

# The Virtual Atheism of the Principle of Immanentism

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## Introduction

The beginning of modern philosophy was marked by a radically new starting point in philosophical speculation - the mind itself. As a consequence, the whole outlook on being was inverted in one of the most audacious endeavors man has ever attempted, “the effort to ground thought radically and totally upon itself!”<sup>1</sup> This is the Principle of Immanentism, a grounding of thought not on something external, but rather on itself. The destination of this endeavor is, according to Cornelio Fabro, the “weirdest and most paradoxical terminus ever to appear in the history of thinking beings.”<sup>2</sup> The grounding of thought on itself, rather than reinforce transcendent ideas, such as the existence of God, instead negates them. From this standpoint, “any concession, direct or indirect, to transcendence is a distortion and a misunderstanding, indeed a total incomprehension of that very Immanentism that characterizes the first step of modern thought.”<sup>3</sup>

Modern thought based on the Principle of Immanentism is atheistic because it can’t ascend to the idea of a transcendent God. Anyone who takes the mind itself as a starting point in the search for God, proves by that very fact, to be “singularly obtuse ... on the score of the transcendence of God and the human spirit.”<sup>4</sup> According to Fabro, “the very definition of an immanentist stand on being can only involve a denial of that transcendence in the [gnoseological] dimension wherein consists the first step of theism rightly and radically understood.”<sup>5</sup> It may seem as if some modern philosophies could allow the idea of God since they use different terminology within such diverse philosophical systems. However, every modern philosophical system is affected because modern thought is convergent in its bias toward the basic Principle of Immanentism.<sup>6</sup> According to Cornelio Fabro, “Every species of theism which has appeared in modern thought is counterfeit and an interloper: thought cannot transcend the human horizon imposed by the [Principle of Immanentism].”<sup>7</sup> As a result, every modern philosophical system based on the Principle of Immanentism is virtually atheistic.

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<sup>1</sup> Fabro, Cornelio. *God in Exile; Modern Atheism from its Roots in the Cartesian Cogito to the Present Day* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1964, p. 1145)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1147

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1144

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1144

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1062

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1146 - The principle of immanentism has shown itself to be “polymorphic” in the four centuries of its evolution. During this time, it has fragmented into opposing segments: rationalism and empiricism, phenomenism and idealism, neo-idealism and neo-positivism, phenomenology and existentialism. Fabro explains that the fragmentation is a symptom of the “cogito, which can’t be satisfied with either the sheerly immediate or the entirely mediate.” As a result, either of the opposing systems in these pairs seem equally justified and well-founded due to the absolute nature of the cogito principle. Any effort to rule out the opposing philosophy seems arbitrary because they all start from the mind itself and are based on the will of the subject.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1145

There are two parts to this paper. The first part will examine modern thought which is characterized by the principle of Immanentism. The second part will examine in detail why the principle of Immanentism leads to atheism and provide a solution to the problem.

## **Modern Thought**

### **Historical Aspect**

Most philosophers up to the time of the Renaissance followed realism. In realism, man has the capacity to know with certitude, together with experience and reason, the real being. This means that apart from knowing what is in his mind, man can also know things outside of his mind, extra-mental reality. Things have existence independent of a thinking subject - there is something "outside" the subject. For example, a book that exists in reality is prior to the concept of "book" that exists in my mind. The book itself is known immediately by my mind and not the idea of "book". The idea of the book is only a mental sign in which the intellect knows the essence of a thing (in this case the real book). Before its intentional presence is known by my mind, it exists in reality. Therefore, in classical realism, being is prior to thinking.

Modern philosophy began with René Descartes (1596-1650), who initiated a new way of thinking apart from what had come before him. Descartes' wanted to begin with something absolutely certain, so he began with a systematic doubt of everything. His famous first principle is *Cogito ergo sum*, which is usually translated into English as "I think, therefore I am".<sup>8</sup> The first thing that Descartes is certain about is not extra-mental reality, but rather something intrinsic. This is the principle of immanence, a reliance on individual human consciousness as the foundation of being and knowledge.

In summary, modern philosophical thought is characterized by a philosophical inversion of the process of knowledge, which completely changes gnoseology, anthropology, cosmology, and metaphysics. **The emphasis transfers from the object to the subject, from the world to the self, and from the external to the internal.**<sup>9</sup> The entire method of how the individual human being relates to reality is upended. Descartes intended for this change to happen because he wanted a new method. However, he did not foresee the consequences that this new method would produce. We follow Cornelio Fabro's 4-step analysis of the atheism of modern thought:

1. Principle of Immanentism and Finitude of Being
2. Meaning of Doubt and Negation
3. Finitude of Being and Negation (Denial of God)
4. From Gnoseological Immanence to Gnoseological Immanentism to Ontological Immanentism

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<sup>8</sup> Descartes, René (1644). *Principia Philosophiae*

<sup>9</sup> Fabro, Cornelio. *God in Exile; Modern Atheism from its Roots in the Cartesian Cogito to the Present Day* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1964, p. 1061)

These four steps should not be understood in a successive manner, as if modern philosophy gradually became atheistic over time. Rather, the steps are meant as an aid to us as we look progressively deeper into the principle of immanentism and its ramifications, seeking to understand why this principle is virtually atheistic.

## **Principle of Immanentism and Finitude of Being**

The revolution in philosophy brought about by the Principle of Immanence can be seen clearly when taking into account the concept of “being”. For classical thought and realism, being substantiates and brings to act the mind itself. Being is not identified with the mind, but rather being is the proper object of the mind<sup>10</sup> which causes the mind to be conscious of being. In classical thought, knowing is a process *perfective* of being.

On the other hand, the thought of modern philosophers does not consider being in the same way. Remember that the first principle is doubt. There is no being to actualize the mind, but rather the mind “initiates proceedings by and from itself in its own act of ‘thinking’.”<sup>11</sup> For modern thought, knowing is not a process *perfective* of being, but rather it is a process *constitutive* and *substantiating* with respect to being! It is called different things in various modern philosophical systems, but this principle of act is present in all of the modern philosophers.<sup>12</sup> The starting point of modern philosophers is not something external, but rather the mind itself. While the *perfective* process of knowledge admits of infinite development (tabula rasa) in classical thought, the *constitutive* and *substantiating* process of modern thought is necessarily finite!

## **Meaning of Doubt and Negation**

Radical doubt is one of the main elements of the Principle of Immanentism.<sup>13</sup> In explaining his new method, Descartes wrote, “While I thus wished to think that all was false, it was absolutely necessary that I, who thus thought, should be something.”<sup>14</sup> A fuller form of Descartes’ method which captures his intent is: *dubito, ergo cogito, ergo sum* (“I doubt, therefore I think, therefore I am”).<sup>15</sup>

Descartes arguably shifted the authoritative guarantor of truth from God to humanity. The traditional concept of “truth” implies an external authority, the “being” of the external thing. Truth according to classical

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<sup>10</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, II, Q83. “Intellectus naturaliter cognoscit ens et ea quae sunt per se entis in quantum huiusmodi, in qua cognitione fundatur primorum principiorum notitia.” “Objectum formale intellectus est ens, sicut color est objectum formale visus.”

<sup>11</sup> Fabro, Cornelio. *God in Exile; Modern Atheism from its Roots in the Cartesian Cogito to the Present Day* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1964, p. 1068)

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1068-1069 - “cogito (Cartesian), entelechia (Leibnizian monad), *nisus* or *conatus* (Spinozan), *Iche denke überhaupt* (Kant), Absolute metaphysical Ego {self} (Transcendental idealists)”

<sup>13</sup> Veitch, John (1850). *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in the Sciences, by Descartes*. Edinburgh: Sutherland and Knox. p. 74-5. - The foundation of Descartes’ method “was never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such ... and to comprise nothing more in my judgment than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt.”

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* “While I thus wished to think that all was false, it was absolutely necessary that I, who thus thought, should be something; And as I observed that this truth, I think, therefore I am, was so certain and of such evidence that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the Sceptics capable of shaking it, I concluded that I might, without scruple, accept it as the first principle of the philosophy of which I was in search.”

<sup>15</sup> Thomas, Antoine Léonard (1765). *Éloge de René Descartes*.

thought is the conformity of the mind with the being of the thing.<sup>16</sup> In modern thought, “certainty” instead relies on the judgment of the individual.<sup>17</sup> Hegel explains the subjective nature of certainty according to modern thought, “apparent knowledge is not true, but only systematized knowledge is true.”<sup>18</sup> His philosophy also declares that the secret power of the dialectic is the uncovering of the negative, the awareness of the non-truth of the apparent knowledge. The disparity between classical thought (conformity of the mind with the being of the thing) and Hegel’s thought (awareness of non-truth of apparent knowledge) illustrates how *modern thought eliminates the external ground of truth*.

The Principle of Immanentism attempts to achieve a safe and systematic list of certainties starting from universal doubt, undertaken methodically and voluntarily by the thinking subject. The danger of this is that the foundation of knowledge is in the human mind, not in something extrinsic. All that can be known are ideas or sense impressions, and not things outside the mind! **The paradoxical result of universal doubt is that the object of thought has no reference to any reality outside thought itself.**<sup>19</sup> Therefore, in modern thought, gnoseology is the foundation and end of knowledge, not metaphysics. The effect is the refusal of the possibility of knowing reality distinct from consciousness and its representations (the refusal of gnoseological transcendence).

### **Finitude of Being and Negation (Denial of God)**

The denial of God’s existence is possible because His existence is not self-evident to us.<sup>20</sup> The Scriptures also point this out, “The fool says in his heart, there is no God.”<sup>21</sup> If knowing a reality outside the mind is rejected, (as gnoseological transcendence is rejected by modern thought) then the existence of transcendent realities can also be similarly rejected. Therefore, the denial of gnoseological transcendence implies and leads to the refusal of ontological transcendence.

The conception of being in modern philosophy is the key to this collective denial of God from the various systems of modern philosophy. “When being is conceived as presence, the principle of act becomes possessed of an all-pervading and all-embracing hegemony.”<sup>22</sup> Being then is the sheer impression and awareness of

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<sup>16</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, I, Q16. “Quod autem dicitur quod veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus potest ad utrumque pertinere.” Truth is the conformity between the thing and the understanding (“adaequatio rei et intellectus”)

<sup>17</sup> Fabro, Cornelio. *God in Exile; Modern Atheism from its Roots in the Cartesian Cogito to the Present Day* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1964, p. 1070-1071) - “It is solely in this sense that consciousness (the mind) is concreteness and freedom, according to the principle of immanentism.”

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1069-1070 - “Truth can be molded only as a system or as a formation of the initial or apparent awareness.”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1070 - “The very concept that is truly adequate to being is in turn identical with the mind.” “Any would-be Beyond of the mind ultimately finds itself ailing within the mind itself.” “The concept corresponds to the object and the object to the concept.”

<sup>20</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, I, Q2A1. “Sed quia nos non scimus de Deo quid est, non est nobis per se nota, sed indiget demonstrari per ea quae sunt magis nota quoad nos, et minus nota quoad naturam, scilicet per effectus.”

<sup>21</sup> Ps 52:1

<sup>22</sup> Fabro, Cornelio. *God in Exile; Modern Atheism from its Roots in the Cartesian Cogito to the Present Day* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1964, p. 1070) - When being is conceived as presence (presentness, being-present, that being-present which is the act of consciousness (mind)) the principle of act becomes possessed of an all-pervading and all-embracing hegemony.

sensation and reflection.<sup>23</sup> Philosophy becomes relegated to simply “taking account of the principle of act.”<sup>24</sup> Hegel expresses this in the most drastic phenomenological formulation as “sheer standing-at-gaze.” *The concept of the thing-in-itself or in relation to some Absolute is lost.*<sup>25</sup>

Fabro points out the key to this way of understanding reality: “any talk of a dual world ... is now simply meaningless.”<sup>26</sup> “If the antithesis, that opposition out of which the dialectic arises and by which that dialectic is supported, is not present from the first moment and constitute the very structure of that first moment, then it can only be forced on the situation from the outside and hence is invalid.”<sup>27</sup> It is impossible to reach a transcendent God from the finitude of being imposed by the Principle of Immanentism. The self-actualization of the mind “cannot and ought not to be mediated by any content (object) but only by itself in the historical experience that impels it.”<sup>28</sup> Fabro’s analysis of the principle of immanentism shows that for modern thought *a dual world is meaningless because the self-actualization of the mind is not mediated by content.*<sup>29</sup>

The mind itself is intrinsically finite because it perceives an intrinsically finite world.<sup>30</sup> “The extreme and definitively genuine form of immanentism is precisely the constitutive reference of the finite mind to a finite world or the projection without remainder of the mind into the world, in its total self-realization in the moment of sheer event.”<sup>31</sup> The pure formulation of immanentism is the “finitude of the being-present of the mind to a world that defines it and renders presence possible precisely by means of the finitude which is essential for the coming-to-presence.”<sup>32</sup> Being is defined “exclusively in terms of man or of the human being as manifested solely in the act of consciousness as dialectic of temporal being.”<sup>33</sup>

### **From Gnoseological Immanence to Gnoseological Immanentism to Ontological Immanentism**

The full concept of immanence receives its definitive theoretical formulation in Saint Thomas’ doctrine on participation. It has a metaphysical connotation “concerning creation and God’s omnipotence as reaching to the ultimate and definitive being of reality, down to matter, and up to and including the human will itself and the will of spiritual beings standing at the summit of the created world.”<sup>34</sup> Immanence as such, as developed by St. Thomas, is opposed by the modern principle of immanentism. This can be seen when examining the

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1070 “Being is act in the extreme concreteness of its individuality, singularity and historical temporality, as the sheer impression and awareness of sensation and reflection, as in Hume.”

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1071

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1072 - Instead, the phenomenon “has assumed that simple and irreducible character of sheer presence and coming-to-presence wherein man’s mind expresses its own self-actuation in time.” “The identity of mind and being is the identity of being and time and being and history ‘without remainder.’”

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1071 - It is meaningless to differentiate between appearance or reality, phenomenon or noumenon, finite or Infinite.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1071

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1071

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1071 “The sole foundation of the cogito (the establishment of the existence of a being from the fact of its thinking or awareness) is the cogitare (the act of consciousness [of mind] in its own self-actualization.)”

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1073

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1073

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1073

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1074

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1074

gnoseology that results from this principle, “the contention that the mind has itself for its object and has no need of seeking that object ‘outside of’ itself.”<sup>35</sup>

Gnoseological immanentism is characterized by the sole content of the data of the mind, of consciousness, as being a result of the act of the mind. This being (given with respect to the mind) does not signify any spatial inclusion “within” the mind. There is no outside or inside but only a being (conditioned by the mind). The important point is that ***the object cannot be conceived of without a self or subject***. The datum (the given) can’t be received without the knower or subject (and vice versa!). “Subject and object are the two elements to be distinguished in the datum as a primordial whole in which each of these elements presupposes the other so that they can be separated only in logical analysis.”<sup>36</sup> There is a correlation of consciousness and content and that of self and not-self. ***Gnoseological immanentism is therefore characterized as being an essential conjugation of subject and object.***

The important point ofgnoseological immanentism is that being (existence) can mean only an object of consciousness and the content of consciousness. The idea of a transcendent reality having no relation to the mind (in the sense that it can be thought of as existing independently of the mind [existing in itself]) implies a contradiction. The concept of “transcendence” would signify not only the overstepping of experience but a total overstepping of the consciousness relation. ***The logic of the principle of immanentism is telling us that a reality independent of the mind, existing without relation to consciousness or the self, has no meaning.***

The progress fromgnoseological immanentism to ontological immanentism is evident when examining the problem of ‘existence’. Modern philosophies distinguish the perception of one’s own existence from the perception of the existence of other things. The perception of our own existence is known in consciousness, in auto-intuition, in the finding-of-ourselves, in being the object of ourselves. However, the perception of the existence of other things is given in that they have relation to the self or inasmuch as the self finds their definitions as contents of its own consciousness, or its own mind. “The point of departure between these two concepts of existence is consistently found in the mind itself, in consciousness itself, and in one’s own existence.”<sup>37</sup>

The problem of the existence of God (something that exists without the self) is entirely meaningless for modern philosophies. “Actually pure being has merely the office of purely functional predication, without any content whatsoever, and thus as such means nothing.”<sup>38</sup> The notion of being as such has no content - Being is nothing unless it is the being (be-ing) of something.<sup>39</sup> According to Fabro, “being always presents itself as

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1075

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1076

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1077

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1078

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* - For something to exist in modern thought, it must be something perceived or thought or serving as object of a feeling or of a tendency of the will.

something particular, of which I take cognizance as a content of my own activities of consciousness, from which God is by definition excluded.”<sup>40</sup> The result of following the principle of immanentism to its logical conclusion is the **mandatory renunciation of a principle transcending man**, the mandatory renunciation of God.

## **Virtual Atheism of the Principle of Immanentism**

Fabro maintains that “the Principle of Immanentism is intrinsically atheistic.”<sup>41</sup> In support of this view, “there has not been a single modern philosopher of any stature who has not been accused of atheism.”<sup>42</sup> In order to examine this topic, there are two clarifications that Fabro highlights. The first clarification is the “absolute necessity of distinguishing sharply between the internal logic of a principle and the subjective intention of individual thinkers.”<sup>43</sup> This means that any faith that a philosopher professes must be distinguished from the logic of his philosophy. The second clarification is “the demand for a God who is truly God in all the ramifications of his ‘metaphysical status.’”<sup>44</sup> Based on these clarifications, the Principle of Immanentism is atheistic in either of two ways. In one case, the fact that there is no God can be logically deduced from the Principle of Immanentism. In the second case, whenever an attribute of the Christian God is denied, there exists atheism insofar as the God that is suggested is not God as He really is.

### **Logical Assertion of Atheism**

Modern atheism, which is based on an affirmation, differs from ancient and Renaissance atheism, which focuses on negative elements.<sup>45</sup> Modern atheism is based on the “fundamental affirmation of the transcendental human subjectivity, the act of the *cogito* as stemming from the subject (ground) and structuring and actualizing the object to which it relates (grounded).”<sup>46</sup> **In modern thought, the grounding principle is the subject and it is the subject which establishes the existence of a being through his own thought!** “Its dissolution into the atheism of modern thought in our day is not fortuitous or optional but rather inevitable and constitutive of the very reduction of the [Principle of Immanence] itself to its primordial elements.”<sup>47</sup>

The revolution which began with Descartes’ new method has been disastrous. Fabro explains that this should be attributed to the fact that the *cogito* has assigned to the Principle of Immanence a status it can’t support. The *cogito* effects the action of the mind, “wrenching it away from being and then commissioning it to

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1078

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1062

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1144

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1149

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1149

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1067 - The atheism of ancient and Renaissance times derives its negation from negative elements such as materialism, the problem of evil, or the providence controversy.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1067

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1067

make being, to construct being, to be the site, the model and the limit of being.”<sup>48</sup> As we have seen in the various historical papers, the many modern philosophies may be diverse in their method. However, what they agree on is that “the structure and the content of the act remain for all on the same level, that of finitude, of a mind, a consciousness, and a cognition (executive actuation of that consciousness) defined in its ontological dimension as ‘Being-in-the-world’”.<sup>49</sup> The result is a “definitive acknowledgement of the non-being or nothingness of man, which is due to the constitutive non-being of consciousness, of the mind. It is no mere accident that the dynamic of this modern thought should declare the non-being of God as solidary with the non-being of man.”<sup>50</sup>

It seems contradictory, but many modern philosophers profess Christian religions and even Catholicism while creating philosophical systems based on the Principle of Immanentism.<sup>51</sup> As Fabro explained, within modern thought, the guarantor of truth is not God anymore but human beings, each of whom is a self-conscious creator and guarantor of their own reality. In this reality, the human reason is autonomous, but it can’t logically make the ontological leap from the finite to the infinite. As a result, “even Catholics such as Descartes, Malebranche, and Herbert, the founder of Deism, have been held to be atheists.”<sup>52</sup>

## Deformation of God

If the attributes of God are denied, then belief in God is affected as well. St. Thomas acknowledges God as simple<sup>53</sup>, perfect<sup>54</sup>, good<sup>55</sup>, infinite<sup>56</sup>, immutable<sup>57</sup>, eternal<sup>58</sup>, and one<sup>59</sup>. Fabro uses these as a basis for establishing five conditions for an adequate notion of God:<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1084

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1067

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1145

<sup>51</sup> Many philosophers have inserted God into their philosophical systems. Hegel (like Descartes) invokes God as the ultimate foundation of truth. Hegel desired to make a ‘transference’ “from the finite to the Infinite with his distinction between a dialectic of true infinity and a dialectic of ‘baneful infinity’ or the ‘leap’ into Being-itself.” However, the radical and utterly drastic finitude of being and the negation of God is described by Hegel: “The phenomenon is the beginning and the ending which of itself neither begins nor ends but is in itself and constitutes the reality and the motion of the life of truth.”

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1152

<sup>53</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, I, Q3A3. “Respondeo dicendum quod Deus est idem quod sua essentia vel natura.” “Et sic, cum Deus non sit compositus ex materia et forma, ut ostensum est, oportet quod Deus sit sua deitas, sua vita, et quidquid aliud sic de Deo praedicatur.”

<sup>54</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, I, Q4A1. “Unde primum principium activum oportet maxime esse in actu, et per consequens maxime esse perfectum. Secundum hoc enim dicitur aliquid esse perfectum, secundum quod est actu, nam perfectum dicitur, cui nihil deest secundum modum suae perfectionis.”

<sup>55</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, I, Q6A1. “Respondeo dicendum quod bonum esse praecipue Deo convenit.” “Cum ergo Deus sit prima causa effectiva omnium, manifestum est quod sibi competit ratio boni et appetibilis.”

<sup>56</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, I, Q7A1. “Cum igitur esse divinum non sit esse receptum in aliquo, sed ipse sit suum esse subsistens, ut supra ostensum est; manifestum est quod ipse Deus sit infinitus et perfectus.”

<sup>57</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, I, Q9A1. “Respondeo dicendum quod ex praemissis ostenditur Deum esse omnino immutabilem. Primo quidem, quia supra ostensum est esse aliquod primum ens, quod Deum dicimus, et quod huiusmodi primum ens oportet esse purum actum absque permixtione alicuius potentiae, eo quod potentia simpliciter est posterior actu.”

<sup>58</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, I, Q10A2. “Unde, cum Deus sit maxime immutabilis, sibi maxime competit esse aeternum.”

<sup>59</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*, I, Q11A3. “Respondeo dicendum quod Deum esse unum.” “Primo quidem ex eius simplicitate. Hoc autem convenit Deo, nam ipse Deus est sua natura, ut supra ostensum est. Secundum igitur idem est Deus, et hic Deus. Impossibile est igitur esse plures deos.”

<sup>60</sup> Fabro, Cornelio. *God in Exile; Modern Atheism from its Roots in the Cartesian Cogito to the Present Day* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1964, p. 44-45)

1. That God is recognized as the *Supreme Being*
2. That God is *One*.
3. That God is *Spirit* who actualizes the perfect degree of being.
4. That God is declared as *transcendent* in Himself and not the sum of the world or a universal Mind
5. That God is recognized as a *supremely free, personal being* in his relations with the world.

Comparing these attributes to Hegel's pantheism is helpful to understand the kind of God that Hegel professes. According to Hegel's pantheistic philosophy, God is not transcendent, personal, infinite, or unchanging. The "world spirit" of Hegel uses these attributes in a pantheistic meaning. Hegel's Absolute "is immanent in the cosmos, and now specifically in the human consciousness...The Absolute is not prior to this world of men or above it; it is not the creating source from which earthly reality derives, nor is it distinct from it. Thus the Absolute is not a 'substance', meaning an existing and already achieved Being or Reality, but rather a 'subject', that is, a process of development in and of and through the human social reality."<sup>61</sup> According to Fabro, "No philosopher has ever spoken so much about God as Hegel, [but] no philosophy ... has so incited the negation of God than Hegel."<sup>62</sup>

### **Conclusion on Virtual Atheism**

Fabro explains the consequences of starting from the mind, "Any thinker who takes the mind as his starting point is bound to be caught in the wash of the intrinsic finitude of the human dimension and sucked down into the ontological void."<sup>63</sup> All modern philosophies are virtually atheistic because they follow the principle of immanentism and start from the mind. Empiricism denies the validity of causes and so within this system, there can be no thought of the ultimate cause by which God remains transcendent. Hegel's pantheism identifies God and nature, without the attributes of God as we know Him. Sartre says that there is no God to give a nature to things.

There are three reasons why the Principle of Immanentism implies a virtual atheism. In the first place, this was seen in the radical doubt of the Principle of Immanentism. Secondly this was a result of placing the gnoseological and metaphysical foundation in intrinsic principles such as "I think" and "I doubt". Thirdly, this is inherent in the subjective nature of the principle of immanentism itself. Modern philosophical systems, characterized by radical doubt and with the *cogito* as the rule for determining truth, logically result in the mandatory denial of the transcendent principle - God.

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<sup>61</sup> R. Chervin, E. Kevane, *Love of Wisdom*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1988, p. 280.

<sup>62</sup> Fabro, Cornelio. *God in Exile; Modern Atheism from its Roots in the Cartesian Cogito to the Present Day* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1964, p. 1072)

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1150

## Solution

A small mistake in the beginning is a big one in the end.<sup>64</sup> St. Thomas uses this phrase at the very beginning of *De Ente et Essentia*. The Principle of Immanentism leads to atheism or atheistic philosophies because it fundamentally changes the reality of man and his relation with the world. The perennial philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas provides the solution for the errors caused by the Principle of Immanentism. According to Scholastic Philosophy, “that which first falls in the intellect is ens, without which nothing can be apprehended by the intellect.”<sup>65</sup> Modern philosophy rejects this first, crucial, and necessary step with the Principle of Immanentism.

The Principle of Immanentism begins instead with universal doubt, which is simply impossible. There are certain points of knowledge which are unquestionable, which cannot be avoided even if one is determined to doubt everything. Anyone who affirms that absolutely everything must be doubted is already making a judgment which represents his own theory, and which, therefore, is an exception to what he is affirming. Universal doubt is contradictory and internally unsustainable because it implies its own negation.

Genuine immanence, which follows the classical line of Aristotle and St. Thomas, is the intentional presence of being in the mind. This intentional presence of being “raises to act the particular potencies of cognitive beings as a transition from act to act in the soul’s acquisition of its own perfections.”<sup>66</sup> The change involves no loss or destruction, but on the contrary a conservation and growth of the subject in itself. Classical Thomist realism comprises a perfective immanence because it involves “a heightening in being of both the subject of the bringing-to-presence (the mind) and the object that comes-to-presence (the world) in their encounter in the cognitional act.”<sup>67</sup>

Classical and modern thought have two different starting points and ends. Classical thought holds a perfective immanence and a growth in the subject beginning with *ens* as the object of the intellect. Modern thought holds a constitutive immanence which resolves and dissolves being, in various ways in the various systems into the forms and modes of self-actuation and self-realization of the mind. The unforeseen outcome of this initial error of the Principle of Immanentism is the radical inversion of man’s concept of being, which leads to a virtual atheism, the inability to grasp the transcendence of God. “Only the thinker who starts from the integral existent being and uses as his lever the radical integrity and transcendent power of Being discoverable in that integral existent, can hope to reach the Absolute Esse, the Infinite Act of Being who is God.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas. *De Ente et Essentia*. “Quia parvus error in principio magnus est in fine.”

<sup>65</sup> Ens: “quod primo intellectus concipit in quo omnes conceptiones resolvit” Primum quod cadit in imaginatione intellectus est ens, sine quo nihil potest apprehendi ab intellectu. Ens - ens est objectum intellectus sicut color objectum visus

<sup>66</sup> Fabro, Cornelio. *God in Exile; Modern Atheism from its Roots in the Cartesian Cogito to the Present Day* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1964, p. 1084)

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1084 - According to Fabro, both go up a degree in the ontological hierarchy: the mind by an intentional possession of the form of being and being itself by the spirituality of the soul to which it is conjoined.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* p. 1150