

Professor Ferrier has not given this. Of course, he cannot reason upon existence without in reality assuming something about it; and when we look into his argument, so as to discover the notion of existence on which he implicitly proceeds, we find that it is essentially the same with that of Spinoza—"per substantiam intelligo id quod in se est, et per se concipitur; hoc est id, cujus conceptus non indiget conceptu alterius rei, a quo formari debeat." Substance or absolute existence is that which is conceived by itself (the conclusions of Spinoza do not at all depend on the clause *in se est* as distinguished from *per se concipitur*), or to the conception of which the conception of nothing else is required. This is precisely the view taken by Professor Ferrier; though, as I have said, he does not present it in the form of a definition, but gives it as a result of reasoning. The third proposition of his Ontology is, that "Absolute Existence, or Being in itself, is not the contradictory;" that is, it admits of being conceived by some intelligence. Without examining the demonstration which is given of this proposition, it is enough to observe that, as an argument, it cannot but be inconclusive, no definition of absolute existence having been furnished, except what the proposition itself affords. So long as absolute existence has not been defined, we can no more prove that it is not the contradictory, than we can prove that the *relphum scalclath* of Gulliver's philosopher is not the contradictory.

The fact is, that even in the way of definition, it is not legitimate to describe Absolute Existence or Real Being as that which may be conceived *per se*. It may perhaps be thought that a writer is at liberty to define terms as he pleases; but the definition in question—which contains the germ of all Spinoza's hideous conclusions—cannot be allowed; because if it does not covertly beg the whole question in dispute, it is without meaning. When it is said that Real Being is that which may be conceived *per se*, what, I ask, is it for a thing to be conceived? The term *conception* is used either as descriptive of our thinking specially, or in some wider sense. If it be employed in the former way then, in defining Real Being as that which can be conceived by itself, it is denied that any thing exists beyond the possible grasp of our apprehension—a doctrine which cannot be allowed to creep in surreptitiously under the guise of a definition. But if the term be taken in the latter sense, then the statement that Real Being is not the Contradictory or the Absolutely Inconceivable, is one to which I can affix no meaning. I understand what is meant by a thing being the inconceivable to me, but not what is meant by its being the inconceivable absolutely.