup> This stress on the person is almost universal in the authors cited above, scl. Schillebeeckx, Walgrave (Cf. n. 59), Owens (cf. n. 59), Ebert, Cirne-Lima (cf. n. 66), It is presently being developed relative to Newman's approach from conscience; cf., for example, E. Sillemen, "Cardinal Newman's 'Grammar of Assent' on Conscience as a Way to God," *Heythrop Journal*, 5 (Oct., 1964) 377-401; J. Artz, "Newman's Contribution to the Theory of Knowledge," *Philosophy Today*, 4 (Spring, 1960), pp. 12-25; and S. Dessain, "Cardinal New-



CONCLUSION OF 'PROOF' FOR GOD

Even regarding the precise conclusion of the 'proofs' for God there seems to be a good amount of confusion. It is important to realize that no 'proof' ever claimed to produce God's Infinite Being itself, like some magician pulling rabbits out of his hat! What the 'proof' is designed to do is to show that *man's affirmation of God* is reasonable; the conclusion of any 'proof' for God, then, is the truth of the affirmation 'God exists'. The 'proof' is a worked out method of showing to someone that there must be a God; we grasp this existential fact in the judgment 'God exists'. No 'proof' claims to unveil God's Infinite act of Existing.<sup>77</sup>

This obvious distinction is nevertheless important if we are to avoid the charge of rationalism, so often hurled against all attempts at 'proving' God. We do not know God's essence — what makes Him to be God — and no 'proof' changes this situation.<sup>78</sup> Moreover we do not have any direct natural experience of God, hence we must reason to Him as distinct from ourselves and all experienced reality. This renewed insistence on the negativity of our knowledge of God, and on the dimension of mystery in everything that touches on the God-question, is one happy result occasioned if not caused by the influence of contemporary atheism.<sup>79</sup>

man on the Theory and Practice of Knowledge," *The Downside Rev.*, 75 (Jan., 1957), pp. 1-23. See also R. Guardini, *The World and the Person* (Regnery, 1965), especially "Person and God," pp. 141-58.

<sup>77</sup> See St. Thomas, *S.T.*, I, q. 3, a. 4, ad 2m, and *Cont. Gent.*, I, c. 12 #7. This traditional position is explained by J. Collins, *God in Modern Philosophy* (Regnery, 1959), p. 399; V. White, O.P. in *God the Unknown* (Harper & Bros., 1956) cc. 2 and 5; M.R. Holloway, S.J., *An Introduction to Natural Theology* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1959), pp. 51-52.

<sup>78</sup> That man never attains to a knowledge of God's essence always has been the traditional doctrine, yet the manner in which philosophers and theologians often spoke, ("from God's point of view . . .") easily gave rise to the opposite impression. Today the stress is on God as the non-objectively co-known condition of objective knowledge. Cf. Ebert, *art. cit.*, pp. 93-95.

<sup>79</sup> This is part of the purification process which contemporary atheism has helped to work in the theist's conception of God. Cf. *Lumière et Vie*, #13 (1954), pp. 41-48, and K. Rahner, "What Does



## LINES OF CONTEMPORARY 'PROOF' FOR GOD

By way of concluding this essay, it may be helpful to point out some of the major obstacles encountered today in any *serious* attempt to 'prove' God's existence, as well as the positive lines of approach suggested by these obstacles. 'Serious' attempt is stressed, since the type of dialogue carried on in many articles of *The Free Press*, for example, would hardly provide an adequate opportunity to treat the question maturely and in depth.

The obstacles which the 'proofs' for God meet in today's intellectual milieu are first of all those general trends which oppose religion as a whole, and the conception of God in particular. The contemporary atheistic mind has been described in a thousand ways, each claiming to reveal its key insight; but perhaps no sketch has succeeded quite so well as John A. T. Robinson's economical portrait: "God is intellectually superfluous, emotionally dispensable, and morally intolerable."<sup>80</sup> This highlights how the contemporary atheistic mind identifies the affirmation of God with the acceptance both of myth against modern science, and of an out-dated metaphysical philosophy against today's phenomenology, personalism and linguistic analysis.<sup>81</sup>

More specifically, each of the general types of 'proof' for God encounters particular difficulties. The ontological argument of St. Anselm has aroused exceptional interest today, but unfortunately usually receives in the end the same negative judgment from modern logicians that it received

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Vatican II Teach About Atheism?" *The Pastoral Approach to Atheism, Concilium*, vol. 23 (Paulist Press, 1967), pp. 7-24.

<sup>80</sup> From John A.T. Robinson, *The New Reformation* (SCM Press, 1965), Appendix I: "Can a Truly Contemporary Person Not be an Atheist?" pp. 106-22, esp. p. 107.

<sup>81</sup> See S. M. Ogden, "The Christian Proclamation of God to Men of the So-called 'Atheistic Age,'" in *Is God Dead? Concilium*, vol. 16 (Paulist Press, 1966), pp. 89-98. Bishop Robinson, in his famous *Honest To God* (SCM Press, 1963), c. 2, explained the contemporary attitude as a revolt against the religious (Bonhoeffer), against the 'mythological' (Bultmann) and against supernaturalism' (Tillich).



from St. Thomas.<sup>82</sup> The cosmological-metaphysical arguments suffer from their basically Hellenistic background and terminology, while the moral arguments and the 'proof' from religious experience have to confront the humanistic relativism encouraged by much of modern sociology and anthropology.

Yet through all this diversity it is not hard to discern one basic source: *man's new found appreciation for man*. Every 'proof' for God must come to grips with the problem of reconciling the existence of an Almighty Creator with the truly creative liberty that constitutes the human person. Thus the most recent attempts to 'prove' God will show Him as the absolute ground of man's being, of his religious depth dimension.<sup>83</sup> God is proposed as the source, not the limit, of the plenitude of man's 'I', as an Absolute Thou that founds all the I-thou relations which go to form man in his communal self-becoming.<sup>84</sup> Thus for example, the traditional argument from contingency would be renovated today by treating it as a type of Husserlian reduction, leading to a deeper understanding of the positive human significance of man's own contingency: human freedom.<sup>85</sup> Today the freedom of choice, so dear to the scholastic manuals, is recognized as only an imperfect form of true freedom which essentially consists in self-possession, the crowning of man's being-with-oneself effected

<sup>82</sup> For example, see the anthology *The Ontological Argument*, ed. by A. Plantinga (Doubleday, 1965); a series of profound interpretations of the argument are found in *Spicilegium Beccense* (cf. n. 26), two of which are translated along with other important studies in *The Many-Faced Argument*, ed. J. H. Hick and A. C. McGill (Macmillan, 1967). This last work also includes a valuable selected bibliography, pp. 357-70.

<sup>83</sup> Both Schillebeeckx and Ebert propose a theism centered in man's structure; man is himself, the 'proof', the way, to God. See also M. F. Sciacca, *L'Existence de Dieu*, (Aubier, 1951), and the same author's preface to L. Leahy, *L'Inéluctable Absolu* (Desclée de Brouwer, 1966).

<sup>84</sup> See G. Marcel, "Theism and Personal Relationships," *Cross Currents*, 1 (Fall, 1950), pp. 35-42; also J. De Finance, "La liberté créée et la liberté créatrice," in *L'Existence de Dieu* (Casterman, 1961), pp. 229-44.

<sup>85</sup> F. Guimet, "Réflexions sur la contingence," in *L'Homme devant Dieu*, (cited in n. 14), pp. 109-16.



in his gradual self-becoming. The forging of man's authentic self-possession can only be accomplished through his free movement towards other thou's, and ultimately toward the Absolute Thou, in personal love. For only in personal love does man attain that concrete fullness of being which constitutes self-possession and self-disposal.

If this basic disposition of man as self-possession can be shown to be founded on man's transcending movement towards God as Absolute Being and Absolute Mystery, then the very characteristics of man's contemporary grasp of himself, his freedom and self-creativity, will be recognized as pointers toward God rather than obstacles. Only through his free self-activity can man realize his true relation to God, a God recognized as not objectively standing over against his own finite, limited ego, but as "One Who expresses Himself in the reality of man's self-possession and Who appeals to this reality."<sup>66</sup>

In conclusion, then, we have tried to show the contemporary relevance of 'proofs' for the existence of God by tracing their underlying source to the basic *reasonableness* of authentic belief in God. The term 'proof' when applied to God's existence is foreign to contemporary usage; perhaps it would be advisable to drop the word in today's context, while re-

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<sup>66</sup> Ebert, *art. cit.* (n.27), p. 102; also Schillebeeckx, *art. cit.* (n.36), pp. 49 ff. See also J. Girardi, "Athéisme et théisme face au problème de la valeur absolue de l'homme" *Rev. Philos. de Louvain*, 65 (Mai, 1967), pp. 207-25. It should be noted, however, that the Christian personalist view of man is by no means acceptable to all; see H. Meynell, "The Humanist: A Dialogue," *New Blackfriars*, 46 #535 (Jan. 1965), pp. 226-33, and especially D. Holbrook, "The Transformation of Man," *New Blackfriars*, 49 #569 (Oct. 1967), pp. 2-29. In Christian circles, there is a strong current which looks on the personalist, existential-phenomenological approach as basically too narrow and inadequate, favoring instead a more political-social, even cosmic-evolutionary orientation. Some authors in this field are J.B. Metz, (cf. *Philosophy Today*, 10 [Winter, 1966] for an introductory article on his thought followed by 4 major articles by Metz himself); H. Cox, *The Secular City*; G. Lindbeck (cf. his "The Framework of Catholic-Protestant Disagreement," in *The Word in History* (cf. n. 36)).



taining the reality. The reality of 'proof' consists in an ordered process of reasoning, explicating and developing a basic insight into man's experience of self and of all reality. As such it is non-constraining, since it demands a definite exercise of the will in the form of a basic option; such an option, however, is understood to be an exigency of reason itself, and hence in no way detracts from the force and intellectual necessity proper to metaphysical reasoning. Finally, any 'proof' or way to God today must ground itself on man's new appreciation for himself as self-possession and creativity. This is not basically a matter of efficiency, but of a true advance in understanding the genuine ontological relationship between the community of human 'I's' and their Absolute Thou.