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WHAT KIND OF NECESSARY BEING COULD GOD BE?

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Abstract. A logically impossible sentence is one which entails a contradiction, a logically necessary sentence is one whose negation entails a contradiction, and a logically possible sentence is one which does not entail a contradiction. Metaphysically impossible, necessary and possible sentences are ones which become logically impossible, necessary, or possible by substituting what I call informative rigid designators for uninformative ones. It does seem very strongly that a negative existential sentence cannot entail a contradiction, and so 'there is a God' cannot be a metaphysically necessary truth. If it were such a truth, innumerable other sentences which seem paradigm examples of logically possible sentences, such as 'no one knows everything' would turn out to be logically impossible. The only way in which God could be a logically necessary being is if there were eternal necessary propositions independent of human language or God's will, such that the proposition that there is no God would entail – via propositions inaccessible to us – a contradiction. But if there were such propositions, God would have less control over the universe than he would have otherwise.

I.

I shall understand by 'metaphysical necessity' the strongest kind of necessity there is, and by 'metaphysical impossibility' the strongest kind of impossibility there is, and so by 'metaphysical possibility' the weakest kind of possibility there is. My concern in this paper is with whether it is metaphysically possible that God be a metaphysically necessary being in these senses.

A substance or event is metaphysically necessary (or whatever) iff it is metaphysically necessary (or whatever) that it exists; and since we can have no discussable knowledge of whether it is metaphysically necessary (or whatever) that the substance or event exists, except (at least in part) by reflecting on features of the sentence which asserts this, it will be more convenient to speak of necessity etc. as belonging to the sentence. I shall come back later to the issue of whether these modal properties belong primarily to entities of some other kind, such as propositions, and consider the consequences which would follow if they did.

I begin with general considerations about what determines the meanings, in the sense of the truth conditions, of the sentences of a human language, that is the conditions in which they are true and the conditions in which they are false and so which other sentences they entail and are entailed by. Sentences of a language mean what its speakers (or – in the case of technical terms – some group of experts, e.g. physicists) mean by them. Each of us learns the meanings of certain sentences by being shown many observable conditions under which those sentences are regarded as true or as false, and by being told of other sentences to which a speaker is regarded as committed by uttering those sentences, and other sentences which are such that someone who utters them is regarded as committed to the former sentences. We learn the meaning of a word by being taught the difference to the meaning of a sentence made by that word playing a certain role in the sentence. By being taught the meanings of individual words and of sentences of various forms, we may then come to an understanding of the meaning of a sentence in which those words are arranged in a certain way, even if we have not been shown observable conditions under which that sentence is regarded as true or as false. Showing 'observable conditions' may involve pointing to them or describing them by terms already introduced. For example, we learn the meaning of 'there is a cat over there' by being shown observable circumstances under which this sentence is regarded as true, and observable circumstances under which it is regarded as false; and by being told that someone who utters this sentence is regarded as committed to 'there is an animal over there', and someone who utters 'there are two cats over there' is regarded as committed to the original sentence. We learn the meaning of 'there is a dog over there' in a similar way. Thereby we come to know the meanings of 'cat' and 'dog', and so the kind of meaning possessed by sentences of the form 'there is a Φ over there.' We need to observe many different examples of

observable conditions under which a sentence containing a certain word in various roles is regarded as true or false, and of the commitments speakers who use sentences containing that word in various roles are regarded as having; and this allows us to acquire an understanding of the conditions under which some new sentence containing that word would be regarded as true or false. Examples of different observable conditions under which some sentence is true or false, and of sentences to which we are not committed by a given sentence also illustrate which conditions do not rule out the sentence being true. We extrapolate, that is, from a stock of supposedly paradigm examples (of observable conditions and relations of commitment) to an understanding that the sentence would be regarded as true (or false, as the case may be) under conditions sufficiently similar in certain respects to most of the paradigm examples.[1]

Because humans have very similar psychologies determining how they learn meanings, and because members of a language group are exposed to very similar paradigm examples (of observable conditions and rules of commitment), members of the same language group normally acquire a very similar understanding of the meanings of words and sentences. This common understanding may be reinforced by dictionary compilers and philosophers who 'tidy up' language by laying down rules for correct usage, usually by codifying most people's actual usage. The rules give general descriptions of the observable conditions under which various sentences of the language are true and of the observable conditions under which various sentences of the language are false, and of the kinds of other sentences to which a sentence of a given kind commits the speaker and by which sentences of other kinds a speaker is committed to a sentence of a given kind. The rules of the syllogism for example are rules of this latter kind; 'all A's are B' and 'All B's are C' commits one to 'All A's are C'. But such rules can in the end only be understood by examples of observable 'conditions' and 'kinds' of sentences. One couldn't understand the stated rule of the syllogism without being shown some things which have some property, and some things which have another property, and examples of things which constitute 'all' members of a class. This programme of

[1] Note however that the sense of a word which we get from this process may be such as to rule out a few of the supposedly paradigm examples as examples of things to which that word applies. Thus we may derive from many supposedly paradigm examples by which we are taught the meaning of the word 'cat' a sense of 'cat' which rules out one of these examples as being a cat at all; it might turn out to have been a baby tiger instead. I ask the reader to understand future uses of 'paradigm' as short for 'supposedly paradigm'.

'tidying up' language aims to secure uniformity of use. To the extent to which it is successful in a language group, there is a correct use of language, and it is an objective matter to what one is and to what one is not committed by some sentence.

Words and sentence forms may be ambiguous, and new words and sentence forms enter language; but I shall count the language as having a correct use, so long as speakers can be got to recognise the ambiguity or novel meaning. This can often be achieved by philosophical discussion forcing a speaker to admit that in one sense of a word 'W', 'S is W' is true, whereas in another sense 'S is W' is false. Because of a lack of sensory or cognitive apparatus, some speakers do not have the capacity to extrapolate from any paradigm examples or inferential rules to the applicability of sentences in new situations. Some people are colour-blind, and so unable to understand the sense of 'green' to which they have been introduced by examples of green objects and so apply it to new instances. Other people do not have the cognitive apparatus to recognize some philosophical or mathematical concept such as 'tensor product' or 'internal negation', to which they have been introduced, and so apply it to new instances. But so long as those who purport to be able to extrapolate from paradigm examples can be got to agree how to do so, I shall count the expressions as having an objective meaning in the language. I shall call the assumption that all sentences of the language would have, in consequence of these procedures, an objective meaning, the 'common language assumption'. I shall call a rule for what one is objectively committed to by a sentence, a rule of mini-entailment. S1 mini-entails s2 if and only if anyone who asserts s1 is thereby (in virtue of the rules for the correct use of language) committed to s2. S1 entails sn iff they can be joined by a chain of mini-entailments, such that s1 mini-entails some s2, s2 mini-entails some s3 and so on until we reach a sentence which mini-entails sn. I shall call a rule for what one is objectively not-committed to by a sentence or its negation a compatibility rule. S1 is compatible with s2 iff s1 does not entail not-s2. If a sentence s1 is compatible with s2, it is of course compatible with all the entailments of s2.

II.

Among metaphysical necessities etc. are ones discoverable a priori, that is discoverable by mere reflection on what is involved in the claim made by the sentence. I'll call these logical necessities etc. (They include both

'logical' necessities etc. in a narrow sense, and 'conceptual' necessities etc.) The obvious examples by which we learn the meaning of 'logically impossible sentence' are self-contradictory sentences and ones which entail self-contradictions. A self-contradictory sentence claims both that something is so and also that it is not so, for example, 'he is taller than 6ft and it is not the case that he is taller than 6 ft.' For such a sentence could only be true if that something was so, and the sentence asserts that it is not so. No sentence could be more obviously or more strongly impossible than such a sentence; and any sentence which entails a self-contradiction is as strongly impossible as a self-contradiction. And the natural understanding which most of us get from these examples is that a logically impossible sentence just is one which entails a self-contradiction; and so any logically necessary sentence is one whose negation entails a self-contradiction, and any logically possible sentence is one which does not entail a self-contradiction.

Purported examples of logically necessary sentences whose negations do not entail a self-contradiction, turn out, I suggest, on examination, either to be such that their negations do entail a self-contradiction or not to be nearly as strongly necessary as ones whose negations entail a self-contradiction.[2] And there is a general reason for denying that

[2] Robert Adams has one example of what, he writes, "seems to be a necessary truth": "Everything green has some spatial property". (See Robert Adams, 'Divine Necessity' republished in his *The Virtue of Faith* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987], pp. 213-4.) He claims that this sentence cannot be shown to be 'analytic'. 'Analytic' may be understood in different ways, but one way which Adams mentions is being true "solely in virtue of the meanings of its terms"; and he claims that this account is "so vague as to be useless". But if 'analytic' is spelled out in terms of the negation of the sentence entailing a self-contradiction, the notion is clear. I suggest that being 'green' can be understood in two possible ways, and that the cited sentence with 'green' understood in either of these ways can be shown to be such that its negation entails a self-contradiction. Being green is a property of a thing. One can understand the word 'green' in such a way that a thing being 'green' entails that thing being a publicly visible thing. A publicly visible thing must have a spatial extension – for what one sees one sees as occupying a region of space. In that case the negation of the cited sentence clearly entails a self-contradiction. But one can understand 'green' in a sense in which (not merely a public visible thing, but also) a private thing experienced by only one person, the content of a mental event such as a sense-datum (or, less controversially, an after-image), could be 'green'. Clearly what it would be for that private thing to be green is to have the same visual appearance in respect of colour as a green public object. It must look like a surface or a volume which is green; and so must have the visual appearance of a spatial thing. For a private object to have a visual appearance of a spatial thing entails it looking as if it occupies a region of public space, and it can only do that if it occupies a spatial region of one's

there are any logically impossible sentences other than ones which entail a self-contradiction (that is, any sentences which are as strongly impossible as those which entail a self-contradiction, and whose impossibility is detectable a priori, but which do not themselves entail a self-contradiction). The reason is that any such sentence must have the form of a declarative sentence, in which the component words already have a sense in the language. It will be a subject-predicate sentence, an existential generalization, or some other one of many recognized forms of declarative sentence. It will – to put the point loosely – assert something about some substance or property or event or whatever that it has or does not have some property or relation to some other substance, property, etc.; or that there are or are not certain substances, properties or whatever. Words have a sense in so far as it is clear what are the criteria for an object, property or whatever to be that object, property or whatever – they therefore delimit a boundary to the sort of object or property it can be or the sort of properties it can have. Hence it will be inconsistent to affirm that an object picked out by some expression is of a kind ruled out by the very criteria for being that object. And the form of a sentence s1 will exclude some alternative s2; and so it will be inconsistent to affirm (s1 & s2). It follows therefore that sentences exemplifying what used to be called 'category mistakes', e.g. 'Caesar is a prime number' or 'this memory is violet'[3] are – in my sense – logically impossible sentences. If a sentence is not impossible for these reasons, then it will be making a claim about the world which does not entail a self-contradiction, a coherent claim. And plausibly no coherent claim can be as strongly impossible as a self-contradictory claim.

Given the common language assumption, we should all be able to agree – within a finite time – about many sentences that they entail self-contradictions, and so are logically impossible; and about many sentences that they are such that their negations entail self-contradictions, and so are logically necessary. Compatibility rules also allow us to recognize many logically possible sentences; and so, since any sentence entailed

visual field. So again, even if one allows the existence of private objects which are green, the negation of 'everything green has some spatial property' entails a self-contradiction. Adams's example does not disconfirm my claim that the logically necessary is simply that the negation of which entails a self-contradiction, and that similar equivalences hold for logical possibility and impossibility.

[3] I take these examples from the article on 'category mistake' by Jack Meiland in R. Audi (ed.), *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 123.

by a logically possible sentence is itself logically possible, to recognize many more logically possible sentences. Of course a philosophical discussion often begins with disagreement about what entails what or what is compatible with what. The way to resolve a disagreement about whether *p* entails *q* is to find a route of mini-entailments from *p* to *q*, or – alternatively – a route of mini-entailments from (*p* & not-*q*) to a self-contradiction. The way to resolve disagreements about whether *p* is logically possible is to find some sentence (normally some long conjunction describing a circumstance) which disputants agree to be logically possible, which entails *p*), or to find some self-contradiction entailed by *p*. But prolonged failure to resolve disagreements in these ways is evidence of a failure in the common language assumption. That failure would mean that the examples and rules by which a word or sentence form has been given a sense has led to different unshareable concepts, different incommunicable understandings of that word or sentence form by different disputants. This may happen either because the two groups differ in their sensory life or in their cognitive abilities.

Here is one example. Suppose that the only noises humans could hear were noises produced by strings vibrating with different frequencies; and they then describe the noises produced by the more frequent vibrations as having a higher 'pitch'. The two groups might have two very different concepts of higher 'pitch'. One group's concept of a higher pitch might be simply the concept of being caused by a string vibrating more frequently; 'higher pitch' means more vibrations. The other group's concept might be that of a quality of a noise contingently caused by string vibration. Both groups would allow that everyone normally judges correctly which strings are vibrating more frequently, but that sometimes members of both groups make mistakes. Yet the two groups would describe the 'mistakes' differently. For the first group the mistakes are simply (bare) mistakes about how frequently the strings are vibrating, while for the second group the mistakes are mistakes caused by vibrations occasionally causing notes of different pitch from the ones they normally cause. For the first group the 'deaf' lack an ability to discriminate vibrations by means of their ears; for the second group the 'deaf' lack an ability to have auditory sensations. The different concepts of 'pitch' have different entailments. For the first group 'the string is now vibrating more frequently' entails 'it is producing a higher note': for the second group, it does not. And so on. The first group reports that it 'cannot make sense of' much of what the second group is claiming.

The difference in the concepts inculcated by the teaching process may have arisen because the second group has sensations which the first group doesn't have. (The first group suffer from the auditory equivalent of blindsight.) But it may have arisen from a cognitive failure on the part of one or other group. It may be that both groups have sensations, but the first group doesn't have the ability to distinguish its sensations from its beliefs. Or it may be that neither group has sensations, but the second group suppose that they must be having sensations because they convince themselves from the example of vision that all perceptual beliefs must be mediated by sensations.

A different kind of example shows how lack of cognitive abilities alone may lead to different concepts. We are all taught by the same kinds of example what is a 'straight line'. Some people come to understand thereby simply a line (which can be extended indefinitely) such that the shortest distance between any two points on the line lies on the line, however far the line is extended. But others, while allowing that as a possible meaning for 'straight line' may acquire a more sophisticated understanding, that a 'straight line' is a line (which can be extended indefinitely) such that for any point P on the line there is some point Q on the line such that the shortest distance between P and any point on the line closer to P than Q lies on the line. This second understanding allows for the possibility of all straight lines (in this second sense) eventually returning to their starting point, and so there being no straight lines in the first sense, and so of space being unbounded but closed. Some people simply 'cannot make sense' of this possibility; for them being a 'straight line' in the second sense entails being a 'straight line' in the first sense. Other people can make sense of this possibility, and so deny the entailment. And, although I myself can make sense of it, it is always (epistemically) possible that I am deceived.

The only way to attempt to overcome such conflicts is to continue to pursue the methods described earlier – try harder to agree on logically possible sentences which entail a disputed sentence, or to find a route by which it leads to a self-contradiction. But it may be that some of us simply lack the ability to recognize certain modal truths, or – alternatively – deceive ourselves into supposing that certain sentences are logically possible, when they are not. But where this doesn't happen, there will be agreement about what is logically impossible etc., so long as we have the same understanding of the 'logically impossible' as that which entails a self-contradiction.

III.

But not all metaphysical impossibilities or necessities are logical impossibilities or necessities. In the 1970's, Kripke and Putnam[4] drew our attention to the fact that there are many sentences which are such that neither they nor their negations seem to entail any self-contradiction, but which seem to be necessarily true or necessarily false with a necessity as strong as that of logical necessity, but whose truth or falsity are discoverable only a posteriori. These sentences were said to be metaphysically but not logically, necessary or impossible. Thus, to modify an example used by Kripke to illustrate this class of sentences, suppose that in days long before people knew the geography of the Himalayas, explorers named a mountain of a certain visual appearance seen from Tibet 'Everest', and a mountain of a certain different shape seen from Nepal 'Gaurisanker', and used these names as rigid designators of the mountains. (A 'rigid designator' is a word which picks out the same object, however the object may change in respect of its non-essential properties.) These mountains are the same mountain; and being the mountains they are, they are – by the necessity of identity – necessarily the same mountain; and so – it seems – 'Everest is Gaurisanker' is necessarily true, with as hard as necessity as any logically necessary sentence. However – we may suppose – the explorers did not know this, and clearly would not have been able to discover its truth by mere a priori means. Hence it is not a logically necessary truth. Or consider Putnam's example of 'water is H_2O', 'water' being understood – as Putnam supposes that it was in the early nineteenth century – as a rigid designator of the transparent drinkable liquid in our rivers and seas. What makes the stuff that stuff is its chemical essence – being H_2O. Having that essence, it could not not have that essence. So 'water is H_2O' is metaphysically necessary, but again not so discoverable a priori. Hence is must be an a posteriori metaphysical necessity.

What has made these necessary sentences a posteriori is that the sentence contains at least one rigid designator of which we learn the meaning by being told that it applies to certain particular things

[4] Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, republished as a book (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), and H. Putnam, 'The Meaning of "meaning"', republished in his *Mind, Language and Reality, Philosophical Papers, vol. 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975). I interpret the claims of Kripke and Putnam about necessity etc. as claims about the necessity of sentences. Kripke makes it clear that his concern is with sentences, and writes that he has no 'official doctrine' of how his account applies to 'propositions'. (op. cit. pp. 20-21.)

(especially substances and kinds of substances) having certain superficial properties, but where – we are told – what makes a thing that thing (that substance or a substance of that kind) is the essence (of which we may be ignorant) underlying those properties. In ignorance of the latter, we do not fully understand what we are saying about a substance when we say that it is that substance or a substance of that kind. Hence I shall call such designators 'uninformative designators'.

I define a rigid designator of a thing as an 'informative designator' if and only if someone who knows what the designator means (that is, has the linguistic knowledge of how to use it) knows a certain set of conditions necessary and sufficient (in any logically possible world) for a thing to be that thing (whether or not he can state those conditions in words.) I define a rigid designator as an 'uninformative designator' if and only if these conditions are not satisfied. To 'know' these conditions for the application of a designator – as I shall understand this expression – just is to be able (when favourably positioned, with faculties in working order, and not subject to illusion) to recognize where the informative designator (or, if it is defined in words, the words by which it is defined) applies and where it does not and to know the mini-entailments of sentences in which it occurs. Having the ability to recognize something when favourably positioned with faculties in working order and not subject to illusion, involves knowing what that thing is. In the case of technical terms, it is experts in the relevant field whose knowledge of the relevant necessary and sufficient conditions determines the meaning of a term. Thus it is physical scientists, whose knowledge determines the meanings of 'quark' or 'electron'.

Many of the words – for example 'red', 'square', 'has a length of 1 metre' – by which we pick out properties are informative designators; they are such that if we know what the words mean we can recognize (subject to the stated restriction) where they do or do not apply, and can make the requisite inferences. Other words by which we pick out properties can be defined by words for which those conditions hold. For example 'has a length of 10^{-15} metres' can be defined in terms of the informatively designated property 'has a length of 10 metres' and the informatively designated relation of 'being shorter by $1/10^{th}$ than' (used 15 times).

So the reason why the claims originally made by the sentences 'Everest is Gaurisanker' and 'water is H_2O' are necessary with as hard a necessity as 'logical necessity' is that they are logically necessary, but the use of uninformative designators has the consequences that speakers

did not know fully what these claims were until they had done some a posteriori investigation. When we know fully what we are talking about, mere a priori considerations can show whether some sentence is metaphysically necessary or impossible. Hence there is available a definition of a sentence as metaphysically necessary (impossible or possible) iff it is logically necessary (impossible or possible) when we substitute co-referring informative designators for uninformative designators. This definition will capture as metaphysically necessary (impossible or possible) almost all the examples of the 'metaphysically necessary' ('impossible' or 'possible') offered by Kripke, Putnam, and others. And so from these examples we derive a sense of metaphysically necessary in which a sentence is metaphysically necessary (impossible or possible) iff it is logically necessary (impossible or possible) when informative designators are substituted for uninformative designators. And so, given the earlier understanding of 'logical impossibility', and the understanding of metaphysical impossibility as in reality logical impossibility, it would seem that no sentence could be as strongly impossible metaphysically as one which is in reality logically impossible; and so there can be no metaphysically impossible (necessary, or possible) sentences apart from ones of the kind analysed in this section.

IV.

So, given some a posteriori logically contingent information (e.g. about which are the molecules of which whatever is the transparent stuff in our rivers and seas is made) which determine which sentences are metaphysically necessary, there should be no scope for disagreement about the modal metaphysical status of any sentence – given that the common language assumption applies to the words and sentence forms of the language – and that we have the same understandings of 'logical' and 'metaphysical' impossibility.

Now I have introduced the term 'metaphysically' impossible as the strongest kind of impossibility which a sentence can have; and defined the 'logically' impossible in terms of the metaphysically impossible. I have filled out what it is for a sentence to be impossible in this 'strongest' sense by examples of self-contradictions, entailments, and compatibilities; and by means of Kripke – Putnam type examples, which I have described in my own way by means of the concept of an 'informative designator'. The particular examples could form the basis of any philosophy student's

introduction to the concepts of metaphysical and logical impossibility. From these examples I have derived sharp usable senses of 'logically impossible' ('entailing a contradiction') and 'metaphysically impossible' (reducible in the stated way to 'logically impossible'), and thereby of the other modal concepts. I call these senses of the terms 'logically' and 'metaphysically' the narrow senses, and I will assume them for the rest of this section.

Others may purport to derive from the paradigm examples wider understandings of these terms. They may suppose (for example) that there are impossibilities in the strongest sense detectable a priori which do not entail contradictions; or necessities in the strongest sense which do not reduce to sentences whose negations entail contradictions when we substitute informative for uninformative designators.[5] The issue then arises whether it is logically possible (on my understanding of this concept) for there to be such impossibilities or necessities. And the only way to resolve any disagreement about this is by the methods described earlier: putting forward examples which we can both recognize do not entail self-contradictions, or showing by a route that we can both recognize that purported examples do entail self-contradictions. But I am pessimistic about the chances of my reaching agreement with many of my opponents on this matter within any finite time. That will show that one or other of us suffers from some (sensory, or much more likely) cognitive deficiency.

V.

However, given my understanding of these concepts together with my assumption that the modal properties are properties of sentences, it seems fairly implausible to suppose that a (positive) existential sentence (a sentence claiming that there exists some thing or things of a certain

[5] Gendler and Hawthorne write, that "the notion of metaphysical possibility ... is standardly taken to be primitive", adding in a footnote "in contemporary discussions at any rate" ([eds] T. Gendler and J. Hawthorne, *Conceivability and Possibility* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], Introduction, p. 4.). It doesn't help me to understand this notion for them to say that it is the most basic conception of 'how things might have been' (ibid. pp. 4-5.). For since this 'most basic conception' is supposed to be wider than logical possibility (as defined by me), it is unclear how the latter is to be widened unless in the way I have analysed. (In one book I myself unhelpfully used 'metaphysically necessary' to mean [roughly] whatever is the ultimate cause of things or is entailed by the existence of that ultimate cause; and so the 'metaphysically possible' is whatever is compatible with the existence of the actual ultimate cause. See *The Christian God* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994], pp. 118-19. But this is certainly not the sense which most writers who use the term have in mind, and not the sense in which I am using in this paper.)

kind) can be logically necessary – for to be so it would need to be such that its negation entails a self-contradiction. The negation of an existential sentence has the form '~(∃x)(ϕx)'; it claims that a certain property (or conjunction of properties) is not instantiated. A self-contradictory sentence, of a kind not containing modal operators, claims that the actual world has a contradictory quality, and that will be so either because some object within it has such a quality or because it both does and does not contain an object of a certain kind. So it will have the form or entail a sentence of the form '(∃x)(ψx)&~(∃x)(ψx)' or the form '(∃x) (ψ x & ~ ψ x)'. Either way it will include or entail a positive existential sentence. But plausibly the mere non-existence of anything of some kind cannot entail the existence of anything. It may be suggested that the contradiction has the form of a sentence in which there are modal operators, where the contradiction arises from its modal features; for example a sentence of the form 'it is possible that something is ϕ, and it is not possible that something is ϕ, '◊(∃x) (Φx) & ~◊(∃x) (Φx)'. But it is not easy to see how the mere non-existence of anything of some kind could entail a modal sentence which would not be entailed by the existence of a thing of that kind.

The plausible suggestion that the mere non-existence of anything of some kind cannot entail a contradiction, and so no positive existential sentence can be a necessary truth is of course is of course due to Hume.[6] It will hold whether the thing is of a concrete or an abstract kind. So the supposed necessary existential truths of arithmetic do not constitute an exception. The negation of, for example, such a supposed necessary truth as 'There are prime numbers greater than 3', 'There are no prime numbers greater than 3', does not by itself entail a contradiction; it does so only when conjoined with some existential axiom of arithmetic (e.g 'There is a number 1' and 'Every number has a successor'). So my suggestion must hold also for the special case where 'Ø' designates any conjunction of properties of a kind supposed to constitute a definite description of God – e.g. 'omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and eternal' – and so God cannot be a logically necessary being.

However some people claim (in effect) that a particular negative existential sentence of this kind does entail a contradiction, and some of them claim to have demonstrated this. If this disagreement persists after serious attempts to clarify the issues, this indicates another case

[6] "There is no being ... whose non-existence implies a contradiction." D. Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion,* originally published 1779 (New York, Hafner Publishing Co., 1948), Part 9, p. 58.

where my 'common language assumption' is mistaken. The entailment must depend on understanding sentences in different senses from the way the rest of us understand them, senses which are not equivalent to any which we can grasp. Yet if someone claims that 'there is no x such that Ø x' (where 'Ø' designates a definite description of God of any traditional kind) entails a contradiction, they will need to hold that innumerable other sentences of very different kinds to each other entail contradictions, when the rest of us hold that they are obviously logically possible. For example they will need to hold that 'Once upon a time there were no rational beings', and 'No one knows everything', and 'No one is perfectly good', and – among sentences evidently describing non-actual worlds – 'The only substances are four mutually repelling steel balls', and 'No one knows what is happening outside a sphere of 1 mile diameter surrounding their body' all entail contradictions, because – if any one of them does not entail a contradiction – there would not be a God in anything like a traditional sense. Someone could only derive a contradiction from all such sentences if they understood an enormous number of predicates – not just one or two technical philosophical terms – in different senses from the rest of us, or if they understood one or more formal terms such as 'exists', 'not', or 'all' differently from the rest of us. In view of the similarity in respect of psychological make-up and the process of language acquisition between humans who believe in ontological arguments and those who don't, I do not find it very plausible to suppose that the former understand all these predicates in different senses from the rest of us. But if they do understand the predicates in the same senses as the rest of us, they will have to admit that 'there is no God' does not entail a self-contradiction, and so 'there is a God' cannot be logically necessary in the sense in which I have spelled it out.

But if there is no logically necessary sentence of the form 'there is an x such that Øx' where 'Ø' designates a definite description of God, no substitution for 'God' in 'God exists' of a co-referring designator will yield a logically necessary sentence, and so 'God exists' cannot be metaphysically necessary in the sense in which I have spelled it out.

VI.

My arguments so far assume that the primary bearers of modal properties are sentences of human languages. Because many human languages have very similar structures to each other – words introduced by the same observable circumstances, the same types of sentences (subject-predicate

sentences, existential sentences, and so on) with parallel inference patterns between them, some sentence in one language often means the same as some sentence in another language; they are inter-translatable. And so in order to talk about the claim which would be made by any such sentence, or any other sentence meaning the same which might be uttered in a language not yet invented, it is useful to suppose that – even before such a claim is made – there is a common thing which they all express, a proposition, the content and logical consequences of which can be discussed independently of the particular language in which it is expressed. This however is merely a useful fiction. There is no reason to suppose that there really are such things as propositions, existing independently of the sentences which express them. We cannot interact with propositions, nor do we need to postulate them in order to explain what we observe – the behaviour of humans who utter sentences. And if the necessary truths were truths about eternal propositions, there would be no easy explanation of how we are in a position to know which such propositions are necessarily true. Why should we trust our intuitions about this Platonic realm? Whereas if necessary truths are truths about human language, there is a ready explanation of how we are in a position to know about them: we learn them in learning language. So there is no reason to deny that ordinary talk about 'propositions' (of a kind that does not imply their eternal existence) can be analysed as talk about human sentences.

If however we suppose that propositions are real timeless entities which have a modal status independently of any human sentences which might express them, then there is some plausibility in the claim that the proposition expressed (imperfectly) by the sentence 'there is a God' might be a metaphysically necessary truth – even if we assume that logically impossible propositions are ones which entail a self-contradiction, and metaphysically impossible propositions are ones from which we can derive from logically impossible propositions by substituting co-referring informative for uninformative designators. For there will not be the slightest reason to suppose that there are only as many propositions as will eventually be expressed or even (in some sense) could be expressed. In that case there would not be any reason to suppose that all necessary propositions which can be expressed can be shown by us to be necessary, because the demonstrations thereof may depend on a deduction which proceeds by means of propositions of kinds which cannot be expressed and whose mini-entailments may be known only to superior beings.

So maybe 'God exists' is necessarily true – even though we humans are totally unable to show that. That of course would not provide us with a sound ontological argument, but it does allow the possibility of there being one, unknowable by humans.

This way of thinking does however carry certain unwelcome consequences for theism. It looks as if all these other necessary propositions coexisting eternally with God, constrain how God can act. If for example it is a necessarily true proposition that God cannot make me exist or not exist at the same time, then this constrains what God can do – not merely what we can do with the English language without uttering a necessarily false sentence. That necessarily true proposition would limit God. One way of attempting to avoid this is to claim that necessarily these propositions are ideas in the mind of God, and so part of his nature. But that raises the question why these propositions rather than any other ones are part of God's nature, and if the answer is that it is just a brute fact that they are, that would make God essentially a very un-simple being. Alternatively one could suppose that God has a nature such that necessarily he creates just these necessary truths.[7] On a normal theistic view God is necessarily good, and so the only necessary truths which it follows from his essence that he will create will be good ones. But there are well-known difficulties in supposing that any agent (including God) can make actions (morally) good (except in virtue of some fundamental moral principle which lays down which actions an agent can make good under which circumstances – e.g. that it is good to use force to uphold a just law if commanded to do so by a just sovereign).[8] Given that the fundamental principles about

[7] See for example Thomas Morris and Christopher Menzel 'Absolute Creation' in (ed.) T. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 161-172. The later pages of this paper (pp. 172-8) go on to defend a (to my mind) even more implausible correlate of this view – that God creates his own nature.

[8] For example, it does rather look as if some of the same actions would be good or bad if there was no God, as are good and bad if there is a God. But if no action would be good or bad unless God had so willed it, that must be because God has some property which other persons lack (e.g. being our creator, or being omnipotent) so that God's willing some action would make this difference whereas other persons willing it would not. But then there must be a fundamental principle independent of God, that it is good to do any action willed by someone having that property; and that principle couldn't be true in virtue of being willed by God. For my account of the relation of God to morality see my 'What difference does God make to morality?' in (ed.) R.K. Garcia, *Is Goodness without God good enough?* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), pp. 151-63; and my *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), chapters 1 and 8.

which actions are good (that is, would be good if they were performed) are independent of the actions of agents, the fundamental principles to which propositions it is good to award the status of necessary truth will be independent of the actions of God. On the propositional view these will be eternally necessary propositions (stating which propositions it would be a good action to make necessary) existing independently of the actions of God, and determining which actions he can do. But then there will be necessarily true eternal propositions independent of the will of God stating which actions (of creating necessary truths) these are. These propositions determine how God can act; they cannot be consequences of God's actions. But if necessary truths (including the fundamental moral truths) are just truths of human language about human language (including the truth about which property 'morally good' designates, and so which properties, such as the property of feeding the starving, are entailed by it), there are no pre-existing things apart from God – although of course the states of affairs which human language is used to describe – e.g. that God is good – may exist before they are described by humans.

So for all these reasons we should regard logical necessity as belonging primarily to human sentences, and only to any other entities as a convenient fiction; and then, I suggest, it follows that God is not a metaphysically necessary being (in the sense analysed in this paper), because it is not logically possible (in my sense) that there be any metaphysically necessary being.[9] But this fact has no relevance to the

[9] I very much doubt whether anyone earlier than Anselm thought that God is a metaphysically necessary being in the sense being discussed. Aquinas did not use 'necessary being' in this sense. For in his *Summa Theologiae* Ia. 50.5 ad. 3 (as elsewhere) he clearly implies that, as well as God, angels (which are beings created by the voluntary act of God) are also necessary beings. He seems to think of a necessary being as one not subject to corruption, that is, one which will go on existing forever unless caused not to exist by something else. He distinguished God from other necessary beings as a "being necessary through its own nature (*per se*) and not caused to be necessary by something else" (op. cit. Ia. 2.3) and so 'unconditionally necessary'. Angels depend for their non-corruptibility on God and so are only 'conditionally necessary'. However Aquinas also seems to claim (in effect) that only self-contradictions are absolutely impossible. ("The impossible is that in which the predicate is incompatible with the subject" – op.cit. Ia. 25.3.) That might seem to suggest that he thought that the negation of 'there is a God' entailed a contradiction, and so he did - but that was because he thought that anything incompatible with what was already fixed entailed a contradiction; on his view what is absolutely possible changes with time. But God, as the eternal source of everything, is always fixed, and so – by Aquinas's criteria - his non-existence is always impossible, and that is why he is absolutely necessary. (I am indebted for this analysis of Aquinas's

logical possibility of there existing a being necessary in some other sense, e.g. a being essentially everlasting and essentially not causally contingent on the existence of any other being for its own existence, which is a property which all traditional theists have believed God to have. And this fact allows the possibility of there being a cogent inductive argument to the existence of such a being.[10]

understanding of modal concepts to Brian Leftow. See his paper 'Aquinas, Divine Simplicity, and Divine Freedom' in [ed.] K. Timpe, *Metaphysics and God* [London: Routledge, 2009], esp. pp. 23-29.) But this is not metaphysical necessity in the sense in which I have been discussing it, which derives from a sense of logical necessity in which 'entailing a contradiction' is something intrinsic to a sentence (with its meaning), and independent of what is or is not already fixed outside the sentence. Admittedly, Aquinas also thought that "God is the same as his own nature or essence" (Ia.3.3); but he goes on to claim that anything immaterial, not just God, is the same as its own nature. His point is simply that material things are individuated by the matter of which they are made, whereas immaterial things are individuated by their forms, that is natures. I know of nothing in Aquinas which should lead us to suppose that he thought that God's existence is a metaphysically necessary truth (in the sense used in this paper). He certainly thought that on Anselm's 'definition' of God the negation of 'There is a God' did not entail a self-contradiction (Ia. 2.1. ad. 2), and I know of no reason to suppose that he thought that this would hold on any other 'definition' (in our sense) of 'God'.

[10] For my own inductive arguments to the existence of God of this kind, see my *The Existence of God*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

ASSESSING ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS[1]

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Abstract. Part I argues that ontological arguments, like other classical proofs of the existence of God, are parts of larger arguments in which they are embedded. These larger arguments include reasons supporting the proofs' premises and responses to them, and to the proofs' claims to validity and non-circularity, since, in the final analysis, our assessment of the proofs will express our best judgment of the cumulative force of all the considerations bearing on their overall adequacy. Part II illustrates these points by examining contemporary defences of, and attacks on, one of the ontological argument's central premises, namely, that God's existence is logically possible.

I.

George Mavrodes introduced the notion of a proof's person-relativity in his seminal *Belief in God*.[2] He began by distinguishing two sorts of "propositional concepts".[3] Subjective propositional concepts "have psychological implications or content". Examples are "believed", "doubted", and the like. Objective propositional concepts "have no

[1] The first part of this article is drawn from pp. 85-88 of chapter 5, "Theistic Proofs, Person-Relativity, and the Rationality of Religious Belief" by William Wainwright, from *Evidence and Religious Belief,* edited by Clark, Kelly James & Van Arragon, Raymond J. (2011). By permission of Oxford University Press.

[2] George I. Mavrodes, *Belief in God: A Study in the Epistemology of Religion* (New York: Random House, 1970). Henceforth Mavrodes, 1970.

[3] "A propositional term is one that can reasonably fill the blank" in a sentence of the "form '*p* ... is---'", where *p* ranges over propositions. (Mavrodes, 1970, p. 36)

psychological [implications or] content". "Important examples" are the terms "'truth' and 'falsity'". Propositions incorporating subjective psychological concepts are person-relative. A proposition can be believed by me, for example, without being believed by you, or doubted by you without being doubted by me. Propositions that only incorporate objective propositional concepts are not person-relative. A proposition can't be true for me and not true for you, although you may, of course, not recognize its truth. An important consequence of these definitions is that the concept of knowledge is also person-relative. Because a necessary (though not sufficient) condition of A's knowing *p* is that A believes *p*, if the latter is person-relative, then so too is the former. (Mavrodes, 1970, pp. 36-37, 39-40)

How does this bear on the notion of proof? To answer this question, Mavrodes further distinguished between an argument's soundness, its "cogency", and its "convincingness". "An argument is cogent for a certain person N if and only if (1) it is sound and (2) N knows it to be sound." (Mavrodes, 1970, p. 32) "An argument is convincing for N if and only if (1) it is cogent for N and (2) N knows that each of its premises is true without having to infer any of them from its conclusion or from any other ... statements that he knows only by an inference from that conclusion." (Mavrodes, 1970, p. 34) Soundness isn't person-relative.[4] But cogency and convincingness are since their definitions contain subjective propositional concepts. Because we ordinarily reserve the word "proof" for cogent or convincing arguments, the concept of proof, too, is person-relative.

While something seems to me profoundly right about Mavrodes' contention, it does raise two questions.

The first is this: Philosophy has traditionally made claims on universal assent. Philosophers have believed that at least *some* arguments and *some* claims *ought* to be accepted by *all* rational or properly disposed subjects. In their view, a proof, properly so-called, is an argument which all rational or properly disposed subjects *ought* to find cogent or convincing whether they in fact do so or not. Call arguments which meet this condition "probative". We may grant that cogency and convincingness are person-relative. It is less clear that probativeness is. For the concept of probativeness incorporates an epistemic ought, and epistemic oughts,

[4] For the soundness of an argument is a function of the truth of its premises and its validity, and "truth" and "validity" aren't subjective propositional concepts.

like moral oughts and truth, aren't obviously person-relative. If I morally ought to do x, then anyone in my situation ought to do x. Similarly, if I ought to believe *p* or accept *a* (where *p* and *a* take propositions and arguments as values, respectively), then anyone in my situation ought to believe *p* or accept *a*. Note that the fact that A *ought* to believe *p* or accept *a* doesn't imply that A *does* believe *p* or accept *a*. Subjective propositional concepts like believe and accept are indeed part of the content of epistemic oughts like these in the sense that, in unpacking the oughts, we introduce hypothetical or counter factual conditionals which include them (for example, "if anyone were in my situation, she should believe p). But unlike Mavrodes' standard examples of "mixed concepts" (knowledge, proof)[5] the application of the relevant concepts ("ought to believe", "ought to accept") to a subject doesn't ascribe a psychological state to that subject, and so isn't person-relative in Mavrodes' sense.

The second and more interesting question, though, is this: What exactly *accounts* for the person-relativity of proofs? In some cases, differences of education, intelligence, or training. A trained physicist, for example, may know certain truths in physics, or be able to follow certain scientific demonstrations, which the untrained lay person doesn't (and perhaps can't) know or follow. Again, since what a person knows is partly determined by his or her temporal and spatial location, one person may know things which others do not. Thus, I may know that it is now raining on Milwaukee's east side although my cousin in Arizona does not. Or again, I may be privy to information which isn't available to others. The culprit may have confessed to me, for instance, but to no one else. Or God may have revealed something to Israel which he didn't reveal to other nations.

There are other, more interesting, sources of person-relativity, however. It is plausible to suppose that a good argument is a sound noncircular argument which accomplishes its purpose. These purposes vary, however. Theistic proofs, for example, may be used to convince nonbelievers, to strengthen the faithful, as instruments of contemplation, or as offerings to God. A good argument for one person may not be a good argument for another if the latter doesn't share the former's purposes. If an argument is designed to establish common ground, for instance, or to further the project of contemplation, or as an offering to God, it may be of little or

[5] Thus "knowledge" is a mixed concept because it includes both objective and subjective elements. "A knows p", for example, entails that p is true and that A believes p.

no interest or use to a person who doesn't share these aims – *even if the argument is sound and noncircular*.[6] Thus, while Plantinga's version of the ontological proof is, arguably, sound and noncircular, and can play a useful role in furthering one's understanding of God, it has little value if one's aim is to convince nonbelievers since the latter can (and usually do) reject one or more of its premises. Furthermore, even if one sees no flaws in an argument, one may dismiss it from one's mind, give it little or no weight in one's practical or theoretical deliberations, or treat it as at most an interesting intellectual curiosity. William James thought that we regard something as real only when we have use for it,[7] and something similar may be true here. Arguments are only taken seriously when they seem to us to have some bearing on how we should think or act or feel. Whether they appear to us to have that bearing depends importantly on our purposes. An argument may thus fail to be a good argument for someone because she doesn't have the interests and concerns needed for her to take the argument seriously.

There is an even more important source of the person-relativity of arguments, however. Not all good arguments are sound deductive or inductive arguments. For conclusions are sometimes warranted even though they aren't entailed by one's premises and can't be derived from the evidence by inductive extrapolation (by generalizing from the character of a fair sample, for example, or by inferring that an event will occur because similar events have occurred under similar conditions in the past). Cumulative case arguments or inferences to the best explanation are examples.[8] Moreover – and this is the central point of this section of my paper – sound deductive or inductive arguments themselves *are often embedded in cumulative case arguments*. Modal versions of the ontological argument and Samuel Clarke's cosmological argument are cases in point. Both arguments seem to me to be sound, for I believe that their premises are true and entail their conclusion.[9] In practice, however, these proofs are no more than *parts* of larger arguments in which they are embedded. These larger arguments include reasons supporting the

[6] For more on this point, see my "Religious Experience, Theological Argument, and the Relevance of Rhetoric", *Faith and Philosophy*, 22 (2005), 391-412.

[7] See, e.g., his *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 924.

[8] See my *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1998), pp. 178-87.

[9] More accurately, I believe that some modal arguments, and a suitably qualified version of Clarke's argument, are sound. See, *ibid*., chapter 2.

proof's premises and responses to the more telling objections to them and to the proof's claims to validity and noncircularity. For in the final analysis, our assessment of the proofs will express our best judgment of the cumulative force of *all* the considerations bearing on their overall adequacy.

One of the simplest versions of the modal ontological argument, for instance, has three premises:

(1) What is possibly necessary is necessarily necessary,
(2) If God exists, he necessarily exists, and
(3) It is logically possible that God exists.

Premise (1) is an axiom in the strongest systems of modal logic. (2) and (3) are controversial, however, and need support. For example, (2) might be supported by claiming that God is maximally perfect and that it is better or more splendid to exist and be God in all possible worlds than to exist and be God in only some of them. Again, (3) is sometimes supported by showing that attempts to derive a contradiction from the concept of God are unsuccessful, by defending the claim that the idea of God isn't artificially constructed or "cooked up" but instead natural, deeply rooted in humanity's religious consciousness, and in other ways. And of course these additional claims may themselves require further support. As a consequence, our assessment of the modal ontological argument's adequacy will ultimately depend on our sense of the comparative weights of *all* the conflicting considerations bearing on the proof's soundness and non-circularity.

Several things make universal agreement as to a proof's overall adequacy unlikely, however. In the first place, our assessment of the premises and of the reasons offered in their support may be unavoidably affected by our experiences and by what William James called our "willing" or "passional" nature – our temperament, needs, concerns, hopes, fears, passions, and deepest intuitions. Our assessment of "It is logically possible that God exists", for example, may be partly determined by our having or not having had apparent experiences of the divine, by the strength of our need for a larger meaning, or by our hunger for God or lack of it. Other things being equal, a person who has enjoyed an apparent experience of God, or who hungers after him, is more likely to find God's possibility intuitively obvious than someone who lacks these experiences or feels no need for God.

In the second, a person's assessment of the strength of the claims offered in support of the premises is often a function of his or her evaluation

of the comparative plausibility of comprehensive explanatory systems which includes those claims as parts. That God is maximally perfect and that maximal perfection involves necessary existence, and that the idea of God is a natural product of human religious consciousness, are both parts of classical western theism, for example. Disagreements over a proof's adequacy can thus ultimately involve a clash of world-views, and world-views can only be supported by cumulative case arguments.

Third, our final assessment of the comparative weight of the numerous considerations bearing upon the adequacy of the ontological proof, or any other interesting philosophical argument, is a paradigm example of informal reasoning. In assessing an inference to the best explanation, for example, we have to decide which hypotheses should be taken seriously and which dismissed as non-starters, what evidence is relevant and what isn't, the comparative weights to be placed on various kinds of evidence, and so on. We must also make judgments of prior probability. Some hypotheses and opinions are legitimately dismissed without argument but those we can't dismiss must be assigned a certain antecedent probability. Moreover, each of us approaches arguments with his "own view concerning" the likelihood of the conclusion "prior to the evidence; this view will result from the character of his mind ... If he is indisposed to believe he will explain away very strong evidence; if he is disposed" to believe he may be willing to "accept very weak evidence".[10]

Finally, and perhaps most important, each reasoner must finally make an assessment of the argument's overall force, determine how strongly the arguments "antecedents" (its premises and the considerations bearing on them) support its conclusion.

There are no mechanical decision procedures for making the assessments described in the last two paragraphs. Judgment is called for and, in the last analysis, each of us must form her own best judgment concerning these matters. Our judgments are irredeemably personal, however. For when all is said and done, each of us can only view the various pieces of evidence "in the medium of [*her*] primary mental experiences, under the aspects which they spontaneously present to [*her*], and with the aid of [*her*] best" efforts to do justice to them.[11]

[10] John Henry Newman, "Love the Safeguard of Faith against Superstition", in *Fifteen Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford* (Oxford 1843; reprint, Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1966), p. 226.

[11] John Henry Newman, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (London, 1870; reprint, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 318.

Assessments of interesting and existentially significant philosophical arguments invariably reflect our personal histories, then. They also reflect our passional nature. Nor is this necessarily a bad thing. As I have argued elsewhere,[12] certain dispositions of the heart may be needed to reason rightly about value laden subject matters. That certain dispositions and attitudes are needed to reason rightly about ethical matters, for example, is a commonplace in classical Chinese and western moral philosophy. Thus Plato thought that "no man who is not naturally inclined and akin to justice and all other forms of excellence, even though he be quick at learning and remembering this or that ... will ever attain the truth that is attainable about virtue".[13] And Aristotle believed that the first premises of moral reasoning are general propositions about what is good for people in general, or for certain kinds of people, or for people in certain circumstances. General propositions of this kind are partial articulations of the good life. Men and women whose natures have been warped by bad education or circumstances, however, will have a perverted sense of the good (identifying it with the life of pleasure, say, or the life of worldly honour). These people (as Plato says) have a "lie in their soul", and are therefore incapable of reasoning correctly about moral matters. A properly cultivated emotional nature is thus essential to sound ethical reasoning.

Now classical Christian theism identified God with Goodness itself. If this identification is correct, it is not surprising that the proper dispositions and feelings should also be thought necessary to reason correctly about God.

Furthermore, the relevance of my remarks is even more general than my application of them to classical ethics and Christian theism might suggest. The most obvious instances of the thesis that basic disputes reflect different passionally inflected assessments of more or less the same body of evidence is furnished by conflicts over comprehensive world-views. Some of these world-views are religious but many are not. It is at least arguable, however, that *all* of them integrally incorporate values.[14] If they do, and values can't be grasped in the absence of the right

[12] William J. Wainwright, *Reason and the Heart: A Prolegomenon to a Critique of Practical Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995).

[13] *Plato's Epistles*, trans. with critical essays and notes by Glen R. Morrow (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), pp. 240-41.

[14] Doesn't physicalism, for example, incorporate high valuations of the hard sciences and comparatively low valuations of the cognitive worth of other intellectual exercises, assign a negligible antecedent probability to theism and other religious views, and so on?

feelings and attitudes, then appropriate dispositions of the heart will be needed to discern the truth of a world-view. Wrong dispositions, on the other hand, will result in false judgments and intellectual blindness.

Yet if this is correct, arguments are person-relative in an even deeper sense than those discussed earlier. Since an argument's cogency and convincingness can depend on the state of one's heart, and the states of people's hearts vary, an argument which is cogent or convincing for one person may not be cogent or convincing for another.

Some of these arguments may nonetheless be probative. Proofs are relative to persons *because* they differ in education, training, and intelligence, *because* they differ in their spatio-temporal location or the information available to them, or *because* they differ in purpose or the state of their hearts. Many of these differences are epistemically innocent.[15] Variations in education, training, and intelligence, or in spatio-temporal location or available information, are examples. Other differences are less obviously innocent. It is arguable, for instance, that all men and women *ought* to exhibit the dispositions and motions of the heart needed to reason rightly about ethical matters and the things of religion, or to share certain purposes. If they should, then any person-relativity derived from variations in purpose or in dispositions of the heart ought not to exist, and proofs whose cogency and convincingness depend upon having the right dispositions or sharing the right purposes *should* be cogent and convincing to everyone who can understand them. They are therefore probative in the sense defined earlier whether everyone or even most people accept them or not.

I will next illustrate these points at more length by examining the ontological argument's possibility premise.

II

Why think that "It is logically possible that God exists" is true? Philosophers have provided a variety of answers.

Clement Dore, for example, argued in this way.[16] The impossibility of a complex mathematical or logical formula may not be intuitively obvious

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And don't these valuations, assignments, etc., in turn express the physicalist's temperament, what he or she has use for, and the like?

[15] In the deontological sense.

[16] Clement Dore, *Theism* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1984), pp. 72-74.

to us. But its possibility typically isn't either. By contrast, the logical possibility of propositions such as "Unicorns exist" appears obvious on their face. "God (a maximally perfect being) exists" seems more like the latter than the former in this respect. Dore's point isn't merely that it isn't obvious that "God exists" is impossible but that it seems obvious that his existence is possible. To help us see the force of this consider the following three ways of unpacking the concept of a maximally perfect being.

Alvin Plantinga defines a maximally perfect being as (roughly) a being that can do anything that it is possible for it to do, knows all true propositions, is unsurpassibly good, and exists in all possible worlds. Charles Hartshorne, on the other hand, defines a maximally perfect being as a being that can be surpassed only by itself. (It can't be surpassed with respect to good-making properties like knowledge and power which have intrinsic maxima; and with respect to good-making properties which lack intrinsic maxima such as happiness,[17] can be surpassed only by itself.) A more traditional way of defining maximal perfection or greatness is this: A maximally perfect being =df. a being which has all and only "pure" perfections, i.e., perfections that entail no imperfections,[18] such as being, goodness, love, power, knowledge, and (arguably) self-sufficiency. All three conjunctions of attributes at least *seem*, at first glance, to be co-exemplifiable.[19]

That some states of affairs are possible on their face is analogous to James van Cleve's claims that in some cases we "just see" that certain things are possible.[20] Because "see" is a success verb, however, "*seems* to

[17] And arguably goodness.

[18] Pure perfections are thus distinguished from both imperfections and "mixed" perfections. The former encompasses both defects like blindness or unrighteousness and limitations such as our inability to lift stones over a certain weight. The latter enhance a thing's value but imply some defect or limitation. Repentance implies the presence of a moral failure that one repents, for example. And while neither being human nor being corporeal entail defects both involve limitations.

[19] Doesn't the possibility of "God does *not* exist" *also* seem possible on its face? Perhaps initially. But, for many of us at least, the intuition that God's non-existence is possible tends to vanish once we realize that the possibility of God's *non*–existence entails the impossibility of his *existence*. (Since [if the ontological argument is valid] the possibility of God's existence entails the necessity of his existence, and the possibility of God's non-existence entails the denial of the necessity of his existence, the possibility of God's non-existence entails that God's existence is impossible.)

[20] James van Cleve, "Conceivability and the Cartesian Argument for Dualism", *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, 64 (1983), 35-45.

see" is not only closer to what I have in mind but also, I think, a more accurate description of the modal intuitions in question.

Since our modal intuitions are defeasible, the fact (if it is a fact) that God's existence is *prima facie* possible or possible on its face does not entail that God's existence is *ultima facie* possible. But I believe that these modal intuitions do carry significant epistemic weight.

It is commonly objected that appeals to "self-evidence" or "just seeing" are woefully insufficient, however, and that modal claims must be grounded in something further.[21] Conceivability obviously isn't enough

[21] There are other objections of course. So called "experimental philosophers" have provided empirical evidence that our modal intuitions are unstable. But as Ernest Sosa notes ("Experimental Philosophy and Philosophical Intuition", *Philosophical Studies*, 132 [2007], 99-107), while disagreement can pose a problem, "*verbal* disagreement need not reveal any substantive, real disagreement, if ambiguity and context might account for the verbal divergence." (Sosa, 2007, p. 102, my emphasis.) An example may be Joshua Knobe and Shaun Nichol's finding (in "Moral Responsibility and Determinism: The Cognitive Science of Folk Intuitions", *Nous*, 41 [2007], 663-85) that "when subjects are asked the abstract question whether agents in D ['a fully determinist universe'] are fully responsible 86% say they are not", but when "a dastardly deed is attributed with a wealth of detail to a particular agent in D", 72% of the same subjects say that he is". The divergence arguably reflects a slippage between two different senses of "moral responsibility", however – an "accountability" sense in which an agent S "is properly held accountable or responsible *for* A, in such a way that various good (or bad) things may be [legitimately] visited on S *for* doing A"; and an "attributability" sense in which an agent S is said to be responsible for A if A is "his own doing" and "reveals something about S's character" (Sosa, 2007, p. 104). Again, Stacy Swain, Joshua Alexander, and Jonathan M. Weinberg ("The Instability of Philosophical Intuitions: Running Hot and Cold on Truetemp", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 76 [2008], 138-155) show that our willingness to ascribe or deny knowledge in Keith Lehrer's Truetemp case is affected by how the question is framed. The case is this. Unbeknownst to Truetemp, "both a very accurate thermometer and a computational device capable of generating thoughts" has been implanted in his brain. As a result, Truetemp is reliably able to tell what temperature it is without consulting an external instrument or having any idea of why his temperature thoughts are so accurate. The question is, does Truetemp *know* that (e.g.) the temperature is 104 degrees? The authors found that if the subjects were first presented with a clear case of non-knowledge, they were more likely to ascribe knowledge to Truetemp. If they were first presented with a clear case of knowledge, they were less likely to do so. Yet as Sosa points out "the effects of priming, framing, and other such contextual factors will affect the epistemic status of [modal] intuition in general only in the same sort of way that they affect the epistemic status of perceptual observation in general" (Sosa, 2007, p. 105). They don't create a *special* problem for intuition. A more radical objection to our reliance on intuition is provided by Joshua Earlenbaugh and Bernard Molyneux ("Intuitions are Inclinations to Believe", *Philosophical Studies*, 145 [2009], 89-109). In their view, philosophical intuitions are not only *not* evidence (and hence not justificatory) since

since we can imagine, understand, entertain, or picture states of affairs such as backwards time travel that rather clearly aren't possible.[22] Peter Kung contends that sensory (visual, auditory, tactual, etc.) imagination is normally a reliable guide to possibility but purely stipulative ("let so and so be such and such") imagination is not.[23] On somewhat similar

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they are not "basic evidential states" like perceivings, rememberings, and introspections; they do not even play an evidential role in argument (i.e., mimic or act like evidence) in spite of appearances to the contrary. Earlenbaugh and Molyneux's argument isn't fully convincing, however. For example, they claim that, other things being equal (e.g., people's faculties are in order, they are properly positioned to [e.g.] see or remember what they claim to see or remember), we take their seemings to see or hear, their remembrances, and their introspections at face value. We don't display "a similar willingness to infer p from the fact that [another person] S finds p intuitive" (Earlenbaugh and Molyneux, 2009, p. 98). It isn't clear that a difference of this sort actually exists, though. We distrust the intuitions of others when we suspect them of being less than ideally situated with respect to the subject matter (because of ignorance, lack of the requisite skills, or something else of the sort), give them real weight when we think that they are ideally situated with respect to the subject matter, and give them some weight when there are no compelling reasons to think that they are not properly situated with respect to it. (Cf. e.g.. Aristotle on the deference due to the person of practical wisdom in ethical matters.) Again, while the authors concede that "philosophers [seem to] treat intuitions as evidence in philosophy", they discount these appearances on the ground that they confuse explanations of their beliefs with justifications of them. Intuitions, in their view, are nothing more than inclinations to believe. I am (strongly) inclined to believe p helps explain why I do believe it but doesn't justify it. Yet this can't be the whole story (i.e., intuitions can't simply be identified with inclinations to believe although they may entail them). For, if it were, most fair minded philosophers would stop appealing to them to justify philosophical claims when confronted with the authors' analysis – and they won't.

[22] Though Paul Tidman goes too far in saying that "merely conceiving a state of affairs *is no reason whatsoever* to think that state of affairs to be possible". ("Conceivability as a Test for Possibility", *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 32 [1994], 297-309, my emphasis.) Tidman's support for this claim is that (1) not only can we conceive of states of affairs that aren't metaphysically possible, (2) we can never be sure that we have grasped all the relevant entailments and therefore conceived the situation adequately, and (3) have no reason to think that how our minds work (e.g., whether we can or cannot imagine something) is correlated with the way things are. But note that considerations similar to those adduced under his third heading can be deployed to support perceptual skepticism and doubts about the reliability of our faculties in general, and that his second consideration corresponds to the perfectly general worry that in drawing conclusions in an area, I may have overlooked some decisive defeater.

[23] Peter Kung, "Imagining as a Guide to Possibility", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 81 (2010), 620-63. It is not clear that Kung has shown that (purely) stipulative imagination is worthless, however. In my opinion, modal claims can be tested against cases constructed by stipulation. Given that these cases are rather fully developed, and that no inconsistencies are apparent after careful reflection, their deployment is by no

lines, Peter Hawke argues that Peter van Inwagen is right in thinking that we have little or no reason to trust modal intuitions concerning "circumstances remote from the practical business of everyday life".[24] Our possibility intuitions are reliable when we can describe "a consistent, reasonably detailed fictional world" in which the proposition we deem possible is true, and which is sufficiently (i.e., very) similar to situations obtaining in the actual world. Modal claims grounded in this way are basic. That they "are [also] somewhat sacrosanct" should be "unsurprising considering how important they are to normal life". Basic modal assertions include such claims as "it is possible that my living room furniture be rearranged", or "it is possible that this window pane should shatter"; but not "it is possible that God exists", "it is possible that alien life exists on another planet", or "it is possible that the ice age didn't occur and dinosaurs still roam the earth". Non-basic modal claims such as the latter are justified ("safe") only if they can be recursively derived from basic modal claims.[25] It seems to me, though, that there isn't a sharp line between basic and non-basic modal claims – only differences of degree. Moreover, claims like "it is possible that God exists" and "it is (metaphysically) impossible that lying isn't prima facie wrong" aren't "distant" from "actual experience" since both[26] play a central role in important strands of human life and activity. Yet it is highly doubtful that either of them can be recursively derived from Hawke's basic modal claims.[27]

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means useless. I am assuming what I believe Kung would be unwilling to grant, though, viz., that the fact that no inconsistencies appear after careful reflection is evidence that there aren't any, that the fact that there are no inconsistencies is evidence (though not conclusive evidence) of possibility, and that the more fully a case is developed the more likely inconsistencies are to surface if there are any. (Cf. my remarks on Tidman in footnote 22.)

[24] Peter van Inwagen, *God, Mystery, and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 12.

[25] P. Hawke, "Van Inwagen's Modal Skepticism", *Philosophical Studies*, 153 (2011), 351-64.

[26] Or at least propositions that entail them.

[27] Hawke's test for the truth of non-basic modal claims is that non-modal facts entail the truth of the claim said to be possible. No non-modal facts in ghost stories, for example entail that there are ghosts. So ghost stories provide no reason for thinking that ghosts are possible. (Hawke, *op. cit*., pp. 363-64.) But this requirement seems to me problematic in somewhat the same way that the verification test for meaning is problematic. Cf. "I have no clear idea of whether p is possible or not since I am unable to come up with a set of non-modal claims which entails it" and "I have no clear idea of what 'p' means since I am unable to come up with a set of empirical claims which would conclusively verify (entail) p".

Elijah Chudnoff, too, wants to ground our modal judgments in something further. His requirements are more elastic than either Kung's or Hawke's, however. In his view both perceptual and intuitive modal claims are prima facie justified by their "presentational phenomenology"; i.e., by our "seeming to be aware of items", and our seeming to perceive that, in virtue of those items, certain facts are true. (Seeming to be immediately aware of an object's redness, for example, and seeming to perceive that, in virtue of that item, the object is red.) How, though, can something of this sort be spelled out for modal intuitions? In some cases the "items" are stories (e.g., Gettier cases). In others they are imagined figures or operations in which the proposition in question (e.g., "nothing can have only one proper part") is illustrated or embodied. In yet others the "item" can be the proposition itself (e.g., 'if 2>1, then 2>1") or its form. Or (in the case of a proposition like "2>1") the relevant items may be acts of intellectual awareness of the proposition's constituents that are retained in one's memory.[28] Yet while Chudnoff's attempt to ground modal intuition in presentational phenomenology is undoubtedly interesting, it isn't fully persuasive. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how his last two examples move us beyond appeals to a proposition's "self-evidence" or "intrinsic luminosity", and are thus superior to van Cleve's or Paul Tidman's claim that, in at least some cases, we "just see" a proposition's possibility, impossibility, or necessity.[29]

Are there any independent reasons for thinking it reasonable to believe that God's existence is metaphysically possible? There are at least four.
(1) Plato and Descartes maintained that the notion of (maximal) perfection is innate and provides the (usually implicit) standard by which we determine the comparative value of other things. J. L. Mackie and others have taken issue with this, however, arguing that the concept of (absolute) perfection is constructed – either by negating the various imperfections which we encounter in experience or by extrapolating a limit from observed or imagined series of things that are so arranged that each member in the series is less imperfect than its predecessor.[30] But this isn't altogether convincing. In the first place, it isn't obvious that the concept of perfection

[28] Elijah Chudnoff, "The Nature of Intuitive Justification", *Philosophical Studies*, 153 (2011), 313-33.

[29] It isn't clear to me that Chudnoff's most recent discussion ("What Intuitions are Like", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 82 [2011], 625-654), although it provides useful clarifications, does anything to relieve these worries.

[30] J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments For and Against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), chapter 2.

is an essentially negative concept. The fact that it can be expressed as the negation of imperfection is irrelevant. For any concept can be expressed as the negation of its negation. (p is equivalent to not not-p. Being coloured, for example, is equivalent to not being non-coloured.[31]) In the second place, it isn't clear that we could construct the relevant sorts of series if we didn't already possess the notion of their limits, i.e., of the ideals toward which the members of these series are progressing.

If there is an antecedent presumption in favour of the coherence of our innate ideas and the idea of maximal or absolute perfection is innate, then there is a presumption in favour of that idea's coherence. Whether there is a presumption in favour of the coherence of our innate ideas may depend on whether or not there is a general presumption in favour of the reliability of our basic epistemic faculties.

(2) William James thought that we are entitled to believe a proposition whose truth can't be conclusively settled on evidential grounds when the choice between that belief and its denial is "forced", "momentous", and "live". Consider, then, the following pragmatic argument for believing that God's existence is possible: "Either God is possible or God isn't possible" confronts us with a forced option. (The alternatives are exhaustive.) The option is also momentous. If the ontological argument is valid, the first alternative commits one to theism and ultimately to the way of life that theism involves. The second alternative forecloses a way of life that countless thousands have found deeply meaningful. Finally, the option is live. I have some tendency to believe each alternative. (I have a strong tendency to believe that God's existence is possible. But I also have some tendency to believe that God doesn't exist. If the ontological argument is valid, however, God's non-existence entails his impossibility.[32] Once I recognize this, I acquire some tendency to believe that God's existence isn't possible.) Suppose, then, that the issue can't be conclusively settled on evidential grounds. My "passional nature" (James) which demands hope and meaning should lead me to believe that God's existence is possible rather than impossible.[33]

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[31] This isn't quite right. Strictly speaking, the negation of *being coloured* is *being non-coloured or being neither coloured nor non-coloured*. Thus (e.g.) in the absence of light physical objects are non-coloured. Numbers, on the other hand are neither coloured nor non-coloured.

[32] If the ontological argument is valid, then if God is possible God exists. So if he doesn't exist, his existence isn't possible.

[33] Note that an argument of this sort won't support belief in the possibility of "near gods" (necessarily existing beings with enormous powers and virtues who fall some

There are at least two objections to this argument. The first is that while the choice between the theistic and non-theistic way of life is forced (I either adopt it or I don't), the choice between believing "God's existence is possible" and believing "God's existence is not possible" is not since I can suspend judgment, choosing to believe neither. The theistic way of life involves great costs as well as great potential benefits, however. Whether one can rationally (or even coherently) pursue it while at the same time thinking it is just as likely that the theistic claims on which it rests can't possibly be true as that they might be true strikes me as doubtful. It isn't clear to me that one can, or at least do so wholeheartedly. The second objection is this: The legitimacy of pragmatic arguments of this kind is controversial and, in any case, carry no epistemic weight. The question, though, is whether they must carry epistemic weight to make opting for "It is possible that God exists" more rational than opting for its denial. The objection also assumes what James denies, namely, that our passional nature isn't truth oriented.[34]

(3) Augustine argued that God (conceived as maximally perfect) is our real good, the only thing that can truly satisfy or fulfil us. If he is, then our desire for happiness is really a desire for God. The idea of God is thus implicit in our desire for happiness. (Cf. Plato's discussion of our desire for the Good and Beautiful in the Symposium.)[35]

Considerations like these suggest that the idea of an unlimited or unsurpassable or maximally perfect reality is natural, and that to suppress it is therefore to suppress something intrinsic to (normal) human nature. There is thus a certain presumption in favour of the idea's coherence. Two conditions must be met for this argument to be successful, however. First, one must show that the concept of a maximally perfect reality really is implied in the notion of God or the Good, and that nothing less than

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arbitrary degree short of perfection), necessarily existing perfect devils, and the like. For once I realize that the possibility of these entities entails their existence, I have no tendency to believe in it, i.e., hypotheses to the effect that they are possible are no longer live for me.

[34] See my *Reason and the Heart* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), chapter 3.

[35] Does this really work? Aren't we illicitly substituting identicals in an intentional context? While the substitution is illicit in the case of some intentional states, its illegitimacy is less obvious in the case of others. That John believes in the existence of happiness doesn't entail that he believes in the existence of God. But if happiness really does consist in union with God, it is by no means clear that "John desires happiness" doesn't entail that he *really* desires God, since desiring x entails desiring what constitutes it. Our desire for happiness is at bottom a desire for what would truly make us happy, not for what we merely think would do so.

a maximally perfect reality will fully satisfy the yearnings of the human heart.[36] Second, one must show that it is unlikely that ideas and yearnings so deeply embedded in human thought and desire are incoherent.

The first condition can be met. The attitudes valorised by theists and expressed in worship arguably imply that their object is maximally perfect. The fully developed monotheistic religions, at least, require "total devotion".[37] Total devotion includes a number of attitudes – love, loyalty, and commitment but also reverence, awe, and admiration – each of which is unreserved.

Theists clearly think that an appropriate object of total devotion must be greater than other existing beings since, if it weren't, it wouldn't be ultimate. If another existing being was greater, our concern, loyalty, and commitment should be directed toward it rather than the first. If it was equally great our devotion should be divided between them. Either way our devotion to the first couldn't appropriately be total. Yet must an appropriate object of total devotion be greater than all other possible beings? Two considerations suggest that the answer is "yes".

If a more perfect being than the being to which we have given our allegiance were possible, then, if it had existed, we should have given ourselves to it rather than the first. But in that case our commitment to the first can't appropriately be totally unreserved. One's commitment to something can no more be unreserved if it depends on there not having been something more perfect than one's love for one's wife can be unreserved if it depends on one's not having met someone more beautiful, charming, and affectionate.

The second consideration is this. Even if unreserved love, loyalty, and commitment could be appropriately directed toward a being when one knew that a greater was possible, unreserved reverence, awe, and admiration could not. I don't unreservedly admire a painting or ball player if I think it would be possible for a painting or ball player to be better. No more can my admiration for a being be unreserved if I think that a better being than it could have existed.

[36] Wilfred Cantwell Smith and others have argued that humanity is naturally religious; that being fully human involves placing oneself in some kind of relation to transcendence. The secularized humanity of modern western society is, in their view, an aberration – an experiment on which the verdict is still out. Note, however, that while this, if true, implies that religious ideas and yearnings are natural, it doesn't entail that the idea of God or a maximally perfect reality and a desire or yearning for it is natural.

[37] The term is Robert Adams's.

If these considerations are sound, then the theist's belief that God is a fully appropriate object of total devotion implicitly commits her to the belief that God is maximally perfect. Since sincere theistic worship includes a belief in the appropriateness of total devotion to its object, there is a clear sense in which an identification of God and a maximally perfect being is built into it.[38]

Worship worthiness isn't the only route to the concept of maximal perfection, however. Paul Tillich believed that the essence of religious attitudes is "ultimate concern". Ultimate concern is "total". Its object is experienced as numinous or holy, distinct from all profane and ordinary realities. It is also experienced as overwhelmingly real and valuable – indeed, so real and valuable that, in comparison, all other things seem empty and worthless. As such it demands total surrender and promises total fulfilment. These attitudes seem fully appropriate only if their object is maximally great – so perfect and splendid that nothing greater is conceivable. And in fact, all major religious traditions – including the non-theistic ones – have at least implicitly construed the object of their concern in precisely that way. (See, for example, Paul Griffiths' *On Being Buddha*.[39])

Whether the second condition is met is more problematic. Many philosophers believe that it isn't. Jean Paul Sartre, for example thought that while the idea of a pour-soi-en-soi was natural, it was logically inconsistent. More troublesome perhaps is the fact that some ideas which seem natural are demonstrably incoherent. The idea of a set of all sets is an example. Is it really unlikely, then, that ideas and yearnings deeply embedded in human thought and desire are incoherent?

J. E. M. McTaggart asked, "in what way is the failure of a desire to be realized inconsistent with reality? ... Many people had a real desire that the Pretender should be victorious in 1745, but they were disappointed." And if we try to save the argument by making "a distinction between [e.g.] the desire for heaven and the desire for the restoration of the Stuarts, we can only do so on account of the greater importance [i.e., value] of the object of the former". But the goodness of an object of desire is no guarantee of its present or future reality.[40]

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[38] For a fuller development of this point see my "Two (or Maybe One and a Half) Cheers for Perfect Being Theology", *Philo*, 12 (2009), pp. 228-32.

[39] Paul Griffiths, *On Being Buddha: The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood* (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1994).

[40] John McTaggart, Ellis McTaggart, *Some Dogmas of Religion* (London: Edward Arnold, 1906), pp. 56-58.

McTaggart's objections don't clearly affect the soundness of our argument, though, and this is for two reasons. In the first place, our argument's appeal isn't primarily to the value of the desire's object but to the desire's universality and depth. The desire for "heaven" or its analogues is generic and universal. The desire for (e.g.) the restoration of the Stuarts is not. Second (and more important), the present argument doesn't move from the existence of a desire (generic or otherwise) to the existence of its object but only to that object's possibility.

Still, while we can't believe that p is impossible and believe p,[41] and we can't believe that doing A or bringing about p is impossible and intend to do A or bring p about,[42] is it clear that we can't want or desire p even though we believe that p is impossible? I doubt that we can. We can want or desire things we believe to be empirically impossible but can we want or desire things we believe to be logically or metaphysically impossible? Perhaps we can desire A and also desire B even though we recognize that the two are inconsistent. But it is by no means obvious that we can desire their conjunction. In any case, in so far as one is rational, a recognition of the impossibility of realizing a desire tends to weaken or undercut it. The existence of a desire or yearning doesn't comport well with a belief in the impossibility of its fulfilment.

Even so, isn't the most that we are entitled to infer from the existence of a desire is a *belief* in its object's possibility, not the possibility itself? Of course if the desire is a basic feature of human nature, then so too is the belief embedded in it. Yet why assign any weight to the fact the desires, yearnings, and beliefs in question are deeply engrained in human nature?

William James' answer seems to me best. It is reasonable to trust our epistemic and practical faculties in the absence of good reasons for not doing so. Our deepest intimations, feelings, and yearnings are inseparable from out epistemic and practical faculties, however. If it reasonable to follow the prompting of the second in the absence of good reasons for not doing so, it is also reasonable to follow the promptings of the first.[43]

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[41] Though of course we *can* believe p if we fail to recognize p's impossibility.

[42] Although we can intend to do A or bring p about if we don't recognize their impossibility.

[43] For more on this see my *Reason and the Heart, op. cit.* See also my "Religious Experience, Theological Argument, and Rhetoric", *Faith and Philosophy*, 22 (2005), 391-412. Paul Tidman offers a Reidian defense of modal intuitions. "The Justification of A Priori Intuitions" (*Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 56 [1996], 161-71) contends that they are the product of a *basic* epistemic faculty, i.e., a faculty whose reliability cannot be justified without appealing to the faculty itself. (For example, suppose that "my intuitions

(4) Nothing can be evidence for (raise the probability of) a logically impossible proposition.[44] So if the considerations adduced in the

tell me that it is possible for my hand to wave about". I can confirm this "by actually waving my hand". Or suppose they "tell us that something is necessarily the case, which experience later disproves by showing it not to be actual ...But any argument which would use this kind of data must depend on another premise stating the ... modal claims that anything which is actual is possible and anything which is impossible is not actual" [Tidman, 1996, p. 168].) Tidman thinks that it seems irrational or perverse to reject the deliverances of a basic epistemic faculty in the absence of a proof of inconsistency or some other positive reason for doing so. So "even if I could withhold my belief, why should I? Wouldn't it be positively irrational from the point of view of one who seeks to have true beliefs to withhold belief in such circumstances?" (Tidman, 1996, p. 169). Yet in the absence of some explanation of *why* our faculties are attuned to the way things are this response seems incomplete. One possible explanation is that God or evolution has equipped us to sort out truth from error. If they have, then the existence of strong and deeply rooted inclinations to believe (e.g.) basic modal or epistemic or moral claims is at least *some* indication of their truth. Convincing arguments to the effect that the desires, needs, or inclinations in question would serve an important biological or psychological purpose *even if* their objects were impossible would tend to undercut any arguments along this line from evolution, however, or, in any case, provide reason to distrust intuitions concerning the possibility of states of affairs removed from what Jonathan Edwards called the "everyday affairs and the common business of life". If, on the other hand, we have to appeal to God to justify the truth of our modal intuition that God's existence is possible, then all ontological arguments are implicitly circular. Note, however, that the fact (if it is a fact) that we need to appeal to God to *explain* how we are able to discern the truth of the propositional objects of the intuitions in question does not entail that we need to appeal to him to *justify* our claim to discernment. (Cf. we may need to appeal to God to *explain* the general reliability of our epistemic faculties. It doesn't follow that we need to appeal to him to *justify* our reliance on them. [If it did, atheists wouldn't be entitled to *believe* that (e.g.) their mathematical intuitions were reliable even if they in fact *are reliable.*])

For an argument along somewhat similar lines to that in section 3 that came to my attention after completing this essay, see Alexander Pruss, "The Ontological Argument and the Motivational Center of Lives", *Religious Studies* 46 (2010), 233-49.

[44] For a rejection of this commonly accepted view see James Franklin, "Non-deductive Logic in Mathematics", *British Journal for Philosophy of Science*, 32 (1987), 1-18. Franklin appeals to cases where (1) we know that a logical or mathematical proposition must be necessarily true or necessarily false, (2) currently lack a deductive proof of its truth or falsity, and yet (3) have non-deductive reasons for believing that the proposition is true rather than false (or vice versa). Mathematical induction provides examples. It seems to me, though, that objective probabilities should be distinguished from subjective epistemic probabilities. While a piece of non–deductive evidence, e, can't raise the *objective* probability of p if p is impossible, it *can* raise p's subjective epistemic probability if it isn't (yet) known that p is logically impossible. Nevertheless, once we *know* that p is impossible (as the result of the discovery of a strict proof, for example), we know that its objective probability is 0, and that therefore nothing can raise its probability. The *logical*

standard arguments for the existence of God provide evidence for "God (a maximally perfect being) exists", then – regardless of whether those considerations are sufficient to establish his existence – (a) it is logically possible that God exists, and (b), since one is abstracting from or bracketing the question of whether the considerations in question prove that God exists, no question is being begged.

Note that we can't mount a similar argument for the possibility of near gods, perfect devils, and the like, since we have no independent (of parodies of the ontological argument) reasons to believe that those entities exist.[45] By contrast, Samuel Clarke's version of the cosmological argument points to a necessarily existing and unlimited being; the argument from high mystical experience, the moral argument, and the argument from human yearning all point to the existence of maximal perfection or the Good, i.e. each of these arguments appeals to considerations which, whether conclusive or not, provide at least some evidence for the truth of its conclusion.[46]

Peter van Inwagen and Peter Hawke have argued that we have little or no reason to trust modal intuitions concerning matters remote from ordinary experience. Their objection is highly relevant to the claim that the proposition "It is possible that God exists" is plausible on its face.[47] It is less clearly relevant to attempts to support the possibility premise by calling attention to innate ideas, our desires and yearnings, and the existence of other "proofs". The first because it appeals to value notions which play a central role in ordinary life; the second because it appeals to desires and yearnings which are (nearly) universal features of human life and thought; and the third because it appeals to things such as our sense of contingency and mystical experience that are deeply embedded in humanity's religious life. (van Inwagen's and Hawke's objection has no clear relevance to the pragmatic argument because the immediate

relations between e and p remain the same both before and after the discovery of the strict proof but the *epistemic* relations (what counts as evidence for what) do not.

[45] We *may* have *some* reason to think that a good, powerful, but limited being exists. (See e.g., J. S. Mill's *Theism* [New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957].) But we have no evidence for the claim that a being of that kind exists *necessarily*, i.e., the "design" evidence that Mill appeals to may point to a "demiurge" but doesn't point to a near god.

[46] And hence (because the conclusion ["God exists"] entails "It is possible that God exists") some evidence for "It is possible that God exists".

[47] Though in considering their case it is important to bear in mind that the controversies over the epistemic status of our modal intuitions in general hinge on highly contestable notions of reasonableness, plausibility, and the like.

conclusion of the latter is that we ought to believe that "It is possible that God exists", not that "It is possible that God exists" is true.)

Note that this section has, in effect, provided a cumulative argument for the ontological proof's third premise ("it is logically possible that God exists"). Attempts to defend its second premise ("if God exists, he necessarily exists") and defend it from objections will also involve constructing a cumulative case for its truth.[48] Moreover, the inference of the conclusion from the ontological proof's premises, too, rests on a cumulative case argument that involves weighing and balancing all of the factors adduced in supporting the argument's premises, as well as assessing the strength of their combined bearing on its conclusion.

Because these assessments reflect our personal histories, the ontological proof is person-relative in the sense that it can be deontologically reasonable for one person to accept the proof without its necessarily being deontologically reasonable for another to do so. For example, whether we find the pragmatic argument, or the argument from desire or yearning, for the proof's third premise plausible may largely depend on whether we have[49] the needs, desires and yearnings that those two arguments appeal to. The plausibility of the fourth argument depends on whether we think that the other God-proofs have some force, where the belief that they do or don't rests on a variety of heterogeneous considerations. And a similar point can be made with respect to the first – its plausibility or lack of it largely depends on the degree of our willingness to trust everyday workings of our epistemic faculties.

[48] The argument's first premise ("what is possibly necessary is necessarily necessary"), too, would need to be supported by a cumulative case argument if the appropriateness of using modal system S5 were challenged.

[49] Or recognize that we have? Not clearly. The needs, desires, or yearnings in question may prompt us to believe in God's possibility even if we aren't consciously aware of them.

VARIETIES OF ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT[1]

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Abstract. I consider what I hope are increasingly sophisticated versions of ontological argument, beginning from simple definitional forms, through three versions to be found in Anselm, with their recent interpretations by Malcolm, Plantinga, Klima and Lowe. I try to show why none of these work by investigating both the different senses of *necessary existence* and the conditions under which *logically necessary* existence can be brought to bear. Although none of these arguments work, I think that they lead to interesting reflections on the nature of definition, on the conditions for possessing the property of necessary existence and point towards a different, neo-Platonic ground for God's meeting the criteria for being logically necessary.

[1] This paper has a long history. The idea that the simpler versions of the ontological argument fail, not because 'existence is not a predicate', but because of a misunderstanding of the nature of definition, began life for me in a graduate paper written for Basil Mitchell in 1969. Much of the rest of the paper was developed for a Jan Hus Society sponsored 'flying university' talk in the suburbs of Prague in 1986, chaired by Petr Rezek: this was further modified for a completely above board talk in Budapest in 1988. This latter version was published in the final edition of the journal *Annales* in Budapest in 1992. This fascicule was edited by Istvan Bodnar, Gabor Boros and Kornel Steiger – three philosophers who have done heroic work in developing the history of philosophy in Hungary during the final years of communism and into the democratic era. Various versions of the paper have also been presented at meetings in Oxford and Liverpool and I have recently benefited from discussion with Brian Davies, O.P. Because I would like the piece to be available to a wider readership than the obscure and extinct *Annales* could make it, and because I wish to bring that article up to date, I present this revised version here. I am very grateful to Fordham University for allowing me to be a visiting scholar during the period when I was rewriting the article.

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I. INTRODUCTION

At least two important monographs on the ontological argument (OA) have appeared in the last forty years. One is Jonathan Barnes's pellucid (1972), the other Graham Oppy's wide ranging (1995).[2] Barnes was unfortunate because his book arrived just before Plantinga (1974) gave new life to the issue with his modal version of the argument.[3] Oppy of course, covers this, but it seems to me that there is still room for an article-length opinionated survey of the various versions of the argument, including those more recent than Oppy. I shall try to provide this, and, although my conclusions will be, with reservations, negative, I believe they will point usefully to other related issues.

II. THE ELEMENTARY OR 'SCHOOLBOY' VERSION OF THE ARGUMENT

The OA is associated with a variety of important philosophers, the most important being Anselm and Descartes. Both these philosophers stated the argument in more than one significantly different way. There is, however, what one may characterize as the popular version of the argument. This is roughly equivalent to one of the versions generally believed to be in Descartes and Leibniz, and fundamentally similar to St. Thomas's construal of Anselm. It is probably this version of the argument which is nearest to what the average undergraduate understands by 'the ontological argument'. This version of the argument can be expressed as follows:

A (1) God is, by definition, the most perfect being conceivable.
(2) Existence is a perfection: that is to say, to be perfect one must exist in reality (and not just in the understanding, or not at all).

Therefore,

(3) God, by definition, exists in reality.

The Kantian tradition of objections to the argument finds fault with the second premise on the grounds that existence, not being an attribute (because 'exists' is not a predicate) cannot be a component in perfection. An older tradition of resistance to the argument, represented by St Thomas

[2] Jonathan Barnes, *The Ontological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1972); Graham Oppy, *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[3] Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

and Caterus, thought it an abuse of what can be achieved from the mere definition or content of a word or concept. St Thomas, I think, does not manage to do better than merely *assert* that the transition from meaning to reality cannot be made:

> Yet granted that everyone understands that by this word 'God' is signified something than which nothing greater can be thought, nevertheless, it does not therefore follow that he understands that what the word signifies, exists actually, but only that it exists mentally.[4]

Caterus, in glossing St Thomas, improves on him saying:

> Though it be conceded that an entity of the highest perfection implies its existence by its very name, yet it does not follow that very existence is anything actual in the real world, but merely *that the concept of existence is inseparably united with the concept of highest being*. (My italics.)[5]

Nevertheless, not even Caterus' objection makes entirely explicit what is wrong with the argument in the form that I have stated it. That argument is *prima facie* valid, and the suggestion is that *something* is wrong with the first premise. Essentially the mistake consists in the use of the word 'God' as a referring expression in (1), for then (1) will be true only if 'God' – its subject term – does refer. So (1) is true (and the argument possibly sound) only if 'God' refers – that is, only if God exists. So the existence of God is presupposed, not demonstrated, by the argument.[6]
One possible response to this objection is to restate the argument mentioning, not using, 'God': if this could be done whilst still producing a valid argument it may be sound.

B (1) 'God' means, by definition, the most perfect being conceivable.
(2) Existence is a perfection: that is, to be perfect something must exist in reality (and not just in the mind or not at all).

Therefore,

(3) 'God' means, by definition, the being that is the most perfect being conceivable and which, therefore, exists in reality.

Therefore,

(4) By definition the being called 'God' which is the most perfect being conceivable, exists in reality.

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[4] *Summa Theologica*, 1a qu.2 ad.1. Also quoted in Alvin Plantinga (ed.) *The Ontological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 29.

[5] Quoted in Plantinga (1968), p. 37.

[6] See Barnes, *The Ontological Argument*, pp. 67ff.

This is, in a way, an extremely difficult argument to refute directly. A first thought might be that (1) is not of a proper form for a definition for certain inverted commas are missing and that it ought to read:

> (1') 'God' means, by definition, 'the most perfect being conceivable'.
>
> (3) would then become
>
> (3') 'God' means, by definition 'the being that is the most perfect conceivable and which exists in reality'.

From (3') one could not move to the referring use of '*the*' in "the being called 'God'" which is necessary for (4), for reference is made in (3') only to expressions. This objection is on the right lines, but is not quite right because one is not obliged, when giving a definition, to place both *definiens* and *definiendum* in inverted commas; in the *definiens* one is not referring only to an expression. It is perfectly proper, for example, to say that "'Table' means (or 'signifies'), by definition, a raised surface able to sustain the weight of household objects". Nor is this possible in the case of 'table' only because it is a common noun which can have many instances. It is possible to do the same for a definite description: for example: "The expression 'the Queen of England' means (or 'signifies') the female sovereign or consort of England".

It was because of the difficulty of producing a knock-down objection to this sort of argument that its opponents resorted to the indirect method of *reductio ad absurdum*. This is the point of Gaunilo's 'perfect island' and Caterus's 'existent lion', both of which have existence built into their definition and so must, if the corresponding version of the ontological argument is sound, exist by definition. The rationale of this strategy is that if the argument is sound then one can manufacture any concept which includes existence and thereby prove that that sort of thing exists, which is absurd.

This does not, however, tell us what is wrong with the argument. The error could lie in deeming existence to be a perfection or a predicate, as Kant claimed, but the nature of the above considerations points to its lying in a misconception about the nature of definition.

What exactly is this misconception?

The reason why it is not possible to show that something exists simply by exhibiting its definition is that definitions are conditionals. The definition of 'table' given above could be rewritten as:

Necessarily, something is a table if and only if it possesses a raised surface able to sustain the weight of household objects.

For any given element in the definition the conditional is explicit:

Necessarily, if something is a table then it has a raised surface.

Applying these forms to the definition of 'God', we have:

Necessarily, something is God if and only if it is the most perfect being conceivable

and

Necessarily if something is God then it exists.

This latter proposition is interesting for its banality. Once the conditional nature of definitions is grasped, the argument comes out as follows:

C (1) Necessarily, if there is something which is God, then it is the most perfect being conceivable.

(2) Existence is a perfection: that is, to be perfect something must exist in reality (and not just in the mind, or not at all).

Therefore,

(3) Necessarily, if there is something which is god, then it exists in reality.

One could substitute any noun F for 'God' in (3) and the sentence would remain true, unless the F in question was of a mythical or fictional entity. Except in these latter cases, existing is a necessary condition for being anything and hence can harmlessly be included in the definition of anything – indeed it goes without saying that existence enters into the definition of any F, if definition involves giving necessary and sufficient conditions for being F: something could not *be* an F without existing.

These last remarks are not meant to be a weighty contribution to the question of whether 'exists' is a predicate. Rather the point is that even if we follow the superficial grammatical facts and treat it as a predicate, it enters harmlessly into definitions, once the conditional nature of definition is perceived. The most easily intelligible fault in the popular version of the ontological argument has nothing to do with whether 'exists' is a logical predicate.

III. DESCARTES'S ARGUMENT FROM 'ESSENCE', NOT DEFINITION

The popular version of the argument is not, however, the only one. Indeed, the view that the argument rests on the definition of the word

'God' is confined almost exclusively to its opponents. Descartes insisted, against Caterus, that his argument rested, not on the definition of the word 'God' but on the 'immutable nature' or 'essence' of God. He argues as follows:

D (1) Anything belonging to the true immutable nature, essence or form of a thing can be truly affirmed of it.
(2) To exist belongs to God's immutable nature.
Therefore,
(3) Existence can be truly affirmed of God – i.e. God exists.

The soundness of this argument depends on what the expressions 'immutable nature', 'essence', etc. are taken as referring to. If God's 'immutable nature' is a facet or feature of God Himself, then reference to it is possible only if God exists, and the argument is no better than the first version that we considered. If, on the other hand, the 'immutable nature' or 'essence' is some sort of abstract object, the existence of which does not depend directly on God's existence, then it appears to be no different from the concept of God. To learn that the concept of God includes existence is no more interesting than discovering that the definition of 'God' includes existence: like the latter, it means only that for something to be God it must exist. If it does not mean this harmless conditional, Descartes would be saying that when he thinks of the concept of God he can see that this concept must of its very nature be instantiated. But interpretation of the argument in this way empties it of its argumentative force. The purpose of the ontological argument is to make clear why this concept must be instantiated: the arguments from definition at least made this clear; it is, they say, because existence is part of the definition of the concept. Just to say that this concept must be instantiated without explanation is not an argument: to say that it must be instantiated because existence to part of the concept is to fall back on to the conditional form: if something is to instantiate the concept 'God' then it must exist.

IV. *PROSLOGION* II

It seems that refutation of the Cartesian forms of the argument is independent of whether 'existence is a predicate'.

The same seems to be the case for at least the first of the three Anselmian forms of the argument. In *Proslogion* II, Anselm says the following:

> And so Lord ... we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived ... Even the fool is convinced that something exists in the

> understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly, that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater. Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.[7]

At first sight one might be tempted to treat this argument as essentially similar to the popular version with which we began. It would then run as follows:

E (1) God is greater than anything else conceivable.
(2) It is greater to exist in reality than in the understanding alone.
Therefore,
(3) God exists in reality, not in the understanding alone.

This argument differs only in trivial verbal ways from the original popular version of the argument that we considered initially; 'God' is being used as a referring expression and hence the question is begged. But this does not do full justice to the oddity of Anselm's argument. It can be restated in a way which mentions rather than uses 'God' and which accommodates the conditionality of definition, yet which leads validly to the desired conclusion.

F (1) If anything is God then it is greater than anything else conceivable.
(2) God exists in the understanding.
Therefore,
(3) God exists – that is, something is God. ((2), *a fortiori*)
Therefore,
(4) God is greater than anything else conceivable. ((1), (3) MP)
(5) It is greater to exist in reality than in the understanding alone.

[7] This is an abridgment of chapter 2 of the *Proslogion*. It is in Plantinga (1968), pp. 3-4. An easily available edition of Anselm alone is *St Anselm: Basic Writings*, translated S. N. Deane, with an introduction by Charles Hartshorne (La Salle, IL: Open court, 1962), pp. 53-4.

Therefore,

(6) God exists in reality, not in the understanding alone.

The trick is worked in the full version of the argument by deeming God's existence in the understanding to be a real mode of His existing. This enables us to overcome the conditionality of the definition in (1). The line of argument in (1) to (3) is not explicit in Anselm's text, but it's conclusion is essential to his argument. The *reductio* conclusion that, if God existed only in the mind then He would both be and not be the greatest being conceivable follows only if what is in the mind is God. There is no contradiction if what is in the mind is simply the *idea* of God, for there is no reason to say that *that* is the greatest being – it is just *the idea of* the greatest being. Although this view of existence in the understanding is plainly in Anselm's text, it is also plainly false. Even contemporaries pointed out to Anselm that 'x exists in S's understanding' was merely a way of saying 'S has an idea of x'. Is there any way of making Anselm's move less of a simple howler?

The move from (2) to (3) can, however, be made less bizarre than it seems at first sight if one imputes to him a certain theory of concepts. Concepts are somewhat mysterious entities and it would not be entirely alien to the classical approach to thought to say that the concept of x is literally to be explained as the existence-in-the-mind of x itself. Such a theory could be compared to the realist theory-of-appearing approach to perception. According to the latter, when I see an object looking red that object is appearing redly to me: that is, the object itself confronts my sense under a particular mode of appearing. Similarly, in thought objects take on, not a sensory form, but an intellectual one – an *esse intentionale* – and so constitute the content of those mental acts which concern them.

There are two grounds for doubting whether Anselm could have held such a theory. First, it may be anachronistic to ascribe such an Aristotelian-seeming theory to Anselm. Second, it involves allowing that a particular object enters the intellect, whereas the intellect deals only with forms. This modification might, however, help our understanding of the argument, and the manner of its rejection by Gaunilo and St Thomas. In the case of normal objects, it is their form which enters the intellect where it is 'thought universally' - that is, deprived of the matter which creates its individuality in the object itself. Such objects, therefore, do not really exist in the intellect, but only their forms. But for God the case, it could be argued, is different. God's essence – His form – and

His existence are identical, according to mediaeval thought. Therefore, if God enters our thoughts in the same way as other objects, by His form entering the intellect, His existence would thereby also become the direct object of the intellect, and the very being of God would be grasped by the mind in a way comparable to that in which one might hold that an abstract object (e.g. a universal) is directly apprehended, leaving no gap between the mental object and the thing itself. That such a theory of thought is relevant to the argument is suggested by Aquinas' otherwise puzzling development of his objections. He says that a proposition can be self-evident in either of two ways: either in itself, or in itself and to us.

> A thing can be self-evident in either of two ways; on the one hand, self-evident in itself, though not to us; on the other, self-evident in itself, and to us. A proposition is self-evident because the predicate is included in the essence of the subject, as 'Man is an animal' for animal is contained in the essence of man. If, therefore, the essence of the predicate and subject be known to all, the proposition will be self-evident to all; as is clear with regard to the first principles of demonstration, the terms of which are common things that no-one is ignorant of, such as being and non-being, whole and part, and suchlike. If, however, there are some to whom the essence of the predicate and subject is unknown, the proposition will be self-evident in itself, but not to those who do not know the meaning of the predicate and subject of the proposition. ... Therefore, I say that this proposition, 'God exists', of itself is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject; because God is His own existence as will be hereafter shown (1aQ. III, a. 4). Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature - namely, by effects.[8]

In this passage Aquinas concedes that if we knew enough of God's nature then we would see that 'God exists' expresses an analytic truth, because He – or His essence – is not distinct from His existence. This prompts the reply that we do, if we have read and believed *Summa Theologica* 1a.Q.III, A.4, know that God's existence is identical with His essence, and we know, therefore, that the predicate of 'God exists' is contained in the subject and hence that the ontological argument is sound. But this objection to Aquinas misses the point. Although we may be convinced that the proposition that 'God's essence is identical with His existence'

[8] *Summa Theologica,* 1a qu.2 ad.3. Quoted in Plantinga (1968), pp. 29-30.

is true, we can never apprehend its truth simply by contemplating its subject and predicate, as we can with 'man is an animal' or 'four is twice two', because the form of its subject is beyond our intellectual grasp. We are obliged, therefore, to approach its truth indirectly. The words can never convey directly to us the full reality of the truth they express, and there is no contradiction of what is directly before our minds in doubting its truth and hence in doubting the truth of 'God exists'.

The Thomist position can be expressed as follows. Philosophy can show that the concept of a being whose existence is identical with its essence is a coherent one and it can bring a posteriori arguments to show that there is such a being; but the human intellect is incapable of apprehending a priori that there is such a being because it cannot think the divine form, which would be required to apprehend a priori its inseparability from existence. Anselm's error is to think that an understanding of the words is equivalent to grasping the forms that lie behind them, and hence of thinking that the Divine Form, which is inseparable from the Divine existence, exists in his own mind.

V. AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY FOR MAKING REFERENCE TO GOD NON-QUESTION-BEGGING?

It might seem that Gyula Klima[9] has a strategy for circumventing most of my arguments in section 1-4 above. He maintains (rightly in my view) that reference is an intentional idiom and so one can refer to something and attribute it properties without committing oneself to its existence. One can talk about, and hence refer to, the Abominable Snowman, the Fountain of Youth, or God, irrespective of whether they exist. So the referential use of 'God' in 'God is the greatest being conceivable' is legitimate and neither requires rewriting in conditional form ('if something is God then it is the greatest being conceivable') nor does it assume His existence; as the idiom is intentional, you can then say *God is the greatest being conceivable* referentially without begging the question of His existence. This is, I believe, unobjectionable so far. The question is whether this legitimizes Anselm's argument. Klima believes that it does and argues as follows, using 'thought object' as his term for an intentional object

[9] Gyula Klima, 'St Anselm's Proof: a Problem of Reference, Intentional Identity and Mutual Understanding', in *Medieval Philosophy and Modern Times*, ed. G. Hintikka (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000), pp. 69-88.

By the meaning of the term,

G (1) God is the thought object than which no thought object can be thought to be greater.

Now suppose that

(2) God is only in the intellect (i.e. God is thought of, but does not exist).

But certainly

(3) any thought object that can be thought to exist in reality can be thought to be greater than any thought object that is only in the intellect.

And it cannot be doubted that

(4) God can be thought to exist in reality.

Therefore,

(5) Some thought object can be thought to be greater than the thought object than which no thought object can be thought to be greater [1,2,3,4]

which is a contradiction, whence we have to abandon our supposition that God is only in the intellect, so he has to exist in reality, too.

(3) is the crucial line. It says, in effect, that God *qua* intentional object, or intentionally inexistent, would not be the greatest being conceivable, as any real being one thought of would be greater. But this employment of intentional reference is surely an abuse. (3) cannot be correct because most thought objects that exist only in the intellect can be and often are thought to exist in reality, but they are not thereby rendered greater than themselves. For example, maybe the Abominable Snowman exists only in the intellect, but can be (because it is) thought to exist in reality by those who believe in it. In fact anything not explicitly contradictory, fictional or mythological can be thought to exist in reality, whether it does or not. So God, even if He does not exist, is thought of as existing in reality. So there is not the required contrast between existing only in the intellect and being *thought of* as existing in reality.

I believe Klima is confusing (3) with

(3') any thought object that can be thought to exist in reality can be thought to be greater than any thought object that is *thought of* as only in the intellect.

(3') applies to the explicitly contradictory, fictional or mythological.
An entity *qua* intentional never possesses its normal properties actually. The Abominable Snowman, *qua* intentionally inexistent, does not make large footprints or stride through the forest: only the actual creature does these things, if it actually exists. Similarly for all its natural properties and similarly for the divine perfections: God, if He exists, is greater than anything else could conceivably be. You cannot attribute an object's defining properties to it *qua* intentional object, except in the conditional sense that they tell you what would have to be the case if the object were actual. The deployment of the intentionality of reference does not aid the argument and the same problems arise. None of 'God in the mind', the idea of God, or God *qua* intentional object are in the competition, as winners or losers, for maximal greatness.

VI. *PROSLOGION* III

It is Anselm's second argument, in *Proslogion* III, which brings us nearest to the question of the connexion between existence and predication.

> For, it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, O Lord, our God.

Modern commentators have argued that this argument is different from that in *Proslogion* II because it attributes by definition to God the property of necessary existence, rather than the property of existence. The distinction is between necessarily possessing the property of existing and possessing the property of necessarily existing: and the suggestion is that God necessarily possesses the property of existing because He possesses the property of necessarily existing. The property of necessarily existing is represented by the idea that His non-existence is inconceivable. No-one, I think, believes that Anselm was explicitly aware of employing this distinction.
From the text quoted it is easy to construct the following argument.

H (1) God is by definition the greatest being conceivable.

(2) A being is greater if its non-existence is inconceivable than if its non-existence is conceivable.

Therefore,

(3) If God's non-existence is conceivable then He would be less great than if His non-existence were inconceivable. (Instantiation of (2).)
(4) If God's non-existence were conceivable then He would not be the greatest being conceivable.
(5) If God's non-existence were conceivable a contradiction would follow, namely, He both would and would not be the greatest being conceivable.

Therefore,

(6) God's non-existence is inconceivable.

The first thing that strikes one about this argument is that (1) is cast in the same style as the original argument, using rather than mentioning 'god' in the statement of a definition. I shall correct this soon. Next, and slightly less obvious, is that fact that (4) follows from (3) only with the assistance of a further premise.
(3a) It is conceivable that God's non-existence be inconceivable.
This is the vital assumption that logically necessary existence is the sort of property that can intelligibly be attributed to God. Restating the argument with allowance for the conditionality of definition we now have:

I (1) If something is God then it is the greatest being conceivable.
(2) Something is greater if its non-existence is inconceivable than if its non-existence is conceivable.

Therefore,

(3) If something is God, then it is greater if its non-existence is inconceivable:
(3a) It is possible that God's non-existence be inconceivable.

Therefore,

(4) If something is God and its non-existence is conceivable then it is not the greatest being conceivable.

Therefore,

(5) If something is God and its non-existence is conceivable, then a contradiction follows, namely that it would and would not be the greatest being conceivable.

Therefore,

(6) If something is God, then its non-existence is inconceivable.

Therefore,

(7) God's non-existence is inconceivable.

This argument is useless unless we can detach the consequent of (6), and, as the antecedent asserts what we are finally trying to prove, it might seem unlikely that we shall be able to do so. It appears, therefore, that this version of the argument, like the most elementary ones, is refuted by the conditionality of definition. The problem is illusory, however. The notion that the non-existence of something is inconceivable is equivalent to the claim that its existence is necessary. (6) is in fact of the form

If p then necessarily p.

But it is an uncontroversial principle of modal logic that no necessary proposition can depend on a contingent proposition, but is self-standing. So from

if p then necessarily p one can conclude

necessarily p.

So (6) is equivalent to

(6') If something is God then it [i.e. God] exists necessarily.

And from (6') we can conclude the equivalent of (7)

(7') God exists necessarily.

To make **I** valid we have had to augment Anselm's original two premises ((1) and (2) above) with (3a) which is a modal premise. If God's non-existence is inconceivable, it follows, in the way we have just seen, that His existence is necessary. Such an idea includes, of course, the claim that His existence is possible. Putting this into modern jargon, we have the claim that God exists in some possible world and that *if He exists in some possible world then there is a possible world in which he exists necessarily*. It is by putting together these two ideas that the modern version of the argument, as I shall reconstruct it, can be built.[10] We can begin with:

[10] The principle modern statement, which corresponds most closely to argument **J** and **K**, is in Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 214-16.

J (1) If it is logically possible that one object should possess necessary existence and the other divine attributes (moral perfection, omnipotence, etc.) then there is a possible world in which there is an object which possesses those features together.
(2) It is logically possible that one object should possess necessary existence and the other divine attributes.

Therefore,

(3) There is a possible world in which there is a being which possesses both necessary existence and the other divine attributes.
(4) 'Necessary existence' means existence in every possible world.

Therefore,

(5) The being which possesses necessary existence and the other divine attributes in some possible world exists in this, the actual, world.

This argument would not, even if sound, constitute a proof of the existence of an All-Perfect God in this world. It guarantees only that a being which is perfect in some possible world exists – perhaps in a much inferior form – in this one. To avoid this weakened conclusion one requires that the being possess not merely necessary existence and perfection in some world, but necessary existence and perfection in every world in which it exists: it cannot exist in an imperfect form. The argument is now altered to read as follows.

K (1) If it is logically possible that one object should possess both necessary existence, and the property of being otherwise perfect (omniscient, omnipotent, etc.) in every world in which it exists, then there is a possible world in which there is an object which possesses these features together.
(2) It is logically possible that one being should possess both necessary existence and the property of being otherwise perfect in every world in which it exists.

Therefore

(3) There is a possible world in which there is a being which possesses both necessary existence and the property of being otherwise perfect in every possible world in which it exists.

(4) 'Necessary existence' (in the sense of the inconceivability of non-existence) means existence in every possible world.

Therefore,

(5) The being which possesses both necessary existence and the property of being perfect whenever it exists, exists and is perfect, in the actual world.

Argument **K** contains two 'transworld' notions – that is, notions that tell one not just what something is, but what it must be. The weaker transworld notion is that God never exists in an imperfect form: the stronger is the property of existing in all possible worlds. Together these are equivalent to (3a) in **G** and **H**, which asserts that God – the invariably necessary perfect being – cannot be conceived to be non-existent – i.e. that there is no possible world in which He does not exist.

It is at this point in the discussion, when we are to consider whether necessary existence is a real property, that we are nearest to the Kant-inspired discussion of existence and predication. We have managed to reject all the versions of the ontological argument from **A** to **I** without raising the question of whether 'exists' is a predicate, for the faults in the argument concerned other matters. In particular, in the classic statement of the argument in A, the fault lay with the concept of definition employed in (1) whereas Kant's attack concerned the use of 'exists' in (2) But before discussing the status of necessary existence I shall consider a final and rather different version of the argument which Anselm employs in his reply to Gaunilo. This too will throw light on the interpretation of **J** and **K**.

VII. ANSELM'S THIRD ARGUMENT AND TWO CONCEPTS OF NECESSITY

Anselm presents a third argument in the first chapter of his reply to Gaunilo. He argues:

> that than which a greater is inconceivable cannot be conceived except as without a beginning. But whatever can be conceived to exist, and does not exist, can be conceived to exist through a beginning. Hence what can be conceived to exist, but does not exist, is not the being than which a greater cannot be conceived. Therefore, if such a being can be conceived to exist, necessarily it does exist.[11]

[11] Quoted in Plantinga (1968), p. 14.

This is most simply put into a valid form as follows:

L (1) God – that than which a greater is inconceivable – cannot be conceived except as being without a beginning.
(2) Whatever can be conceived not to exist can be conceived to exist through a beginning.

Therefore,

(3) God – that than which a greater is inconceivable – cannot be conceived not to exist.

(2) is a modification of what Anselm actually says. He talks of 'what can be conceived to exist but does not exist'. The argument can be put in those terms, though at greater length, but it is not necessary to do so, for Anselm's opponent is not claiming that God could exist, but does not, as his version of the premise suggests, but that, though He does, He might not have existed. Nevertheless, it is instructive to cast the argument in Anselm's form, as we shall see. It would then run:

M (1) God – that than which a greater is inconceivable – cannot be conceived except as being without a beginning.
(2) What can be conceived to exist, but does not exist, can be conceived to exist through a beginning.

Therefore,

(3) God – that than which a greater is inconceivable – cannot be conceived to exist but not exist.

Therefore,

(4) If He can be conceived to exist then He does exist.

The interest of this version of the argument is that it anticipates Leibniz's modification of Descartes, that God exists if His existence is possible. This is not quite Anselm's way of expressing the point: he does not consider possibility, but being conceived, and he thinks it sufficient for this that the notion be understood in a fairly superficial sense. But the conclusion of **L** is less satisfactory than **K** not merely because it is a conditional, but principally because, even if the consequent of the conditional be detached it is weaker both than the conclusion of **K** and than the conclusion Anselm seems to think he can draw. He wishes to conclude that God necessarily exists – i.e. that His non-existence is inconceivable – but this cannot be derived from **L** because what is to be negated is only that He does not exist, not that His non-existence is conceivable.

This is the argument which Norman Malcolm thinks is sound. He reports it in the following terms.

> ... if you can conceive of a certain thing and this thing does not exist then if it *were* to exist then its non-existence would be *possible*. It follows, I believe, if it were to exist it would depend on other things both for coming into and continuing in existence, and also that it would have duration and not eternity. Therefore it would not be, either in reality or conception, an unlimited being, *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*.[12]

The governing idea here is that a *contingent* being is a *dependent* being. This is also the principle behind (2) in both **L** and **M**. The thought is that anything which may or may not exist can also come into existence – and, presumably, pass out of existence too.

The confusion that is being made here is one made by Kant and many twentieth century philosophers, namely the mistake of confusing two senses of 'necessary being'. In one sense, a necessary being is a logically necessary being, that is, one of which the proposition asserting its existence is a necessary truth, so that it exists in all possible worlds.[13] The other sense of 'necessary being' is of a being which is not contingent in the sense that it is not subject to the processes of generation and decay, and which (in the case of God, at least) does not depend for its existence on anything other than itself. This latter is the sense in which, according to Aristotle and Aquinas, God is a necessary being. Now it is clearly logically contingent whether there are any beings which are not subject to the processes of generation and decay and which do not depend for their existence on anything else. These are, therefore, not the same as logically necessary beings. But it is equally plain that if a being free of the processes of generation and decay and owing its existence to nothing else were to exist, it could not have had a beginning in time, for there is no process by which it could have come to be and it could not have been created *ex nihilo* by anything else. It might be argued that it could have come into being, *ex nihilo*, without a cause – that is, by pure chance, and that the only way to rule out this possibility is to make its existence logically necessary. It is certain that the scholastics believed that nothing

[12] Plantinga (1968), p. 145.

[13] This distinction was first brought clearly to the attention of modern philosophers by Patterson Brown, 'St Thomas's doctrine of necessary being', *Philosophical Review*, vol. LXXIII (1964), pp. 76-90. Reprinted in *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Anthony Kenny (New York: Doubleday, 1964), pp. 157-74.

could come to be *ex nihilo* except by a creative act, but one may reject this principle (though I doubt whether Anselm would have rejected it). The thought would be that to come into existence is to receive existence from elsewhere and therefore to breach one of the conditions for being the sort of necessary being that God is said to be. It might be doubted, however, whether a being that just pops into existence receives its being from anywhere. Nevertheless, such an event could not be part of any naturally intelligible or explicable process and such a being could not be generated: the possibility of its coming randomly into existence is not something that belongs to it as an expression of the kind of thing that it is. Putting aside these problems, it is in this sense that God is said to be a necessary being by those who do not accept the ontological argument, and it is a sense which Kant, in his accusation that the cosmological argument rests upon the ontological, because it is an argument for the existence of a necessary being, entirely fails to grasp. (Kant, believing that nothing happens without a cause, could not suggest that the bare possibility of springing randomly into existence showed that this was not a genuine sense of 'necessary'.) In sum, the objection to Anselm's third argument is that there is a conception of necessary existence, which one might call 'self-subsistence', which is weaker than logically necessary existence, but which is strong enough to rule out having a beginning or an end or an external cause.[14]

One recent defender of OA, E. J. Lowe, does not seem to take notice of this distinction. He expresses the argument as follows.

N (1) God is, by definition, a maximally great being and thus a being whose existence is necessary rather than merely contingent.
(2) God, so defined, could exist; in other words he *does* exist in *some* possible world.
(3) Suppose that *w* is a possible world in which God, so defined, exists: then it is true, in *w*, at least, that God exists there, and, being God, exists there as a necessary being.
(4) But a necessary being is one which, by definition, exists in *every* possible world if it exists in *any* possible world.

[14] In Aristotle's *Metaphysics Lambda* there are two classes of beings necessary in this sense. The ordinary heavenly bodies are not subject to natural generation or decay but they are not self-sufficient in that they owe their being to the prime mover, which is free from generation and decay and wholly self-sufficient. God would be self-sufficient in the strong sense. *Lambda*, chapter 8 (1073a14 to 1074b14).

(5) Hence, the God who exists as a necessary being in *w* is a being that exists in *every* possible world, including *this*, the actual world.
(6) Therefore, God exists in the actual world; he actually exists.[15]

Lowe's form ignores the conditionality of definition, but this can be handled as it is above. The main problem is that he, like Plantinga, assumes that the greatness-making property *necessary existence* is *logically* necessary existence, and not the Aristotelian sense of being free from the possibility of generation or decay.

The conflation of these two senses of 'necessary' is explicable in an Aristotelian or medieval context because the view that anything possible is at some time and place actual is often ascribed to Aristotle. It involves equating the space of logical possibility with actual space-time. It is as if 'might have happened to be the case' is conflated with 'might have happened – i.e. come about, or occurred in time'. It is certainly part of the orthodox conception of God that if He exists at all He exists from all eternity and for all eternity, so if the conceivability of His non-existence meant that He was the sort of thing that might come into existence, His non-existence would be inconceivable. But if we do not make this conflation, the conclusion does not follow.

The issue then seems to be this: can the concept of logically necessary existence be coherently applied to a non-abstract being like God, for if it can the argument is sound and if it cannot, it is not.[16]

VIII. A MISTAKEN OBJECTION TO THE ARGUMENT

There are, broadly, three ways of attacking OA. One is to attack the argument directly, by disputing the truth of a premise or the logic of the argument. The other is to try to show that similar forms of argument give rise to conclusions no-one wants to accept and so to show – or very

[15] E. J. Lowe, 'The Ontological Argument', in *The Routledge Companion to the Philosophy of Religion*, eds C. Meister and P. Copan (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 331-40. (I have changed only the numbers given to the steps.)

[16] There has been considerable discussion of Gödel's version of the argument; see J. Sobel, *Logic and Theism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). As far as I can see, apart from more or less purely formal issues, this raises no new questions. Gödel has one premise which defines God as a being that possesses all and only *positive* properties, and an axiom that says that necessary existence is a positive property. The parallels between perfection or greatness, and positive properties, and between calling necessary existence a great-making, or perfect-making property and calling it *positive* are clear enough. So I do not see that new substantive issues arise.

strongly indicate – that *something* must be wrong with the argument. Most of the discussion has concerned the first path. The Gaunilo and Caterus strategies are cases of the second. I shall argue in section 9 that these arguments can be countered by claiming that definitional existence (or necessary existence) must supervene (in an intuitive sense of that quasi technical term) on the other properties of the object and cannot be added in an arbitrary way.

There is a third category, similar in some ways to the second, in which there are examples purporting to show that arguments similar to those that prove that maximal greatness is instantiated in some possible world can also be used to show that properties inconsistent with maximal greatness are also instantiated. Plantinga's example[17] is the property of no-maximality, which is the property of there not being a maximally great entity. This seems to be just as coherent a property as maximal greatness and so to be as good a candidate for being instantiated in some possible world. But if it is, then there is no-maximally great being. Plantinga seems to think that one has to choose between these options, on the basis of faith rather than reason, so to speak.

This does not seem to me to be a strong objection. Maximal greatness is a purported property of first order individuals and no-maximality a property of worlds. This gives priority to maximal greatness, for, in general, world properties depend or supervene on the properties of the objects in them: if maximality has its foot in the door by being a possible property of a first order entity, then no-maximality is excluded.

IX. THE ARGUMENT AND 'A FOOTHOLD IN REALITY'

In the original version of this paper, cited in footnote 1, I claimed that there is, in fact, a surprising analogy between **J** and Anselm's first argument, as expressed in **F** above. Both arguments operate by treating as a foothold in reality something which is not such a foothold, and then arguing that if the greatest being conceivable exists in that minor way He must exist in a greater way. In Anselm's case, existence in the mind is wrongly treated as a mode of existence for the thing thought of: for Plantinga, existence in a possible world is similarly confused with a genuine mode of existence. I now think that this interpretation of Plantinga's argument is mistaken.

[17] Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*, pp. 217-21.

In the case of what we have called Anselm's first argument – **F** above – the extension from the foothold in reality to full actuality is driven by the demands of 'greatness' – a being existing in an inferior mode cannot be the greatest. In Plantinga's case, however, the move from possible existence to actual is driven by (logically) necessary existence and this works – if it works at all – whether or not you regard existence in a possible world as a genuine form of existence at all: something that exists of logical necessity exists actually, whatever account of possibility one wishes to provide.

It is, however, interesting to note that, if you are a Lewisian realist about possible world, then there is a form of OA using the 'foothold' principle, which is probably sound, given that realism, and given that the notion of a greatest being makes sense.

O. (1) The greatest possible being exists in some possible world (as all possible beings do).
(2) It would be greater to exist in all possible worlds than only in one or some.

Therefore,

(3) The greatest possible being exists in all possible worlds, including the actual world.

The only way that I think a Lewisian might get around this argument is to say that, as transworld existence is only counterpart, the greatness of any real individual is not increased by existing in more worlds. I do not see why this should apply to unchanging necessary beings, however: would a Lewisian Platonist be committed to saying that there was a counterpart number seven in each world, and not the same entity? I shall not pursue this argument here.

X. LOGICALLY NECESSARY EXISTENCE AND HOW IT WORKS

The conclusion so far seems to be that the argument is sound *if* logically necessary existence is the sort of property that it makes sense to attribute to God. The moral that we can draw from Gaunilo-type objections is that this property can only be possessed when it is entailed by the rest of the nature of the object. Necessary existence (or existence by definition) cannot be added simply by stipulation to a list of properties, its presence must be rationalized by those other properties. So, for example, it is

plausible to hold that numbers, universals and the like are necessary existents because they are abstract entities. A similar principle applies to the Aristotelian, self-sufficiency form of necessary existence. It follows from the nature of the object, namely that it has no matter or parts which could give a mechanism for generation or decay.

Why do abstract entities strike us as plausible candidates for necessary existence? One reason, I think, is that, if one is persuaded to treat them realistically at all, it is difficult to see under what circumstances an abstract object, such as the number seven, for example, could fail to exist. I think that this points to a more general criterion for logically necessary existence, namely that the things taken so to exist are presupposed by a world's being intelligible: they are part of the framework for our finding any world intelligible – with the possible exception of the empty world, though I shall ignore that issue.

So the question is, does this apply to God – is His existence a precondition for a world's being an intelligible place?

At this point, we need to distinguish two kinds of preconditions for intelligibility. One of these is preconditions for the intelligibility of the *constitution* of the world. The platonic entities come into this category. For example, without numbers, individuation of objects or events would be impossible: without properties or universals there could be no particular way a world is, no states of affairs. The second is *explanatory intelligibility*: the conditions for making sense of why the world should be, or how it can be, the way it is. It is plausible to claim, I think, that different forms of cosmological argument attempt to show that God is a precondition for the explanatory intelligibility of the worlds of various types. The temporal first cause argument, for example, purports to show that any non-empty world with a temporal dimension must have a cause outside itself; Aquinas's first two ways, that any world with change requires an external cause; teleological arguments, that any world with functional features must be so explained.

So there are three notions of necessary existence in play. These are (i) logically grounded necessity, which is possessed by things whose existence is a precondition of what one might call the *descriptive intelligibility* of the world; (ii) Aristotelian necessity or the *necessity of self sufficiency*, which is possessed by anything not subject, in principle, to processes of generation and decay nor dependent on other things; and (iii) *explanatorily grounded necessity*, according to which something must exist if the world is to make metaphysical sense. God, if He exists,

certainly possesses the second. Cosmological arguments, if successful, would show that He possesses the third in some form. But the *logically* necessary existence cannot be attributed to Him on the grounds of His definition, concept or essence, in the way that OA requires.

As a parting flourish, it is interesting to note that this last fact does not mean that God does not meet the condition I gave for being a logically necessary entity, namely that of being a precondition of the descriptive intelligibility of the world. He meets this condition if Aristotle and the neo-Platonists are correct in claiming that the world of logically necessary Platonic entities must be a Divine Intellect, not a collection of self-standing abstract objects, and this Divine Intellect is identical with God. I have defended this neo-Platonic position elsewhere,[18] but it does not help OA, for that God has this status cannot be proved by the OA strategy, as an argument from 'essence' or 'greatness'; the neo-Platonic strategy is an argument *for* God's logically necessary existence, not an argument *from* it.

[18] Howard Robinson, 'Benacerraf's Problem, Abstract Objects and Intellect', in *Truth, Reference and Realism,* eds Z. Novak and A. Simonyi (Budapest and New York, Central European University Press, 2011), pp. 235-62.

PRUSS, MOTIVATIONAL CENTRALITY, AND PROBABILITIES ATTACHED TO POSSIBILITY PREMISES IN MODAL ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

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Abstract: Pruss (2010) argues that consideration of the motivational centrality of Theistic belief in flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length provides reason for thinking that Theistic belief is at least possibly true. But Theistic belief is belief in a necessarily existent God. So, according to Pruss, consideration of the motivational centrality of Theistic belief in flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length provides reason for thinking that there is a necessarily existent God. Pruss's gambit is the most interesting original move in the recent literature on modal ontological arguments and, on that account, deserves detailed analysis. In this paper, I aim to provide just such an analysis. Perhaps unsurprisingly, I argue for the conclusion that Pruss's gambit should be declined.

Pruss (2010) offers a novel defence of possibility premises in modal ontological arguments. In particular, he offers a new way of arguing that these possibility premises are 'probably true'. I propose to argue that Pruss's defence is unconvincing: in the end, it probably amounts to nothing more than an expression of prejudice against worldviews that reject that claim that God is essentially omnipotent, essentially omniscient, essentially perfectly good, essentially the creator of all else, and necessarily existent.

I. MODAL ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

Suppose that we focus on a conception of God which holds that, if God exists in at least one possible world, then God exists in all possible worlds.

Suppose further that we maintain that S5 is the correct modal logic that governs reasoning concerning God as thus conceived.

We can represent the range of considered rational opinion concerning this conception of God, on the further assumption about the relevant correct modal logic, in the following way: (1) *Theism*: {It is possible that God exists, God exists, It is necessary that God exists}; (2) *Atheism*: {It is possible that God does not exist , God does not exist, It is necessary that God does not exist}; (3) *Agnosticism*: Suspension of belief between (1) and (2).

On the one hand, given the conception of God and the further assumption about the relevant correct modal logic, each of the claims attributed to Theism *entails* the other claims attributed to Theism; and, on the other hand, given the conception of God and the further assumption about the relevant correct modal logic, each of the claims attributed to Atheism *entails* the other claims attributed to Atheism. Given these first two observations, it is clear that considered, rational Agnosticism requires suspension of belief concerning each of the three pairs of claims attributed to Theism and Atheism; and, in particular, it is clear that considered, rational Agnosticism requires suspension of belief between the claim that it is possible that God exists and the claim that it is possible that God does not exist.

Given the entailments just noted, it is easy to see that the following two arguments are *valid*: (1) It is possible that God exists so God exists (and, indeed, it is necessary that God exists); (2) It is possible that God does not exist so God does not exist (and, indeed, it is necessary that God does not exist). However, given the symmetry of the advanced considerations, it is also easy to see that, *on their own*, these arguments do nothing to decide between Theism, Atheism and Agnosticism. On the one hand, rational Theists will suppose that the first argument is sound, and the second unsound; on the other hand, rational Atheists will suppose that the second argument is sound, and the first argument is unsound. And, of course, rational Agnostics will suspend judgement on the question which of the two arguments is sound.

Whether there are considerations that decide between Theism, Atheism and Agnosticism may depend upon what else is taken to be part of the conception of God at issue. If we suppose that, if God exists in at least one possible world, then God is perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient, and creator of all else in every possible world, then there is a range of considerations that we can take into account in weighing

the claim that God exists against the claim that God does not exist (or, equivalently, in weighing the claim that it is possible that God exists against the claim that it is possible that God does not exist). If we suppose that, if God exists in at least one possible world, then God is the one and only god – the one and only supernatural being or force that has and exercises power over natural reality that is not, in turn, under the power of higher-ranking or more powerful beings or forces – in every possible world, then there is a perhaps different range of considerations that we can take into account in weighing the claim that God exists against the claim that God does not exist. And so on, for other proposals about what else is part of the conception of God.

There is, I think, fairly strong *prima facie* reason to suppose that modal ontological arguments do not have a serious contribution to make to the decision between Theism, Atheism, and Agnosticism. In particular, if we allow that there are many considerations that bear on the question whether God exists – e.g. considerations about the origins of causal reality, the fine-tuning of natural reality, the quantity of horrendous evil in natural reality, the presence of consciousness and reason in causal reality, the insignificance of human beings on any cosmic scale, the apparent objectivity of various normative domains (e.g. the logical, the mathematical, the moral, the aesthetic, etc.), the range and distribution of religious belief, the nature and existence of diverse canonical religious texts, the range of attestations to the occurrence of 'anomalous' phenomena, the quantity and kinds of great goods to be found in natural reality, and so forth – then it seems that we should expect that the decision between Theism, Atheism, and Agnosticism will depend upon some careful weighing of these many considerations.

Even if we suppose that the decision between Theism, Atheism and Agnosticism will depend upon the careful weighing of a large range of considerations, we might still suppose that there is *some* interest that attaches to the evaluation of these positions with respect to particular considerations, all other considerations being ignored. Thus, for example, we might suppose that some interest attaches to the question whether Theism, Atheism, or Agnosticism is most favoured by the range and distribution of religious belief on the Earth at the beginning of the twenty-first century, all other considerations being ignored. However, there are at least two grounds for scepticism about this kind of supposition. On the one hand, it might be doubted that, *even in principle*, the decision between our positions on total evidence can be

decomposed into a sum over decisions on particular pieces of evidence, all other evidence being then ignored. And, on the other hand, it might be doubted whether, in practice, decisions between our positions on total evidence do decompose into sums over decisions on particular pieces of evidence, all other evidence being then ignored. The above misgivings notwithstanding, we shall proceed on the assumption that at least *academic* interest attaches to questions that concern decisions between our positions on the basis of particular pieces of evidence, all other evidence being then ignored.

II. UNIFORMLY SAMPLED BELIEF AND LIKELIHOOD OF TRUTH

Suppose that we sample uniformly from the pool of human beliefs. (It doesn't matter whether we take a current sample, or a sample over some range of human history, or even a sample over the whole of human history.) What should we say about the likelihood that the belief that we select is true?

There are various considerations that might be taken to tell in favour of the claim that it is more likely than not that our chosen belief is true. Some might appeal to Davidsonian principles of interpretation; some might appeal to Wittgensteinian considerations about hinge propositions; some might appeal to evolutionary considerations about environmental fit; and so forth.

Suppose that, for whatever reasons, we *should* say that a uniformly sampled belief is more likely than not to be true. Then, it seems, we should also say that, if the only information that we have is that a given belief is held, then we should hold that it is more likely than not that the belief in question is true. (If asked to bet on whether a belief is true or not, given only the information that the belief in question is held, we should bet that the belief is true.)

Here's an easy application of our assumptions to this point: if we are given the information that the belief that God does not exist is held, then, in the absence of any further information, it is more likely than not that God does not exist. That is, we should judge that, setting all other information aside, the information that the belief that God does not exist is held licenses the claim that it is more likely than not that God does not exist. Said differently: if we set aside all other information, except the information that the belief that God does not exists is held,

then the information that we have favours Atheism over either Theism or Agnosticism.

It is not easy to get excited about this. After all, in the context of debate about Atheism, Theism, and Agnosticism, it is common ground that each position is held. Moreover, it is common ground that no rational person can occupy more than one of these positions (at a single time). If we set aside all other information, except the information that the belief that God exists is held, then the information that we have favours Theism over either Atheism or Agnosticism. And, if we set aside all other information, except the information that the beliefs that God exists and that God does not exist are both held, then the information that we have does not favour either Theism or Atheism over Agnosticism. Big deal.

III. MOTIVATIONALLY CENTRAL BELIEFS

Pruss claims that 'if humanly excellent activity flows from some motivationally central belief, then, in the absence of any further information, we should say that the belief is more likely than not to be at least possible' (2010: 235).

While there are terms here that require further explanation, it should be noted at the outset that the discussion in the previous section suggests that Pruss is here underplaying his hand. Why not say this: if humanly excellent activity flows from some motivationally central belief, then, in the absence of any further information, we should say that the belief is more likely than not to be true? After all, unless 'motivationally central beliefs' are somehow more suspect than 'motivationally peripheral beliefs', the narrower claim is a simple consequence of the further observation that uniformly sampled beliefs are more likely than not to be true.

What are 'motivationally central beliefs'? Pruss writes:

> I believe that I have a wife and kids. If I ceased to believe that, my life would change in widespread and significant ways, and many of the things that I am now motivated to do, I would no longer be motivated to do. My belief in the existence of my wife and kids, then, is one of the beliefs that are motivationally central to my life. (Pruss 2010: 234)

This passage suggests something like the following picture. A belief of mine is *motivationally central* just in case, were I to be rational, reflective, well-informed, and otherwise in good cognitive shape *but* lacking the belief in question, I would fail to have many of the motives for action

that I now have. Many of my current actions are motivated by concern for my wife and kids; but, of course, I would not have that motivation if – despite being in good cognitive shape – I no longer believed that I have a wife and kids.

It is perhaps worth noting that talk about 'motivationally central beliefs' – understood in the way just outlined – need not involve commitment to an anti-Humean theory of motivation. Humeans deny that beliefs are motivational states: motivation is the exclusive provenance of desire, intention, and the like. But Humeans need not deny that beliefs and desires can rise and fall together: Humeans can allow that the having of certain beliefs is necessary for the having of given desires and intentions. However, there are other things that Pruss goes on to say – e.g. 'The most motivationally central beliefs are ones that actually rationally move us' (2010: 244) – which do suggest a commitment to an anti-Humean theory of motivation.

It is perhaps also worth noting that it is a further question whether the motivational centrality of beliefs is closely tied to centrality within one's web of beliefs. If we suppose that the relative centrality of a belief to one's web of beliefs is a matter of how much of one's web of beliefs would need to be revised in order for one to give up that belief (while remaining in good cognitive order), then it is not immediately obvious whether this kind of centrality coincides with motivational centrality. Consider, again, the case of the existence of my wife and kids. I take it that, were I to lack this belief while remaining in good cognitive order, this would be because I did not have a wife and kids. But, if that's right, then this case gives us no reason to deny that motivational centrality coincides with centrality in one's web of beliefs.

What is 'humanly excellent activity'? While he does not address this question directly, Pruss makes various indicative remarks. He says, for example, that humanly excellent activity requires 'a flourishing and intellectually sophisticated life for a significant period of time' (2010: 235); that a humanly excellent life would be 'an examined life' (2010: 235); that 'battling evil' is an important aspect of human flourishing (2010: 241); and that 'love for and friendship with others' is a central part of human flourishing (2010: 242). While this is hardly the place to argue these points, I would prefer a more pluralistic picture of human flourishing – cf. for example, Strawson (1974) and Wolf (1982) – and I would certainly resist the emphasis on 'intellectual sophistication' and 'the examined life'. I don't deny that the things that Pruss mentions *can*

be part of humanly excellent activity; however, I am inclined to resist the suggestion that any of them is *necessary* for it.

What is it for action to 'flow from' a motivationally central belief? Given the account of 'motivationally central beliefs', one possible answer is that an action *flows from* a motivationally central belief just in case the action would not have been performed had the belief in question not been held. But this seems to have odd consequences. If I didn't have a wife and kids, I would not be living in the large house that I live in. But, if I weren't living in the house that I live in, I would not have gone to the fridge that I just went to in order to get the drink that I just consumed. So my getting the drink that I just consumed from the fridge in which it was located 'flowed from' my belief that I have a wife and kids? Given subsequent claims that Pruss wants to make about actions 'flowing from' motivationally central beliefs, I think that this cannot be what he has in mind.

Here's another suggestion. An action *flows from* a motivationally central belief just in case the best explanation of the action cites that belief (along with relevant desires, intentions, and so forth). On this account, we certainly avoid the previous problem: perhaps, for example, the best explanation of my going to the fridge cites only my thirst and my belief that there is water in the fridge that is mine to drink. However, while this manoeuvre may enable us to avoid commitment to the suggestion that my belief that I have a wife and kids is somehow instrumental in my going to the fridge to get a glass of water, it raises the prospects of a different kind of difficulty. For it is not clear that there are any 'humanly excellent' actions that I perform whose best explanation cites the fact that I believe that I have a wife and kids. (Of course, if asked, I will assent to the proposition 'I have a wife and kids'. Hence, some of my behaviour in filling out census forms and so forth is best explained in terms of this belief. But the actions in question don't seem to have much to do with 'human excellence'. Of course, too, there are actions of mine that are candidates for 'humanly excellent' whose explanation adverts to beliefs that *entail* that I have a wife and kids: but it won't do to say that an action *flows from* a belief just in case the best explanation of the action either cites that belief, or else cites some other beliefs that entail that belief. Surely my filling out of census forms does not 'flow from' my belief that either I have a wife and kids or else I have some dirty washing that's been sitting in the back of my car for the past two weeks!)

Here is one last try. A belief that p *entails* a belief that q just in case p entails q. An action *flows from* a belief just in case the best explanation

of the action adverts to that belief. A belief is *motivationally central* just in case many actions flow from beliefs that entail the belief in question. An action *depends upon* a belief just in case the action flows from a belief that entails the belief in question. *Pruss' central claim* is that, if humanly excellent activity depends upon a motivationally central belief, then, in the absence of any further information, we should say that the belief is more likely than not to be possibly true. Since I am not sure that this is what Pruss really has in mind, I shall stick with Pruss' original formulation for the remainder of my paper, and I shall simply ignore the worries just canvassed.

IV. TWO ARGUMENTS

Pruss provides two arguments in support of the claim that, if humanly excellent activity flows from some motivationally central belief, then, in the absence of any further information, we should say that the belief is more likely than not to be at least possible.
First:

> An impossible proposition entails all propositions. An intellectually sophisticated person or community reflects particularly on the entailments of beliefs that are motivationally central, and some of the motivational centrality is apt to transfer to the entailed claims. As a result, there is some likelihood that if a motivationally central proposition were in fact an impossible proposition, then the person or, especially, community would come up with an entailment q of the motivationally central proposition such that believing q would be damaging to flourishing. For instance, if they believed that circles are squares in a motivationally central way, they might draw the logical conclusion that pleasures are pains, and then they might torture people in order to give their victims pleasure. But to commit torture is significantly harmful to one's flourishing. (Pruss 2010: 235)

This is a strange argument. In the sense in which an impossible proposition 'entails' all propositions, it seems wrong to claim that an intellectually sophisticated person or community reflects particularly on the 'entailments' of beliefs that are motivationally central. Take my belief that I have a wife and kids. In the former sense of 'entails', this belief entails Fermat's Last Theorem. But there is no sense in which intellectually sophisticated persons and communities try to *derive* Fermat's Last Theorem from my belief that I have a wife and kids. (Of course, there

actually are *no* persons and communities that have *any* interest at all in deriving consequences from the claim that I have a wife and kids – but the fact that people and communities lack this interest does not, I think, suffice to show that they lack intellectual sophistication!) I'm inclined to agree with O'Connor that we are 'committed to some "opaque" internal and external relations of necessity' (2008: 67). But, once we reject the imputed connection between 'necessity' and 'explicit formal logical contradiction', any *prima facie* plausibility in Pruss' argument simply evaporates.

It is perhaps also worth noticing that it is not very plausible to suppose that people do just blindly accept the consequences of applications of *ex falso quodlibet*. As belief revisers, we are all well attuned to the 'garbage in, garbage out' principle. I am tempted to speculate that Pruss might here be conflating principles of logic with principles of rational belief revision (cf. Harman [1986]). Perhaps Pruss might say that there is surely some likelihood that even rational, reflective, well-informed inquirers might occasionally make this kind of egregious move – but I'm sceptical. Certainly, if I developed a derivation that pleasures are pains, I would be unshakeably certain that there was an error somewhere in that derivation; I would not be touting the derivation as proof of some hitherto undetected wisdom.

Second:

> An important aspect of human flourishing involves humanly and morally and intellectually excellent activity flowing from motivationally central beliefs. Maybe it is possible that humanly excellent activity would flow from beliefs that are so far wrong as to be impossible, but it does not seem very likely. A humanly excellent life would be an examined life, and a part of the point of the examination is to ensure the compatibility of one's beliefs. (Pruss 2010: 235)

Plainly enough, this argument involves the same difficulties as the first argument. But it involves further difficulties as well. Even if we accepted that a humanly excellent life must be an examined life, it is not clear that part of the point of the examination is to *ensure* the logical consistency of one's beliefs. I think that we already have evolved strategies for coping with logical inconsistencies in our beliefs: in particular, there is a lot of modularity in our believing, and inconsistencies in our beliefs are harmlessly tolerated in consequence. Of course, when inconsistent beliefs arrive together at central processing, there is work to do: but, even then, we might preserve both beliefs in their quarantined or partitioned states (cf. Lewis [1982: 438]).

Note that I am not here arguing for paraconsistency, or toleration of inconsistency in explicit theorising, or the like. I think that inconsistency is a fatal flaw in scientific and philosophical theories. But most of our believing is neither scientific nor philosophical. Moreover, many – perhaps most – of our 'motivationally central beliefs' are neither scientific nor philosophical. Consider, yet again, my belief that I have a wife and kids.

I conclude that Pruss's positive arguments for the claim that, if humanly excellent activity flows from some motivationally central belief, then, in the absence of any further information, we should say that the belief is more likely than not to be at least possible, are unconvincing. However, as noted above, I do not say that there is no other good way of arguing for this claim. In particular, I observe, again, that Pruss's claim is an easy inference from the claim that, if humanly excellent activity flows from some motivationally central belief, then, in the absence of any further information, we should say that the belief is more likely than not to be true.

V. OBJECTION

Pruss claims that 'a number of individuals and communities have led a flourishing and intellectually sophisticated life of significant length while holding a motivationally central belief that there is a maximally great being [God, a perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient creator of all else who exists in all possible worlds]' (2010: 234). And from this – by way of the claim that, if humanly excellent activity flows from some motivationally central belief, then, in the absence of any further information, we should say that the belief is more likely than not to be at least possible – he concludes that, probably, it is possible that God exists.

More carefully, what Pruss concludes – or, at any rate, by his own lights, ought to conclude – is this: given just the information that there are a number of individuals and communities that have led flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length while holding the motivationally central belief that God exists, and ignoring all other considerations, we should conclude that it is more likely than not that it is possible that God exists.

But, as we noted in our discussion of uniformly sampled beliefs and the likelihood of truth, in the context of the debate between Theists, Atheists and Agnostics, it is common ground that each position is widely held. Moreover, it seems indisputable that there are a number of individuals and

communities that have led flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length while holding motivationally central beliefs that entail that God does not exist. So oughtn't we also conclude that, ignoring all considerations other than the fact that there are a number of individuals and communities that have led flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length while holding motivationally central beliefs that entail that God does not exist, it is more likely than not that it is possible that God does not exist (and perhaps even that it is much more likely than not that it is possible that God does not exist)?

Perhaps Pruss might be meaning to argue that, since there have been *more* individuals and communities that have led flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length while holding the motivationally central belief that God exists than there have been individuals and communities that have led flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length while holding motivationally central beliefs that entail that God does not exist, it is more likely than not that it is possible that God exists. But surely he's just wrong in thinking that belief in God (a perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient creator of all else who exists in all possible worlds!) has been motivationally central in the majority of individuals and communities that have led flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length. Consider the extent of flourishing and intellectual sophistication in lives of significant length in Ancient China, Ancient India, and Ancient Greece. Consider the extent of flourishing and intellectual sophistication in lives of significant length amongst Deists, Pantheists, Buddhists, and Non-Necessitarian Theists (not to mention Free-Thinkers, Sceptics, Atheists, Rationalists, Naturalists, and Secularists of all stripes).

In response to this kind of objection, Pruss claims to have three moves available. For each case, he claims that he can argue (a) that the belief in question is actually compossible with the existence of God and so not in conflict with it; or (b) that the belief in question is either not motivationally central to a flourishing life or makes a less rational contribution to that life than theistic belief does to flourishing theists; or (c) that the belief in question is undercut by the existence of a decisive argument against it.

Given the conclusion that Pruss is aiming for, (c) seems to be beside the point. If we are ignoring all other considerations, then we are ignoring all other considerations. On his own account, Pruss is not claiming that

the premise in his argument is an all-things-considered probability; rather, it is an all-other-things-ignored probability.

Given the conclusion that Pruss is aiming for, (a) seems to be of very limited use. On Pruss' own account, Theism says that every possible world contains an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good creator of everything else. Any view that holds that it is *possible* that there is not an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good creator of everything else is not 'compossible' with Theism. Likewise for any view that holds that it is *actually* the case that there is not an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good creator of everything else. Almost all non-Theistic worldviews fit into both of these categories.

Given the conclusion that Pruss is aiming for, deployment of (b) also seems to have very limited use. What Pruss wants to argue is that, whereas the belief that God exists is motivationally central for (many) Theists, the beliefs that entail that God does not exist are not motivationally central for (many) non-Theists. But, no matter how we understand 'motivational centrality', this seems broadly implausible. It is evidently true that the actions and motives of many non-theists would be vastly different if they gave up those of their beliefs that entail that God does not exist (while remaining in good cognitive shape). It is no less plainly true that relevant counterparts to the belief that God exists – e.g. the belief that causal reality is exhausted by natural reality – figure equally prominently in explanations of particular actions. (Why did I squirm when my sole Theistic guest insisted on loudly saying grace before dinner? Why did I spend almost every waking minute of last weekend playing cricket? Why did I insist that my children be excused from religious indoctrination sessions at school? Etc.) Of course, to claim 'equal prominence' is not necessarily to claim that any such beliefs *do* figure prominently in explanations of particular actions: we have already noted grounds for scepticism about how much of my behaviour is actually explained in terms of my belief that I have a wife and kids (and similar grounds could be urged in connection with the belief that God exists and the belief that causal reality is exhausted by natural reality). However, even if equal prominence is only equal lack of prominence, that would suffice to defeat Pruss' view.

Perhaps there is something further that Pruss might say in response to these objections to deployment of (b). He says the following things:

> Belief in God typically enters motivationally into the lives of persons and communities in multiple ways. It makes them see the natural world around them as created by God, and it makes it possible for them to see their neighbour as made in the image of God. It gives them hope in a providential government of the world. It confers a deep felt meaning on their lives and the lives of those around them, by entailing that somehow behind this physical reality there is that than which no greater can be thought. It gives fruit for meditation and grounds contemplation, which not only are constitutive parts of a person's flourishing, but profoundly help form distinctive character traits. Divine love provides an example for meditation. And so on. (Pruss 2010: 236)

> While it seems likely that theism tends to be central to the motivational life of theists, to many atheists atheism is not motivationally central. The atheist probably does not kiss her husband because she thinks that there is no God, and it is arguably unlikely that she helps the needy because she thinks there is no God. But a theist might well kiss her husband because she believes that the spousal relationship is a reflection of God's love, and she might help the needy because the needy are children of God. In fact, it seems that there is something crabbed in a life motivationally centred on a negative doctrine like atheism. (Pruss 2010: 243)

> The most central of beliefs are going to motivate not just one's scientific life, but also one's interpersonal life. And there the belief that all causation is natural causation does not seem helpful. It might even induce worries about free will and responsibility that are deleterious to flourishing. The theistic scientist, on the other hand, can be motivated in both her interpersonal life by her seeing others as images of God as well as in her scientific life by a belief that God exists and would likely give created agents epistemic powers at least somewhat commensurate with their thirst for knowledge. (Pruss 2010: 245)

I take it that what Pruss is effectively saying here (and in related passages sprinkled throughout his article) is that those who believe that God exists – while leading flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length – typically exhibit certain kinds of virtues *because* they hold the belief that God exists, whereas those who do not believe that God exists – while leading flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length – exhibit the virtues that they do in fact exhibit *in spite of* the beliefs that they hold that entail that God

does not exist. If this is what Pruss is saying, then it seems to me that what he says is largely the expression of theistic prejudice.

If we accept what Pruss says about what belief in God can do, then we can hardly deny that belief in God can also: make it possible for people to see their neighbours as competitors for, or obstacles to, their own salvation; give people overwhelming fear of eternal punishment and damnation; destroy meaning and value by orienting believers lives around merely hoped for future existence (if, indeed, God does not actually exist); and so forth. Moreover, if we look at data that seems relevant to human flourishing – e.g. correlations between religiosity and societal dysfunction – we find that, if anything, there is a correlation between diminished religiosity and improved societal outcomes (see Paul [2005]). At the very least, this data certainly does not speak in favour of the motivational superiority of belief in God. Consequently, it seems to me to be incredible to suppose that there is the sharp division that Pruss discerns, within the class of those who lead flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length, between those who hold worldviews that entail that God exists and those who hold worldviews that entail that God does not exist. As far as I can see, flourishing falls equally upon those who have God-entailing worldviews and those who have God-denying worldviews. Moreover, as far as I can see, the belief that God exists has no greater role in explaining the flourishing of those who have God-entailing worldviews than beliefs that entail that God does not exist have in explaining the flourishing of those with God-denying worldviews. It is implausible to suppose that worldviews have some extra motivational role for believers that they do not have for non-believers; it is no less implausible to suppose that the belief that God exists is somehow more central to God-entailing worldviews than claims that entail that God does not exist are to God-denying worldviews.

Perhaps it is worth noting here that I agree with Pruss that an atheist does not kiss her husband because she thinks that there is no God, and nor does she help the needy because there is no God. Rather, an atheist kisses her husband because she loves him, and helps the needy because they are in need of help. If a theist kisses her husband because she believes that the spousal relationship is a reflection of God's love, and helps the needy because the needy are children of God, then – *pace* Pruss – it seems to me that it is the *theist* who has the crabbed motivation. At the very least, it seems that her husband can justly complain that there is one thought too many involved in that kiss; and the needy could justly

complain that there is one thought too many involved in that charitable activity (cf. Williams [1981: 18]).

Perhaps it is also worth noting that Pruss' claims about the ways in which belief in God can enter motivationally into the lives of people and communities do not ring entirely true. What Pruss is trying to establish is that the belief *that* God exists enters motivationally into the lives of people and communities. But it is sleight of hand to transfer motivational consequences from belief *in* God to the belief *that* God exists. After all, one could believe *that* God exists without believing that one's neighbours are made in the image of God, or that there is an afterlife, etc. To say that someone believes *in* God is typically to say – or perhaps implicate – that that one has certain kinds of motivations (though no doubt there is a role for context, interest, and so forth in the determination of the relevant class of motivations); to say that someone believes *that* God exists is typically not to say – or perhaps implicate – anything much about that person's motivations.

Perhaps it is further worth saying that the belief that all causation is natural causation – i.e. that there are no supernatural causes or supernatural agents – plainly has some beneficial motivational consequences: after all, pretty much everyone agrees that *most* beliefs about supernatural causes and supernatural agents are false, and that *most* superstitious beliefs militate against human flourishing. Moreover, it is unclear why it is impossible to maintain that natural causation includes natural agent causation – and so it is unclear why the belief that all causation is natural causation should be thought to be a potential threat to moral responsibility even by those who suppose that agent causation is necessary for moral responsibility.

I conclude that Pruss has certainly not made good his claim that beliefs that entail that God does not exist are either not motivationally central to flourishing lives or else makes less rational contributions to those lives than theistic beliefs do to the lives of flourishing theists.

More broadly, I conclude that there are many different reasons for being sceptical about Pruss' (implicit) assertion that considerations, about the motivational role that the belief that God exists plays in God-entailing worldviews and the motivational role that beliefs that entail that God does not exist play in God-denying worldviews, significantly support the contention that *relative only to information about flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length, the possibility of God's existence is more likely than not*.

VI. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Pruss' paper raises a number of other interesting considerations. I have space to comment upon only a few of them.

First, it is worth noting that there is a genuine dispute about the connection between false belief and human flourishing. Pruss allows that it might be that false beliefs are central to flourishing human lives:

> One can imagine a doctor who leads a flourishing and intellectually sophisticated life bringing an expensive cancer treatment to the needy. A belief in the effectiveness of the treatment will be motivationally central to her life, but her life is not much less a flourishing human life should it turn out that all the studies that claimed the treatment to be effective were in fact wrong. (Pruss 2010: 234)

It is not obvious that Pruss is right about this case. A natural judgment in this case is that the doctor wasted her life: she did no better than she would have done had she organised large shipments of sugar pills to those with cancer. More generally, one might think – as I believe that Aristotle did – that having true motivationally central beliefs is a necessary condition for human flourishing. However, if getting things right – or, at any rate, not getting things wrong, at least in certain ways – is necessary for flourishing, then there is a clear potential threat to Pruss' argument. If, for example, Theistic belief is consistent with flourishing just in case Theistic belief is true, then it becomes impossible to assess the truth of Pruss' key premise without a *prior* assessment of the comparative merits of Theism, Atheism and Agnosticism. (And, of course, there are many Theists who do suppose that their flourishing depends upon the truth of their Theistic beliefs: 'If Christ be not risen, my life is all in vain', etc.)

Second, it is worth observing that Pruss makes quite a deal about the possibility of motivationally central beliefs in flourishing and intellectually sophisticated subjects that involve 'Kripkean' necessary falsehoods:

> (i) George believes that Dorothy is his biological daughter and this belief is near the motivational centre of his life, but Dorothy is not his daughter, having been swapped at birth. (ii) Patricia believes that electrons are manifestations of a field, and her life-work as a physicist is centred on this belief, but in fact electrons are essentially particles. (iii) A fair amount of Dr. Livingstone's activity was based on the assumption that the Lualaba River was the Nile; but, in fact, the Lualaba was the Upper Congo, and so it is metaphysically impossible that the Lualaba be the Nile. (Pruss 2010: 237)

Pruss essays two responses to these kinds of cases. The 'more daring' response is to insist that 'motivational centrality of these kinds of beliefs detracts from the flourishingness of lives' (2010: 237):

> George would flourish more if he focussed less on the biological aspects of paternity. Patricia would live a more intellectually open scientific life if she were more open to the possibility of field theories of electrons being false. And Dr. Livingstone would perhaps have done more good to the science of geography were he not focussed on a Quixotic quest for the sources of the Nile. (Pruss 2010: 237)

To the extent that these responses push in the direction of the idea that flourishing depends upon not holding false beliefs – or at least not holding certain kinds of false beliefs – these responses also raise the possibility that it is not possible to assess the truth of Pruss' key premise without a *prior* assessment of the comparative merits of Theism, Atheism and Agnosticism.

Pruss favours – 'presses' – a response that invokes two-dimensionalism. If we say that a sentence S is *metaphysically possible* just in case its secondary intension is true at some world, and conceivable just in case its *primary intension* is true at some world, then we can accommodate 'Kripkean' cases by modifying the central claim in Pruss' argument so that it says that: 'if humanly excellent activity flows from some motivationally central belief, then, in the absence of any further information, we should say that the belief is more likely than not to be at least possible *or conceivable*.' However – as Pruss in effect notes, at least *inter alia* – even if we have no qualms about the two-dimensional framework, it is obvious that this framework is insufficient to represent the dispute between Theists, Atheists and Agnostics. A 'neutral' – or 'negotiated' – representation of the concept of God will have it that either (as Theists suppose) God exists in all possible worlds, or else (as Atheists suppose) God exists in no possible worlds. Given that we hold fixed the identity of primary and secondary intension in the case of 'God', there are still two 'possibilities' for the relevant 'unified' intension of 'God' (all worlds, or none). Of course, these 'possibilities' are not jointly representable in the two-dimensional framework as either metaphysically possible or conceivable – but the correct conclusion to draw from this, I think, is that accommodation of 'Kripkean' cases is a peripheral concern that has no bearing on the main game (given that our interest lies in addressing questions about the existence of God).

Third, it is worth paying some further attention to Pruss' claim that the probability of the possibility of motivationally central beliefs:

> ... increases roughly in proportion to such factors as: how motivationally central the belief is, how flourishing the individual or community x is, how much of x's humanly excellent activity flows from that belief, how rational the motivational connection between the belief and the humanly excellent activity is, how intellectually sophisticated x is, how long the time span involved is, how large a community x is, and so on' (Pruss 2010: 236).

Perhaps there is a sense in which this is at least partly right. In the absence of all other information, perhaps we should judge that beliefs that everybody holds are more likely to be true than beliefs that only some people hold. In the absence of all other information, perhaps we should judge that majority beliefs – beliefs that are held by the majority of people – are more likely to be true than beliefs that are only held by a minority of people.

However, once we add in the information that there is serious – protracted, perennial – disagreement about a claim, it becomes much less clear that we should suppose that majority opinion is more likely to be correct. As noted above, the context within which Pruss' argument is constructed is one in which it is taken for granted that there is serious – protracted, perennial – dispute between Theists, Atheists, and Agnostics. In the context of assessment of Pruss' argument, there is something very odd about the suggestion that the information that there is serious – protracted, perennial – disagreement about the existence of God might be properly ignored, or that serious interest attaches to questions about what one ought to think if this information is part of the information that is ignored.

Fourth, Pruss has remarks to make about polytheism, pantheism, illusionism, and non-religious atheism that work with the strategies (a)-(c) that he suggests can be used to defeat the claim that there have been significant numbers of individuals and communities that have led flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length while holding motivationally central beliefs that entail that God does not exist. Many of these remarks seem to me to misrepresent the views in question.

Consider polytheism. I take it that polytheists believe that there are many gods: many supernatural beings or forces that have and exercise power over natural reality that are not, in turn, under the power of higher-ranking or more powerful beings or forces. But, if there are many gods, and if there is nothing that has and exercises power over any

of the gods, then there is no maximally great being. But then, *pace* Pruss, polytheism entails the denial of Theism, and nothing that he says tells against the idea that there have been individuals and communities that have led flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length while holding motivationally central polytheistic beliefs.

Consider pantheists. I take it that pantheists deny that it is possible that deity exist even though the physical universe does not; whereas, on Pruss' own account, Theists allow that it is possible that God exists, even though the physical universe does not (because, say, God chooses not to create anything else). But then, *pace* Pruss, deity is necessarily distinct from God, and pantheism entails the denial of Theism. Again, nothing that Pruss says tells against the idea that there have been individuals and communities that have led flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length while holding motivationally central pantheistic beliefs.

Etc. (I leave examination of Pruss' other cases to the interested reader.) One final observation that is perhaps worth making is that Pruss does not have anything to say about the case of theists who are not Theists, i.e. about those who think that there is just one god, but that this god is not 'essentially omnipotent, essentially omniscient, essentially perfectly good, essentially the creator of all else, and necessarily existent'. His argument requires that individuals and communities who hold motivationally central beliefs that are theistic but non-Theistic are less likely to lead flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length than individuals and communities who hold motivationally central beliefs that are Theistic. I do not think that I will be alone in finding this somewhat implausible: at the very least, I'd like to know what reason there could possibly be to accept this.

VII. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Pruss claims that the following argument 'provides [defeasible] reason to believe that there exists a being that is perfectly good, omnipotent, and omniscient in all worlds' (2010: 248):

(1) Necessarily, if x is a maximally great being, then x exists in all possible worlds and is perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient, and creator of any and all contingent beings in every world.

(2) If x is a human individual or community that leads a flourishing and intellectually sophisticated life of significant length while holding a motivationally central belief that p, then, probably, it is possible that p is true.

(3) A number of individuals and communities have led flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length while holding a motivationally central belief that there is a maximally great being.
(4) (Therefore) Probably it is possible that there is a maximally great being. (From 2, 3)
(5) (Therefore) Probably there is a maximally great being. (From 1, 4)

However, the merits of Pruss' argument come most clearly into view when we compare it with the following argument:

(1) Necessarily, if x is a maximally great being, then x exists in all possible worlds and is perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient, and creator of any and all contingent beings in every world.
(2) If x is a human individual or community that leads a flourishing and intellectually sophisticated life of significant length while holding motivationally central beliefs that entail that p, then, probably, it is possible that p is true.
(3) A number of individuals and communities have led flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives of significant length while holding motivationally central beliefs that entail that there is no maximally great being.
(4) (Therefore) Probably it is possible that there is no maximally great being. (From 2, 3)
(5) (Therefore) Probably there is no maximally great being. (From 1, 4)

There are two significant options. On the one hand, Pruss could concede that the latter argument provides defeasible reason to believe that there does not exist a being that is perfectly good, omnipotent, and omniscient in all worlds. However, if we take this path, then it seems clear that the defeasible reasons annul one another: taken together, the two arguments do nothing to resolve the dispute between Theists, Atheists and Agnostics. (And this is true whether or not we remember to interpret the 'probability' in question as an 'all-other-things-ignored' probability.) On the other hand, Pruss could insist that, while the third premise in the first argument is true, the third premise in the second argument is false. But it seems to me that there is no construal of the key terms that are used in the formulation of these third premises under which rational Agnostics and Atheists are obliged to concur. Indeed, I think that only Theistic prejudice against Atheists – including theists! – and Agnostics could lead one to suppose that there is neutral reason to give *greater*

credence to the third premise of the first argument than to the third premise of the second argument.

One final observation. There is a question to ask about the connection between *worldviews* and human flourishing. Whether individuals and communities lead flourishing and intellectually sophisticated lives may be dependent upon worldview. If so, then worldviews are motivationally central, and the facts about the distribution of individual and community flourishing suggest that, among worldviews, Theistic worldviews can claim no special motivational privilege. On the other hand, if not, then worldviews are not motivationally central, and, *ipso facto*, Theistic worldviews can claim no special motivational privilege. Either way, then, Theistic worldviews can claim no special motivational privilege. Perhaps – *perhaps*! – if worldviews are motivationally central, the belief that God exists has a particular motivational centrality in Theistic worldviews that is not matched by any corresponding *single* belief in non-Theistic worldviews. But, *even if so*, this supplies no one with reason to suppose that the belief that God exists is possibly true. Or so it seems to me.

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IS THERE A SHALLOW LOGICAL REFUTATION OF THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT?[1]

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Abstract. The beauty of Anselm's ontological argument is, I believe, that no matter how one approaches it, one cannot refute it without making a significant metaphysical assumption, one that is likely to be contentious in its own right. Peter Millican (2004, 2007) disagrees. He introduces an objection according to which one can refute the argument merely by analysing its shallow logical details, without making any significant metaphysical assumption. He maintains, moreover, that his objection does not depend on a specific reading of the relevant Anselmian text; in fact, Millican claims that his objection is applicable to *every* version of the ontological argument. In this paper, I argue that Millican's objection does not succeed, because, contrary to what he says, in order to justify his objection he does have to make a deep metaphysical assumption and rely on a specific reading of Anselm's text.

I. INTRODUCTION

In his 2004 paper, Peter Millican formulates the ontological argument found in Anselm's *Proslogion* and develops a radically new objection to it. In my 2007 paper I argue for the following three claims: (i) it is not obvious that Anselm's text supports Millican's formulation of the ontological argument, (ii) there is an alternative formulation of the argument that is consistent with the text, and (iii) the alternative formulation is not vulnerable to Millican's objection. In his 2007 paper Millican argues that the alternative formulation fails, for more or less the same reason that the original formulation fails. The aim of this paper is to raise a difficulty

[1] This paper was read at a meeting of the Joseph Butler Society at Oriel College, Oxford. I would like to thank members of the society for helpful comments and useful suggestions. I would also like to thank Peter Millican for our exchange on the ontological argument.

with Millican's attempt to refute the alternative formulation. Although this paper results from my exchange with Millican over the last couple of years it does not presuppose any familiarity with the earlier papers.

One might claim that it is not very important to examine Millican's particular objection to the ontological argument because there is a general consensus among philosophers that the argument fails one way or the other anyway. I disagree. The beauty of the ontological argument is, I believe, that no matter how one approaches it one cannot, if it is formulated properly, refute it without making a significant metaphysical assumption. Such an assumption seems likely to be contentious independently of the debate over the argument itself. In other words, there can be no objection to the ontological argument that is obviously and uncontroversially successful; this is indeed what the history of the debate on the argument seems to have proved for 930-odd years. It is important to determine the cogency of Millican's objection precisely because he diametrically opposes such a view. According to Millican, we can refute the ontological argument with relative ease, merely by analysing its shallow logical structure *without* making any significant metaphysical assumption. Millican says, moreover, that his objection does not depend on a specific reading of the relevant Anselmian text; in fact, he claims that his objection is applicable to *all* versions of the ontological argument.

In what follows, I argue that Millican's objection to the ontological argument does not succeed because in order to advance his objection Millican does, ironically, have to make a deep metaphysical assumption and rely on a specific reading of Anselm's text.

II. TWO DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF MILLICAN'S OBJECTION

Millican's objection to the ontological argument has two distinctive features. The first is that, unlike other existing objections, his objection is meant to undermine the argument without questioning any of Anselm's implicit or explicit metaphysical assumptions. Consider, for example, the following two well-known objections that Millican contrasts with his own objection.

> *The comparison difficulty*: There seems to be something logically odd about purporting to compare something that exists only 'in the mind' with something existing in reality. Therefore Anselm's premise ... which crucially depends on the possibility of doing so, is dubious (Millican 2004, p. 443).

> *The Kantian dogma ('existence is not a predicate'):* As Kant famously argued (anticipated to a significant extent by Gassendi and Hume), it seems dubious to consider something's existence as a property that characterizes it, and hence as a factor that can contribute to the assessment of its greatness. Rather, its existence seems to be something presupposed if it is to have any properties at all (Millican 2004, p. 443).

Millican thinks that such objections as the comparison difficulty and the Kantian dogma are at best ineffective because in order to defend them one has to commit oneself to controversial, deep metaphysical assumptions such as that the greatness of an existent entity and the greatness of a non-existent entity are not comparable or that existence is not a property that characterizes its possessor. He maintains that his objection is better because it sets aside any metaphysical assumptions and questions only shallow logical details of the ontological argument. Thus, as I explain below, he tries to construct an objection by appealing, on behalf of Anselm, to 'a radically non-Kantian theory of existence-independent "natures" within which [Anselm's] argument can be framed so as to resist the standard objections' and 'identify a hitherto unremarked flaw in [Anselm's] reasoning which not only invalidates the argument in its original form, but which also, unlike those standard objections, operates at a level which makes it ineradicable by any plausible reformulation' (Millican 2004, p. 438). In using the term 'nature' Millican refers to an existence-independent entity and speaks of a nature as 'instantiated' if such an entity exists in reality.

The second unique feature of Millican's objection is that it purports to be neutral with respect to the interpretation of the relevant text, even though it might appear otherwise initially. Consider a key sentence in Chapter 2 of Anselm's *Proslogion*. M. J. Charlesworth translates the sentence as follows:

> (Translation 1) [I]f [God] exists solely in the mind even, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. (Anselm 1077-1078, p. 117)

This translation suggests that Anselm compares two beings: God existing only in the mind and God existing in the mind as well as in reality. Millican (2004) claims, however, that this is a mistranslation. He says that it should, rather, be translated as follows:

> (Translation 2) [I]f [God] exists solely in the mind, something that is greater can be thought to exist in reality also. (Millican 2004, p. 439)

Millican says that Translation 2, which can fairly be regarded as a non-standard interpretation,[2] implies that, contrary to what Translation 1 says, Anselm compares God existing only in the mind and something else (*i.e.*, something that isn't God) existing in the mind as well as in reality. However, Millican emphasises that he is 'undogmatic about the interpretative issue' and 'insist[s on his objection] on a philosophical point' (Millican 2007, p. 1041). In fact he thinks that 'objections in a similar spirit could be made against *all* versions of the [o]ntological [a]rgument', not just the specific version that Millican formulates on the basis of his non-standard reading of Anselm's text (p. 1043).

III. MILLICAN'S THEORY OF NATURE

Millican claims that in order to construct a successful objection to the ontological argument it is helpful to introduce a theory that enables 'reference to be made to an "entity" (such as God) without presupposing either its existence or its non-existence' (p. 449). Millican uses the term 'nature' to denote an existence-independent entity and speaks of a nature as 'instantiated' if such an entity exists in reality.

According to Millican's theory of natures, the nature of, for example, Laika, *i.e.*, the Russian space dog, can be expressed as follows:

<*Laika*>: <first dog to be sent into space>

In general, the first set of angle brackets encloses the name of a nature and the second set encloses at least one of the most significant properties of that nature. Following this format, the natures of Lassie, *i.e.*, the television dog, and Kings Alfred and Arthur, *i.e.*, British heroes, can be expressed as follows:

<*Lassie*>: <dog, catches villains, rescues victims, star of film and TV>

<*Alfred*>: <King of England, defeated the Danes, translated Boethius>

<*Arthur*>: <saintly and heroic king, kept a court of knights, sought the Holy Grail>

[2] See, for example, Graham Oppy (2008, pp. 114-115). Oppy surveys five recent formulations of the ontological argument provided by Millican, Timothy Chambers, Jordan Howard Sobel, Nicholas Everitt, and Brian Leftow. Among these five interpreters, only Millican formulates the argument in terms of the comparison of greatness between God existing only in the mind and something else existing both in the mind and in reality, instead of the comparison of greatness between God existing only in the mind and God existing both in the mind and in reality.

Millican maintains that Anselm subscribes implicitly to this theory of natures, which enables him to rank them on the basis of their greatness. According to Millican's interpretation, Anselm thinks that 'among the various criteria for greatness (power, wisdom, goodness, *etc.*) real existence [or instantiation] "trumps" all others, so that any nature which has a real archetype, however lowly its characteristic properties may be, will on that account alone be greater than any nature, however impressively characterized, which does not' (p. 451). This means that, according to Millican's interpretation, Anselm endorses the following principle:

> The Principle of the Superiority of Existence (PSE): Any nature that is instantiated is greater than any nature that is not instantiated (or any nature that is conceived only in the mind).

Suppose that Lassie is more courageous and smarter than Laika. According to PSE, however, <Lassie> is less great than <Laika> because it is not, unlike <Laika>, instantiated. It is controversial whether or not King Arthur really existed; that is, whether or not <Arthur> was instantiated. If <Arthur> *was* instantiated, then it is the greatest among the above four natures, for its existence immediately defeats <Lassie> and its other great-making properties defeat <Laika> and <Alfred>. On the other hand, if <Arthur> was not instantiated, then it is not as great as <Alfred> or even <Laika>. It is only greater than <Lassie>.

Now the nature of God can be expressed as follows:

<*God*>: <omniperfect, creator of the universe>

Omniperfection includes all divine properties, such as omniscience, omnipotence and moral perfection. If <God> is instantiated, then it is greater than the above four natures, or indeed any natures at all, except <God> itself.[3] On the other hand, if <God> is not instantiated, then it is not even as great as <Laika>; it is only greater than all other *un*instantiated natures such as <Lassie>.

Using the concept of natures, Millican presents his interpretation of the ontological argument as follows (pp. 457-458):

> (1) The phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought' is clearly understood by the Fool, and apparently makes sense.
>
> (2) Hence we can take the phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought' as successfully denoting some specific nature.

[3] Here I assume that no other nature is as great as <God>.

(3) A nature which is instantiated in reality is greater than one which is not.
(4) So if a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought were not instantiated in reality, then it would be possible to think of a nature that is greater (for example, any nature that is in fact instantiated in reality).
(5) But this would be a contradiction, since it is obviously impossible to think of a nature that is greater than a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought.
(6) Therefore a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought must indeed be instantiated in reality.

Notice that premise (3) is equivalent to PSE. On the basis of the above interpretation and the theory of natures, Millican provides a unique objection to the ontological argument. Whether or not it is legitimate to reformulate the ontological argument in terms of natures, as Millican does, is a matter of further debate. In this paper, however, I assume, in favour of Millican, that it *is* legitimate.

IV. MILLICAN'S OBJECTION TO THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Millican's objection is concerned with the most crucial phrase in Anselm's ontological argument, namely, 'a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought', which appears in premises (1), (2), (4) and (5). Millican maintains that there are four possible interpretations of this phrase:

(i) A nature that is so great that no nature is greater
(ii) A nature that can be thought so great that no nature can be thought greater
(iii) A nature that is so great that no nature can be thought greater
(iv) A nature that can be thought so great that no nature is greater

Now assume that the following is the greatest instantiated nondivine nature:

<*Aurelius*>: <absolute Emperor of the Roman Empire, wise, just, beneficent>

On this assumption, atheists would think that <Aurelius> is the greatest instantiated nature *simpliciter*, and *a fortiori* the greatest nature *simpliciter*. Millican argues that none of the above four possible interpretations of the phrase enables Anselm to convince atheists to hold that <God>, rather than <Aurelius>, is the greatest nature.

Consider each of (i) through (iv). Given PSE the following observations can be made:

Phrase (i) denotes an instantiated nature that is so great that no instantiated nature is greater. Atheists would think that, on this interpretation, the phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought' refers to <Aurelius> rather than <God>. Here, the ontological argument yields the trivial conclusion that the greatest nature is instantiated, *i.e.*, that there exists the greatest existent being.

Phrase (ii) denotes a nature such that *if* it exists, it is so great that no nature can possibly be thought greater. In this case, the phrase refers successfully to <God> and the ontological argument runs smoothly through premise (4). However, it fails at premise (5), according to which it is impossible to think of a nature that is greater than a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought. Given PSE, atheists would claim that it *is* possible to think of a nature that is greater than a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought; namely, any nature that is instantiated (*e.g.*, <Laika>, <Alfred>, <Aurelius>, *etc.*). From the atheistic point of view, they are greater simply because, unlike <God>, they are instantiated.

(iii) denotes an instantiated nature that is so great that no nature can possibly be thought greater. Atheists would not think of this phrase as denoting any nature at all, because there is no such nature unless <God> is instantiated. On this interpretation, premise (2), *i.e.*, that we can take the phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought' as successfully denoting some specific nature, is unwarranted.

(iv) denotes a nature such that *if* it is instantiated it is so great that no instantiated nature is greater. In this case, the phrase could refer to <God>.[4] However, the ontological argument fails, again, at premise (5) because, given PSE, it *is* possible for atheists to think of a nature that is greater than <God>, namely, instantiated natures, such as <Laika>, <Alfred> and <Aurelius>.

Therefore, Millican concludes that Anselm's ontological argument fails to prove the existence of God.[5]

[4] Here the phrase can refer to the nature of any uninstantiated being that is greater than the natures of all instantiated beings. <God> falls into this category but the phrase could also refer to other natures that are not as great as <God>. For example, it could refer to the nature of a being that is just like Aurelius but slightly more powerful.

[5] In addition to this main objection, Millican introduces a supplementary objection, which appeals to a Gaunilo-type parody argument (pp. 459-463). According to the objection, there must be something wrong with Anselm's reasoning because we can

V. THE ALTERNATIVE FORMULATION OF THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

In my 2007 paper I introduce the following alternative formulation of the ontological argument, which is consistent with the relevant Anselmian text. More specifically, it is consistent with both Translations 1 and 2 above (Nagasawa, 2007, pp. 1035-1036):

(1) The phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought' is clearly understood by the Fool, and apparently makes sense.
(2) Hence we can take the phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought' as successfully denoting some specific nature.
(3') A-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought that is instantiated in reality is greater than a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought that is conceived only in the mind (because existence is a great-making property).
(4') So if a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought were not instantiated in reality, then it would be possible to think of a nature that is greater; namely, a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought that is instantiated in reality.
(5) But this would be a contradiction, since it is obviously impossible to think of a nature that is greater than a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought.
(6) Therefore a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought must indeed be instantiated in reality.

I maintain that this formulation of the ontological argument is not vulnerable to Millican's objection. Premises (1) and (2) say that, whether or not theism is true, the phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought' can be understood by anyone and, hence, the phrase denotes a specific nature, irrespective of its existence in reality. In particular, given that the phrase is interpreted as *a nature that can be thought so great that no nature can be thought greater* (interpretation (ii) above), it successfully denotes <God>. Premise (3') says that a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought that is instantiated in reality is greater than a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought that is

construct, from the ontological argument, a parallel argument that yields the absurd conclusion that 'AntiGod' exists, where AntiGod is a being that is almost identical to God, except that, instead of being morally perfect, it is 'most effectively evil'. The parody objection is interesting because, just like Millican's main objection but unlike all other objections, it tries to refute the ontological argument without making any metaphysical assumptions. See Nagasawa (2010) for a critical assessment of this objection.

conceived only in the mind. This premise is based on the anti-Kantian assumption that existence *is* a great-making property. Again, Millican tries not to dispute any deep metaphysical issues in advancing his objection to the ontological argument. Specifically, as we saw in Section 2, he does not dispute the anti-Kantian assumption. Hence, in order to remain consistent with his own methodology, he cannot reject premise (3'). Premises (4') and (5) say that it would be contradictory if a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought were not instantiated in reality because it would then be possible to think of a nature that is greater than a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought, namely, the same nature that is instantiated in reality. Notice that the argument no longer fails at (5) because it abandons PSE by replacing (3) with (3'). Given (3') it is indeed *im*possible for atheists to think of a nature that is greater than a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought. The argument concludes that, therefore, a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought must be instantiated in reality.

VI. MILLICAN'S RESPONSE AND THE ALTERNATIVE FORMULATION

Millican (2007) agrees with me that the above formulation of the ontological argument does not fail in the exact same way as the original version does. Nevertheless, he maintains that it 'fails in a closely related way' (Millican 2007, p. 1041). He claims, in particular, that it fails not for a deep metaphysical reason but, again, for its shallow logical details. In what follows, however, I argue that Millican's claim is not cogent because, contrary to what he says, in order to apply his objection to the above formulation he does have to rely on a deep metaphysical assumption and a specific reading of Anselm's text.

Millican accepts (1) and (2). He agrees that if we interpret the phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought' as, as I assume, *a nature that can be thought so great that no nature can be thought greater*, then the phrase is understood even by atheists and successfully denotes <God>. Millican argues, however, that I fail to defend the rest of the argument:

> But in [defending the rest of the argument] Nagasawa – just like Anselm – is blurring the distinction between the level of greatness that some nature *actually* has, and the level of greatness that it *can be thought* to have. Consider, for example, his initial statement of the claim that 'if there were <God> that is instantiated in reality and <God> that

> is conceived only in the mind, then the former would be greater than the latter'. This conditional may sound plausible, but in fact it is deeply muddled because its antecedent does not describe any possible situation: the nature <God> – which Nagasawa takes to be the referent of Anselm's key phrase – is either instantiated in reality or it is not, and *it cannot be both*. (Millican 2007, p. 1051)

This passage seems to miss my point. Again, the nature <God> is defined by Millican himself as follows:

> <*God*>: <omniperfect, creator of the universe> (Millican 2004, p. 453)

My point quoted in the above passage is that the nature described as <omniperfect, creator of the universe> would be greater if it were instantiated in reality than if it were not. Here existence is treated as a property, so there is nothing contradictory in comparing an omniperfect creator of the universe *with* the property of being existent and the same being *without* that property. It is true, as Millican says, that the same being cannot be both existent and non-existent simultaneously, but that is irrelevant to my point.

Millican's response to my argument is more clearly explained in the following passage:

> Now with this point in mind look at Nagasawa's step (4'), which says that if <God> were not instantiated in reality, then it would be possible to think of a nature 'that *is* greater', namely, <God> 'that *is* instantiated in reality ([Millican's] emphasis). But if <God> is not, in fact, instantiated in reality, then it is not possible to think of any nature that *in fact* achieves this higher level of greatness: thinking of <God> *as instantiated* adds nothing to its *actual* level of greatness. (p. 1052)

This passage suggests that Millican's theory of natures does not allow the comparison of greatness between uninstantiated <*x*> and instantiated <*x*>, even though it might allow the comparison of greatness between uninstantiated <*x*> *being thought of not existing in reality* and uninstantiated <*x*> *being thought of existing in reality*. Millican thinks that the comparison of greatness between uninstantiated <*x*> and instantiated <*x*> does not make sense because if <*x*> is not instantiated in reality, there is no such thing as <*x*> that *is* instantiated in reality. That is why he rejects premises (3') and (4') of the alternative formulation, where the argument makes the comparison of greatness between a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought that is instantiated in reality and the same nature that is not instantiated in reality. Yet this means that Millican

commits himself, unconsciously, to a version of the comparison difficulty, which says, as we saw in Section 2, that '[t]here seems to be something logically odd about purporting to compare something that exists only "in the mind" with something existing in reality' (Millican 2004, p. 443). Thus, Millican's objection to the alternative formulation is not as metaphysically neutral as he thinks it is. The comparison difficulty, to which Millican does not allow opponents of the ontological argument to commit themselves, is hidden in his own theory of natures. (The version of the comparison difficulty that Millican endorses might be slightly weaker than the standard version introduced in Section 2 of this paper, because while the standard version does not seem to allow the comparison of greatness between any instantiated nature, on the one hand, and any uninstantiated nature, on the other, his version allows the comparison of greatness between instantiated <*x*> and uninstantiated <*y*> provided that *x* is not identical to *y*. For example, Millican allows the comparison of greatness between instantiated <Aurelius> and uninstantiated <God>.[6] As I explain below, however, whether or not Millican's comparison difficulty is weaker than the standard version is beside the point.)

There is yet another problem for Millican, which is that his response to the alternative formulation contradicts his own claim that he does not rely on a specific reading of Anselm's text. As I mentioned earlier, the standard reading of the relevant passage in the *Proslogion* suggests that Anselm compares two beings: God existing only in the mind and God existing both in the mind and in reality, rather than God existing only in the mind and something else existing both in the mind and in reality. If, as Millican says himself, he is 'undogmatic about the interpretative issue' (Millican 2007, p. 1041), he has to be open to the standard reading.

[6] Millican's objection to the original formulation of the ontological argument is based on the assumption that Anselm endorses PSE, which, again, says that a nature that is instantiated in reality is greater than one that is not. Millican thinks that we can safely make this assumption because Anselm does not correct Gaunilo's attribution of the following thesis to him: 'if this same being [God] exists in the mind alone, anything that existed also in reality would be greater than this being' (Gaunilo 1078, p. 157). In my 2007 paper I agree with Millican that the thesis that Gaunilo attributes to Anselm is indeed equivalent to PSE. However, if, as Millican seems to think, PSE implicitly assumes that the comparison of greatness is impossible between a nature that is not instantiated in reality and the same nature that is instantiated in reality, then the thesis in question is *not* equivalent to PSE. The above quote from Gaunilo does not say anything about the impossibility of the comparison of greatness between a nature that is not instantiated in reality and the same nature that is instantiated.

Yet the way in which he responds to the alternative formulation of the ontological argument excludes such a reading; his response does not allow us to make the comparison of greatness between God existing only in the mind and God existing both in the mind and in reality (or <God> that is not instantiated in reality and <God> that is instantiated in reality), despite the fact that it allows the comparison of greatness between God existing only in the mind and God existing in the mind and also being *thought of* existing in reality.

In sum: Millican's objection to the alternative formulation precludes us from comparing God existing only in the mind and God existing both in the mind and in reality. This entails that his objection fails because it contradicts its own two unique features discussed in Section 2. With respect to the first feature, *i.e.*, purporting not to make any deep metaphysical assumption, it does make such a deep metaphysical assumption as a version of the comparison difficulty. Admittedly the version that Millican holds could be weaker than the original version; one might judge that Millican's is not even a version of the comparison difficulty. That is, however, beside the point. The point is that, contrary to what he believes, Millican commits himself to a deep metaphysical assumption, to which, again, he does not allow opponents of the ontological argument to commit themselves. With respect to the second unique feature, *i.e.*, purporting not to rely on a specific reading of the relevant Anselmian text, Millican's response to the alternative formulation of the ontological argument does rely on a specific, non-standard reading of Anselm's text. Conversely, if Millican does not adopt the non-standard reading, he cannot defend his objection in the first place.

VII. CONCLUSION

Whether or not the ontological argument ultimately succeeds it seems unlikely that critics can construct a convincing objection which questions only shallow logical details of the argument. Any objection to the argument seems to make, implicitly or explicitly, a significant metaphysical assumption and could also rely on a specific reading of the relevant Anselmian text. Since both the metaphysical assumptions and the specific readings of Anselm's text are all contentious in their own right, there is no refutation of the argument that satisfies the majority of analysts of the argument. The beauty of the ontological argument seems to remain intact even more than 930 years after Anselm introduced it.

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WAS GAUNILO RIGHT IN HIS CRITICISM OF ANSELM? A CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract. Gaunilo argued that Anselm could prove the existence of many perfect objects, for example, the happiest island, that is, happier than any other island. More formally, Gaunilo's arguments were intended to show that the sentence "God exists" does not follow from premises accepted by Anselm. Contemporary versions of the ontological proof use the maximalization procedure in order to demonstrate that God exists as the most perfect being. This paper argues that this method, which is based on maximalization, is not sufficient to prove God's existence. Thus, a "contemporary Gaunilo" can repeat objections raised by his ancestor.

Gaunilo, a Benedictine monk (who lived in the years 1033–1011, mostly in the Marmoutier Abbey in France), offered the first criticism of St. Anselm's ontological proof of God's existence in a small booklet *Liber pro insipiente* (On Behalf of the Fool). The title alludes to the words "How the Fool said in his heart which cannot be said" at the beginning of Chapter IV of Anselm's *Proslogion* (written in 1077–1078).[1] Although this phrase is a rather pejorative piece of rhetoric, Gaunilo took it as innocent and formulated arguments defending the Fool. The text of *Liber pro insipiente* was added to *Proslogion* together with Anselm's reply.[2] My aim in this

[1] I quote the *Proslogion* from Anselm of Canterbury's, *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises*, tr. by J. Hopkins and H. Richardson (Minneapolis: The Arthur J. Benning Press, 2000), pp. 88–112.

[2] I quote the texts that constitute these polemics from the 'Internet History Sourcebooks Project', tr. by S. Deane, ed. by P. Halsall, http://evans-experientialism.freewebspace.com/gaunilo.htm [accessed 11th June 2012].

paper is to evaluate the Gaunilo/Anselm exchange from a contemporary (logical) perspective. Roughly speaking, I will play the role of a "modern Gaunilo". Since Gaunilo did not refer to *Monologion*, Anselm's earlier work, I will not mention this work either. In fact, since *Proslogion* continues and improves upon *Monologion*, restricting my discussion to the former is justified from a systematic point of view also.

The relevant text from Anselm's *Proslogion* runs as follows (excerpts from pp. 93–95):

CHAPTER TWO

God truly [i. e. really] exists. [...].

Indeed, we believe You to be something than which nothing greater can be thought. Or is there, then, no such nature [as You], for the Fool has said in his heart that God does not exist? But surely when this very same Fool hears my words "something than which nothing greater can be thought", he understands what he hears. And what he understands is in his understanding, even if he does not understand [i.e. judge] it to exist. For that a thing is in the understanding is distinct from understanding that [this] thing exists. [...] So even the Fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be thought is at least in his understanding; for when he hears of this [being], he understands [what he hears], and whatever is understood is in the understanding. But surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be only in the understanding. For if it were only in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality – something which is greater [than existing only in the understanding]. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought were only in the understanding, then that than which a greater *cannot* be thought would be that than which a greater *can* be thought! But surely this [conclusion] is impossible. Hence, without doubt, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality. [...].

CHAPTER THREE

[God] cannot be thought not to exist.

Assuredly, this [being] exists so truly [i.e. really] that it cannot even be thought not to exist. For there can be thought to exist something which cannot be thought not to exist; and this thing is greater than that which can be thought not to exist. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought could be thought not to exist, then that than which a greater cannot be thought would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought – [a consequence] which is

contradictory. Hence, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists so truly that it cannot even be thought not to exist. And You are this [being] [...]. Therefore, [...] You exist so truly that You cannot even be thought not to exist. And this is rightly the case. For if any mind could think of something better than You, the creature would rise above the Creator and would sit in judgment over the Creator – something which is utterly absurd. Indeed, except for You alone, whatever else exists can be thought not to exist. Therefore, You alone exist most truly of all and thus most greatly of all; for whatever else exists does not exist as truly [as do You] and thus exists less greatly [than do You]. Since, then, it is so readily clear to a rational mind that You exist most greatly of all, why did the Fool say in his heart that God does not exist?! – why [indeed] except because [he is] foolish and a fool!

CHAPTER FOUR

How the Fool said in his heart that which cannot be thought.

Yet, since to speak in one's heart and to think are the same thing, how did [the Fool] say in his heart that which he was unable to think, or how was he unable to think that which he did say in his heart? Now, if he truly [i.e. really] – rather, since he truly – both thought [what he did] because he said [it] in his heart and did not say [it] in his heart because he was unable to think [it], then it is not the case that something is said in the heart, or is thought, in only one way. For in one way a thing is thought when the word signifying it is thought, and in another way [it is thought] when that which the thing is is understood. Thus, in the first way but not at all in the second, God can be thought not to exist. Indeed, no one who understands that which God is can think that God does not exist, even though he says these words [viz. "God does not exist"] in his heart either without any signification or with some strange signification. For God is that than which a greater cannot be thought. Anyone who rightly understands this, surely understands that that [than which a greater cannot be thought] exists in such way that it cannot even conceivably not exist. Therefore, anyone who understands that God is such [a being] cannot think that He does not exist. [...].

Omitting rhetorical accents, Anselm's argument can be segmented into several steps:

(1) It is possible to imagine a being than which none greater can be conceived.
(2) Existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind alone.
(3) If any imagined being exists only in the human mind, it is not a "being than which none greater can be conceived".

(4) Any being than which none greater can be conceived must also exist in reality.
(5) The lack of existence in reality would mean the failure to be a being than which none greater can be conceived.
(6) Consequently, the being than which none greater can be conceived must exist, and we truly call this being God.

In fact, Anselm argues that if one can imagine God as the being which is greater than any other being, the predicate "is God" is not empty. Anselm's demonstration goes via *reductio ad absurdum* and tries to establish God's existence on the basis of the assertion "it is impossible to conceive the predicate 'is God' as empty".

Gaunilo agrees that we can imagine something which is greater than any other being and debate about such items, in particular about their existence. Similarly, we can imagine items which have no counterparts in the actual world. Surely, we understand related locutions. However, according to Gaunilo, these observations do not lead to any definite existential conclusions. Gaunilo applies this observation to the being which is greater than any other being (here "in the understanding" means "in mind"):

> But that this being must exist, not only in the understanding but also in reality, is thus proved to me:
>
> If it did not so exist, whatever exists in reality would be greater than it. And so the being which has been already proved to exist in my understanding, will not be greater than all other beings.
>
> I still answer: if it should be said that a being which cannot be even conceived in terms of any fact, is in the understanding, I do not deny that this being is, accordingly, in my understanding. But since through this fact it can be no wide attain to real existence also, I do not concede to it that existence at all, until some certain proof of it shall be given.
>
> For he who says that this being exists, because otherwise the being which is greater than all will not be greater than all, does not attend strictly enough to what he is saying. For I do not yet say, no, I even deny or doubt that this being is greater than any real object. Nor do I concede to it any other existence (if it should be called existence) which it has when the mind, according to a word merely heard, tries to form an image of an object absolutely unknown to me. [...].

[I]t should be proved first that this being itself really exists somewhere; and then, from the fact that it is greater than all, we shall not hesitate to infer that it also subsists in itself.

[...] For example: it is said that somewhere in the ocean is an island, which, because of the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of discovering what does not exist, is called the Lost Island. And they say that this island has an inestimable wealth of all manner of riches and delicacies in greater abundance than is told of the islands of the blest; and that having no owner or inhabitant, it is more excellent than all other countries, which are inhabited by mankind, in the abundance with which it is stored.

Now if someone should tell me that there is such an island, I should easily understand his words, in which there is no difficulty. But suppose that we went on to say, as if by a logical inference: "You can no longer doubt that this island which is more excellent than all lands exists somewhere, since you have no doubt that it is in your understanding. And since it is more excellent not to be in the understanding alone, but to exist both in the understanding and in reality, for this reason it must exist. For if it does not exist, any land which really exists will be more excellent than it; and so the island already understood by you to be more excellent will not be more excellent.

If a man should try to prove to me by such reasoning that that this island truly exists, and that its existence should be no longer be doubted, either I should believe that he was jesting, or I know not which I ought to regard as the greater fool; myself, supposing that I should allow this proof; or him, if he should suppose that that he had established with any certainty that existence of this island. For he ought to show first that the hypothetical excellence of this island exists as a real and indubitable fact, and in no wise as any unreal object, or one whose existence is uncertain, in my understanding.

Thus, Gaunilo argues that conceiving something as greater than anything else does not imply that the imagined objects exists. In fact, Gaunilo rejects two conclusions. Firstly, that the item in question must exist (a stronger assertion), and secondly, that it exists (a weaker assertion). Generally, according to Gaunilo, being in the understanding (mind) does not entail an assertion of existence. Yet he did not intend to prove that God does not exist, but only to demonstrate that Anselm's argument is not valid.

St. Anselm counterattacked Gaunilo's objections immediately and tried to show that his criticism fails. He repeated his demonstration in the following way:

> [...] if that [i.e. that which is greater than any other] being can be even conceived to be, it must exist in reality. For that than which a greater is inconceivable cannot be conceived except as without beginning. But whatever can be conceived to exist, and does not exist, can be conceived to exist through a beginning. Hence what can be conceived to exist, but does not exist, is not the being than which is a greater cannot be conceived. Therefore, if such a being can be conceived to exist, necessarily it does exist.

As far as the matter concerns the island which is the most excellent but still unreal (the Lost Island), Anselm points out that it can be conceived as not existing. The Lost Island is essentially different from God, because one cannot imagine the object greater than He is, although the most excellent land could be still replaced by a more excellent land. Anselm's argumentation, in his reply to Gaunilo, explicitly refers to modalities, because it essentially uses the idea that God's existence is necessary, but the Lost Island and similar items are contingent.

It seems that Gaunilo's criticism of Anselm remained unknown until recent times. Thomas Aquinas, who rejected Anselm's ontological proof in favour of cosmological demonstrations, never mentioned the monk of Marmoutier, although the *Doctor Angelicus* shared Gaunino's contention that merely conceptual analysis of the essence has no existential consequences. According to Aquinas' view, one must prove God's existence before accepting that *essentia* implies *existentiae* in the case of Supreme Being. The Anselm/Gaunilo controversy was also ignored by further ontological attempts to prove God's existence, in particular by Descartes and Leibniz. Kant criticized such proofs by pointing out that existence is not a predicate (is not expressible by a predication), contrary to the tradition from Anselm to Leibniz. Kant, contrary to Aquinas, Descartes, or Leibniz, argued that no theoretical, ontological as well as cosmological, proof of God's existence is available. According to Kant, who was not an atheist, the issue can be solved by *practical* reason.

Gaunilo's name became fairly popular in the age of modal proofs of God's existence.[3] I will examine Gaunilo's arguments, or rather formulate

3 See J. H. Sobel, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and against Beliefs in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) for an extensive and penetrating survey.

Gaunilo-like arguments, in a more contemporary setting. Before doing so, I will repeat his reasons as well as Anselm's reply in another language. Gaunilo proposed to introduce a predicate *P* defined by the phrase "consistently possesses properties *F* to the greatest degree than other objects", for example the Lost Island, mountains higher than all known peaks, or persons taller than all people who already exist or will exist in the future. Gaunilo's next step consists in demonstrating that Anselm's inference sometimes leads to true conclusions, but some arguments end with false propositions. If so, we have a simple way to argue that there are items which do not exist. This means that Anselm's proof is not conclusive, that is, its conclusion does not follow from the assumed premises. Once again, this criticism does not lead to the assertion that God does not exist, but qualifies Anselm's proof as formally fallacious. Gaunilo claimed that Anselm showed that the denotation of *P* exists in the mind only. Hence, it must be supplemented by demonstration that it exists in the world as well. Anselm's strategy points out that in some cases, for example, with respect to the Lost Island, we can say either that *P* is empty or that it is non-void. On the other hand, the denotation of the predicate "is God" is necessarily non-empty.

Anselm's understanding of necessity is not quite clear. It stems from an uncritical use of such words as "think", "conceive", "imagine", etc. One interpretation is logical and consists in recognising that the sentence "the predicate 'is God' is non-empty" is necessarily true. The second reading is more psychological and suggests that it is impossible to conceive that "is God" is empty. This leads to the conclusion of conceiving that the predicate "is God" is non-empty, which is a necessary conclusion. However, passing from the necessity of conceiving (thinking, understanding, imagining, etc.) that some *a* exists to the necessity of its existence can be considered problematic. Accepting this link means that the conceivability (possibility of conceiving) of something is equivalent to its existential possibility and provokes at least two objections; namely, firstly, that of psychologism and, secondly, that human acts of conceiving differ with respect to subjective circumstances and cannot measure what is objective, possible or necessary. Consequently, one, Anselm for instance, can point out that any person arguing for the emptiness of the predicate "is God" plays the role of the Fool.

Fortunately, both interpretations can be reconciled by the reduction of conceivability to consistency. This move equates possibility and consistency, and renders psychological language as a rhetorical ornament

to a concrete argumentation, for example, concerning the Lost Island. Contemporary formalizations of Anselm's proof tend to be completely free of such psychologism. One of such formalizations is as follows (I employ proposals made by the late Jerzy Perzanowski; his paper is unpublished and preserved as a draft). Perzanowski starts with a reconstruction of the reasoning proposed by Charles Hartshorne. It is based on two axioms:

(a) If a being is the most perfect, its existence is necessary;

(b) the existence of the most perfect being is possible (Leibniz' lemma).

Using modal system **S5**, we can obtain:

(c) The most perfect being exists.

Perzanowski simplified Hartshorne's argument by proving (b) in a stronger modal logic, equating truth and necessary truth. Moreover, this logic proves (this is another version of the Leibniz lemma)

(d) if the most perfect being is possible (its existence is possible), it is necessary (its existence is necessary).

Hence, via modus ponens, we have

(e) the most perfect being exists as necessary (necessary existence implies existence).

The last step ends Perzanowski's reconstruction.

What could contemporary Gaunilo say for Perzanowski's argument? Certainly, he cannot limit himself to arguments advanced by his mediaeval predecessor, because Anselm's followers elaborated new weapons. However, the situation of modern Gaunilo is not hopeless. If the matter concerns (a), one might observe that it is a conditional assertion having an existential antecedent. Hence, any further application of this axiom essentially depends on truth of the sentence "the most perfect being exists". If (b) is applied in proving that the most perfect being exists, the entire argument is burdened by *petitio principii*. This is quite evident if we consider the equivalence (f); the most perfect being exists if and only if the most perfect being exists and it is possible.

However, (f) is trivial because the sentence "*a* exists" entails "it is possible that *a* exists". As far as the issue concerns Perzanowski's simplification, the success of his main move based on (d) requires a very strong modal logic (the logic of strong rationalism). Although the scope of the term "logic" is conventional to some extent, one can express some serious doubts about whether logic should lead to existential consequences that are so strong. Personally, I would prefer to say that the proof of the Leibniz lemma and

further steps of the entire argument proceed in the context of some formal theory involving modal concepts and relations between them, and that this theory is not purely logical. Nevertheless, the fact that Anselm's argument can be presented via a precise formal machinery shows the power of formalization applied to concepts of rational theology or theological ontology.

Since, according to Leibniz, possibility is logically equivalent to consistency, (d) can be rendered as

(g) if the most perfect being is consistent, its existence is necessary.

Let the letter *B* denote the predicate "is the most perfect being". Assume that *B* is introduced by some consistent set *K* of sentences. By the Gödel-Malcev completeness theorem (a set *X* of sentences has a model if and only if this set is consistent), *K* has a model. This assumption metamathematically guarantees that *K* is non-empty. One can be even tempted to say

(h) if a set of sentences has a model, it possesses it necessarily (it is impossible that the set in question has no model).

However, this last assertion requires additional constraints (see below). The way in which *K* is given as defining the item conceived as greater than any other being, is very important. First of all, the phrase "the conceived item" means "the item described by a set of sentences". Secondly, according to the common opinion, the most perfect being (**MPB**, for brevity) is introduced by the maximalization procedure. Metalogically speaking, it consists in the identification of **MPB** with a collection of perfections (omniscience, omnipotence, the greatest goodness, immutability, infinity, etc.); existence belongs to perfections. Assume that *K0* is a initial consistent collection of perfection. It might be maintained that application of the Lindenbaum maximalization theorem (every consistent set of sentences has a maximally consistent extension) provides an argument for generating the adequate set *K*. However, the Lindenbaum extensions are not unique. More specifically, if *X* is a consistent set of sentences, it has more than one (in fact, there are infinitely many) maximally consistent extensions. Every such extensions *E* has a model (a possible world) in which elements of *E* are true. Moreover, since these sentences cannot be false in this model, they must be true in it as well. Note that the relativisation to a specific model is crucial.

Let us apply these observations to the set *K0* and *K***.** Clearly, the former set has several different maximally consistent extensions, including *K*,

as their part; in fact, *K* itself is not maximal, but this is a minor point. Metamathematical observations about *K* are not sufficient to demonstrate that this set is true in every possible world. Note that we could consider *K* as a body of absolute necessities (necessary truths), that is, sentences true in every model. It is obvious now that necessity of truth with respect to a specific model is not absolute, but just relative, because a sentence true in one model can be false in other possible worlds. Moreover, there is no a priori reason to refer to one and only one initial set *K0* of perfections. One could ask, for instance, why the greatest goodness or immutability, but not changeability or goodness directed to people deserving it to some degree, should be regarded as *prima facie* perfections. Typically listed perfections are recommended by Christian (or other similar) theology, but it is only a religious argument, not a logical one. Thus, contemporary versions of Anselm's ontological proof do not show that *B* is not empty in virtue of logical necessity. Further, one cannot demonstrate independently of the assumptions of a given monotheistic theology that the denotation of *B* is unique.

If we apply a similar technique to any consistent collection of anti-perfections (that is, pointing out the lack of perfections in the ordinary or theological sense), it is easily provable by the dual logic and metamathematics (it takes falsity as the distinguished value) that there is a being such that nothing lesser can be conceived. We can interpret this being as the Absolute Evil (**AE**, for brevity). If we entirely omit the ordinary or religious meaning of perfection, **AB** is a maximal being, because it is constructed by a similar maximalization strategy as employed in the case of the denotation of *B*. There is no reason, at least no logical reason, to maintain that **AE** is less real than **MPB** or the Christian God. This leads to a Manichean theology with its perennial battle between the forces of Goodness and Evil, or even a radicalized Marcionic heresy on which the world presents itself as an emanation of the personified Evil, in particular, deceiving people in order to make them suffer more. The theist could presumably answer that the metamathematically phrased ontological proof is enough for demonstrating the existence of **MPB**, let's say a god of philosophers having properties not entirely coherent with Christian theology. This being is necessary and thereby existing. However, this standpoint is not correct, even if we agree that some perfections actually occur in our world. Lindenbaum's maximalization procedure does not imply that there exist maximal perfections in the sense of Anselm and his followers. Although people know something,

can do something, or behave properly, these facts do not entail that there is a being (subject) which realizes these properties in the most maximal manner. Thus, there are models in which there occurs no **MPB**. In fact, some maximally consistent extensions of *K0* contain the sentence "there exists the **MPB**, according to a given specification of perfections", but this sentence is false in other extensions. Since we do not know which model represents our universe, we can only say that the gods of philosophers (and theologians as well) exist in some possible models.

The contemporary setting of the Gaunilo/Anselm exchange could be rendered in such a way:

> *Anselm*. I proved that there is a model in which the predicate *B* is not empty.
> *Gaunilo*. That's right, but your strategy allows me to prove that an arbitrary consistent predicate is not empty as well.
> *Anselm*. You overlooked that the set of sentences determining the denotation of *B* is necessary (consist of necessary truths). This means that this denotation exists (is a perfection), but references of your predicates exist accidentally. Consequently, you cannot deny the existence of the denotation of *B* without contradicting yourself.
> *Gaunilo*. You are mistaken, because you do not distinguish absolute and relative necessity. Although you correctly demonstrated that the set *K* used for the characterization of the predicate *B* is true in some model **M**, the existence of an item satisfying the conditions in question is a perfection, but only with respect to **M**. There are no obstacles to treat my predicates, for instance, related to the Lost Island, in the same way. Moreover, I can prove that there are many maximally, but mutually different, perfect beings.

Gaunilo was a faithful Christian and had no doubts concerning God's existence. However, although he could consider atheists as unreasonable people, he said something important on behalf of the Fool, namely that Anselm did not prove what he intended to demonstrate by his ontological argument. According to earlier comments, Gaunilo's arguments can be sharpened by observing that the assertion that God does not exist can be consistently added to any set of statements about the empirically accessible world; clearly, the sentence "God exists" transcends such sets. Thus, Anselm was unfair, when he qualified unbelievers as foolish.

MODIFIED GAUNILO-TYPE OBJECTIONS AGAINST MODAL ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

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Abstract. Modal ontological arguments are often claimed to be immune to the «perfect island» objection of Gaunilo, because necessary existence does not apply to material, contingent things. But Gaunilo's strategy can be reformulated: we can speak of non-contingent beings, like quasi-Gods or Evil God. The paper is intended to show that we can construct ontological arguments for the existence of such beings, and that those arguments are equally plausible as theistic modal argument. This result does not show that this argument is fallacious, but it shows that it is dialectically ineffective as an argument for theism.

I. CLASSICAL AND MODAL ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS

In *Proslogion* II, Anselm of Canterbury presented his well-known ontological argument for the existence of God. God is by definition the being than which no greater can be conceived. If we suppose that such a being does not exist, then we could imagine something greater, namely, an existent God, but that is impossible since there can be nothing greater than God. So we may conclude that God exists.

This reasoning came under instant criticism: the monk Gaunilo objected to Anselm's proof, claiming that it is fallacious, because we could use it to establish false, or at least extremely implausible consequences, like the existence of a perfect island. For if we define Atlantis as an island that is so great that no greater island can be conceived, and if we suppose that Atlantis does not exist, then we can imagine something greater than Atlantis – namely, an existent Atlantis; but it is impossible, since there can be nothing greater than Atlantis. Therefore, we should conclude that Atlantis exists.

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Anselm tried to respond to Gaunilo's arguments, but his response is quite disappointing. Anselm simply assumes that God is the only being to which an ontological argument may correctly apply, and does little to support this claim. I do not say that Anselm couldn't formulate any arguments for it, but as a matter of fact, he did not formulate them.

As we know, history likes to repeat itself, and virtually the same situation was repeated five hundred years later. Descartes in his *Meditations on First Philosophy* presents the following argument: God is, by definition, the being having all perfections. But existence is a perfection, therefore, God exists. *Meditations* drew considerable critical attention from prominent intellectuals of that time, one of which was Pierre Gassendi. Gassendi objected to the Cartesian argument with an example of the perfect Pegasus: the concept of this being, among other perfections, contains existence, therefore we should be able to establish the existence of the perfect Pegasus, which is absurd. Descartes' reply to Gassendi was crude and rhetorical, mainly due to a negative personal attitude. So again the argument intended to parallel the ontological argument was neglected and treated as silly.

Such "parallel" arguments were neglected probably even more, when objections to the ontological proofs formulated by Hume and Kant were considered by many philosophers as most important and decisive: the Humean thesis that "necessary existence" is an inconsistent concept, and the Kantian *dicta* that existence is not a (real) predicate and that no existential statement can be analytically true.

This situation continued until the middle of the twentieth century. It was at this time when some philosophers – most notably Charles Hartshorne and Norman Malcolm – insisted that the real intention of proponents of ontological proofs, especially Anselm, was to provide a *modal* proof; that is, a proof of the necessary existence of God, not just existence *simpliciter*. Anselm's *Proslogion* III contains just such an overlooked argument: God is the being than which no greater can be conceived, and if we conceive that God does not exist, we could conceive some greater being – a being which cannot even be *conceived* not to exist, but it is in contradiction with the definition of God. So God exists and cannot even be conceived not to exist.[1] Not only did Hartshorne and

[1] From the purely textual point of view, Anselm's main argument is non-modal, while the modal one looks like a mere corollary, which may explain why the discussion focused on the non-modal argument. Interestingly, a similar situation is in the case of Descartes:

Malcolm interpret Anselm in a novel way, but they also proposed their own modal arguments based on their interpretation of Anselm. With their work, modal form was established as a standard for contemporary ontological arguments, like those of Kurt Gödel and Alvin Plantinga.

The main hope of adherents of modal ontological arguments is the alleged ability of those arguments to avoid the main criticisms levelled against classical, non-modal proofs. Firstly, Kant's objection that existence is not a predicate may be dismissed by observing that although existence is not a predicate of anything, necessary existence is a genuine predicate, because it expresses the certain mode of existence of a certain thing. Secondly, a new light is thrown upon the rejection of the "explosivist" arguments of Gaunilo and Gassendi. Although Anselm and Descartes gave very unclear and unconvincing answers to those arguments, we can now see what probably was the intuition lying behind those answers: examples of the greatest conceivable island or perfect Pegasus do not constitute sound objections to modal ontological proofs, because the notion of necessary existence does not apply to material things, bounded in space and time and causally dependent in their existence on other things. "Necessary existing island" and "necessary existing Pegasus" are simply inconsistent concepts, so we do not have to bother with them. Malcolm, for example, says that a necessary being must exist timelessly,[2] and islands and horses are clearly not timeless beings. (It should be noted, however, that an appeal to timelessness is not necessary. Hartshorne, for example, as a process theist holds that God is a temporal and changing being. Hartshorne's reason to reject arguments with islands and horses is the *contingency* of those beings.[3])

Those observations seem to support the view that modal ontological arguments are immune to classical criticisms and therefore may constitute sound proofs of the existence of God. But are they immune to any criticism? Certainly not, as even proponents of modal ontological arguments differ in views on the correct formulation of the argument; for example, Plantinga rejects the arguments of Hartshorne and Malcolm

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the argument from *Meditations* is clearly a non-modal one (existence is a perfection), while in responses to *Objections* Descartes shifts to a modal form (necessary existence, which is an exclusively divine attribute, is a perfection).

[2] Norman Malcolm, 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments', *The Philosophical Review*, 69 (1960), 48.

[3] Charles Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-Examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence* (La Salle: Open Court, 1991), p. 19.

as insufficient.[4] What is more, there is even a controversy over which attributes should be counted as perfections: most theists ("classical" ones) hold that eternality and immutability are perfections, but Hartshorne disagrees with them on this point. Naturally, modal proofs also come under attack by philosophers suspicious about any ontological arguments and philosophers opposed to any forms of proofs of God's existence. One possibility of a global criticism of modal ontological arguments is to insist on the Humean idea that the concept of necessary existence is incoherent or meaningless, but in recent years this view seems to be losing popularity due to widespread use of possible worlds semantics and the idea of transworld identity: a necessary existing object (like mathematical objects for example) is an object which exists in every possible world. We can also dispute some modal axioms used in the proofs, like axiom S5, i. e. discuss whether this axiom in the metaphysical interpretation (if something is possibly necessary, then it is necessary) is true or not, but it is a difficult issue. So those objections are far from conclusive. It may seem that we are stuck in an impasse: neither party gains a decisive advantage over the other. Are there any prospects of breaking this impasse? I think that there are.

II. "EXPLOSIVIST" ARGUMENTS MODIFIED

I believe we can find a global objection to modal ontological arguments by utilizing Gaunilo's and Gassendi's idea and modifying it so that it becomes immune to critics' objections. Critics say that necessary existence does not apply to islands, horses and so on, because they are contingent, temporal beings. So what about considering some non-contingent, non-temporal beings? Firstly, consider *quasi-Gods*, that is, beings which possess all perfections except some of them, for example a quasi-God which is omniscient, omnibenevolent and not omnipotent, but only very powerful. Secondly, consider the *Evil God*, that is, the being which is exactly alike God in every respect except of being maximally evil (omnimalevolent).[5] The concepts of such beings cannot be dismissed

[4] Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 212-213.

[5] It should be noted that this line of argument is not entirely new, for among critics of ontological arguments one can find various appeals to "anti-gods" or "devils". For example, Jan Woleński (Jan Woleński, 'Gaunilon dzisiaj', in *Dowody ontologiczne. W 900. rocznicę śmierci św. Anzelma*, ed. Stanisław Wszołek [Kraków: Copernicus Center Press, 2011], p. 33) makes use of the concept mirroring Anselms' definition of God: the being than which no *worse* can be conceived. However, it is not specified what attributes this

out of hand as inconsistent with the property of necessary existence, so they are genuine counterexamples which should be taken into serious consideration by anyone who thinks that he or she is in a possession of a sound ontological argument. To avoid any misunderstandings, I want to stress that Evil God is not the same thing as Devil or Satan, because Devil is not conceived as omnipotent and omniscient, but only as powerful and very informed. This is very important, because belief in the existence of Devil is inherent in many theistic conceptions, so many theists could be pretty happy should this belief be proved. On the contrary: if we could prove the existence of Evil God – not Devil – along with the existence of God, then we would fall into some sort of manicheism, which is unacceptable for most theists. I shall return to this issue later.

So far, we have the concepts of quasi-Gods and of the Evil God. Now, we can launch any of the modal ontological arguments to "prove" that those beings necessarily exist. Since it would take a lot of time to test all modal ontological arguments, we may choose one example to see the core idea: the reasoning goes on in an analogous way in the case of other arguments. Let's utilize one of the arguments from Malcolm – it is probably the simplest one and is not engaged in any complicated formalism. The standard argument for God goes as follows:

(Premise 1) God is an eternal, and therefore noncontingent being, so it either exists necessarily, or its existence is impossible.
(Premise 2) God is not impossible.
(Conclusion) Therefore, God exists necessarily.

The argument for Evil God is exactly parallel:

(Premise 1*) Evil God is an eternal, and therefore noncontingent being, so it either exists necessarily, or its existence is impossible.
(Premise 2*) Evil God is not impossible.
(Conclusion*) Therefore, Evil God exists necessarily.

Of course we can substitute Evil God with any quasi-God we please and obtain an analogous conclusion. Surely such results are unwelcome to the utmost for many people. What then can be objected to this (and similar) argument?

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being possesses, and Woleński seems to conceive this being as a being which simply possesses attributes which are opposite to all of God's attributes. But such being wouldn't be the worse conceivable being – for example, an omnimalevolent being which lacks omniscience is certainly *per saldo* less evil than an omnimalevolent being which is omniscient. In fact, the being than which no worse can be conceived – Evil God – differs with God *only* with respect to goodness.

III. OBJECTIONS TO MODIFIED GAUNILO-TYPE ARGUMENTS

"Cooked Up" Concepts

It is sometimes claimed that the concepts of quasi-Gods, nearly perfect beings and so on are "cooked up"; that is, they are arbitrary concepts made up *ad hoc* by philosophers, in contrast with the concept of God, which is fairly natural. This objection could possibly be employed by Malcolm, who does not intend to prove the possibility of God and finds it sufficient to observe that the concept of God, like the concept of material thing, has "a place in the thinking and the lives of human beings".[6] Although Malcolm, a pupil of Wittgenstein, does not say it explicitly, he is probably making use of the concept of a language game: theism is a certain language game of many people, which somehow substantiates the view that the concept of God is consistent. Perhaps he would be tempted to say that the concepts of pseudo-Gods are not anchored in this way, so they are *ad hoc*. But Malcolm says that "I do not think that it is legitimate to demand such a demonstration [of the consistency of the concept of God]",[7] so we could similarly reject any demand of proving the consistency of concepts of pseudo-Gods.

Another problem with Malcolm's remark is that if we treat the appeal to a theistic language game really seriously, then we could argue not only that God is *possible*, but that He is *real*, since He plays such an enormous role in the thinking and the lives of so many human beings. And this strategy would remove the very need for an ontological argument for God's existence. Since such a "linguistic argument" for God's existence looks implausible, the appeal to language games in establishing the consistency of theism also seems unconvincing. Maybe Malcolm wouldn't deny this consequence, but if so, he would be unable to formulate a convincing linguistic argument for the *inconsistency* of pseudo-Gods. Without deciding whether this interpretation of Malcolm is sound or not, we can say that this line of argument is amiss. Firstly, the concept of Evil God is not so arbitrary, because it has some grounds in the religious life of humanity, like that of manicheists and maltheists. Secondly, and more importantly, it is completely irrelevant whether concepts are natural or not, cooked up or not. Even the most cooked

[6] Norman Malcolm, 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments', *The Philosophical Review*, 69 (1960), 59-60.

[7] Ibid., p. 60.

up concepts have some objective features, and maybe it is an objective feature of those cooked up concepts of gods that ontological arguments really apply to them. Consider the following concept:

(C) the number identical with $2{,}73 + \log_4 191^3 - \sin(\cos 1{,}14 - \log_{189} \tan 1{,}12)$

It is a completely cooked up concept! But this is irrelevant, because this concept has some objective features, like being a concept of a rational number (if this number is in fact rational) or being a concept of an irrational number (if this number is in fact irrational). Therefore it is not important whether, for example, the concept of a being which is omniscient, omnibenevolent and capable only of conjuring falls of golden coins is natural, because one of the objective features of this concept may be the applicability of the ontological argument. Besides, the naturality of concepts is, naturally, an extremely vague property.

Rival Gods

Another objection goes as follows: it is impossible that there are two or more omnipotent beings, because they would limit each other's omnipotence. This is probably true, but it only shows that by using ontological arguments we may fall into contradictions, so there is another reason to give up those arguments. If somebody would insist on saying that God exists, therefore Evil God cannot exist, we could easily turn it and say that someone could insist on saying that Evil God exists, therefore God cannot exist. But someone could retort that God is more perfect, and therefore more powerful than Evil God, so God has some kind of metaphysical priority. Such argument lays on a confusion regarding the notion of perfection. This notion is *ambiguous*, or maybe it has even more meanings. Perfection in the neutral sense is any property that makes some being powerful, while perfection in the axiological sense is any property which makes some being axiologically positive. In the natural language, both those notions figure under the word "perfection". For example, omnibenevolence is surely a perfection in the axiological sense, but not in the neutral sense, because benevolence has nothing to do with power. On the other hand, omnipotence, omniscience and necessary existence are perfections in the neutral sense, but not in the axiological sense, because power and knowledge may be used for very different purposes, not only for good ones, but also for evil ones. Evil God differs from God only with respect to goodness, and this is not a perfection in the neutral sense. God and Evil God are equally powerful,

since both are omnipotent, omniscient, necessarily existing, etc., so there is no reason to think that God, as more perfect, has any priority over Evil God in the competition for existence. The ambiguity of the notion of perfection has another interesting consequence: it shows that the concept of the being possessing all perfections – God – is not as homogenous as it may seem at first glance. It seems homogenous when we treat it as a concept of a being possessing all properties of some given, natural kind (in this case, that kind is "[maximal] perfection"). But once we realize that "perfection" is ambiguous, we see that the concept of a supremely perfect being is in fact "pasted" of two completely different concepts: the concept of a being supremely perfect in the neutral sense and the concept of a being supremely perfect in the axiological sense. The concept of God is therefore not a homogenous one, because it contains properties which do not form a single, natural kind, and the opposite impression is due to the use of an ambiguous word "perfection". Of course, the lack of homogeneity is not a drawback for a concept, similarly as the lack of naturality, discussed before. But it is not wholly without importance in the case of God and ontological arguments. I suppose that the apparent homogeneity of the concept of God has some intuitive, aesthetical, or even mystical value for a theist: this concept looks so simple, uniform and elegant that it may prompt to consider it as something which is not a mere figment of our imagination, but a representation of some ultimate, simple, unsurpassable, divine metaphysical reality. Such intuitions may favour the acceptance of ontological arguments and its premises among some theists. But after the recognition of the essential heterogeneity of the concept of God, those intuitions may fade away, which may in effect increase skepticism about the correctness of ontological arguments.

Inconsistency

The third and, in my opinion, the most important objection that can be raised is that quasi-Gods and Evil God are *impossible*. In the premise 2* we assume that Evil God is not impossible, but maybe we are wrong and this premise is false?[8] Here we enter into a tricky issue, which I will try to deal with carefully and show why this objection is wrong. Let's start

[8] This is the premise of a "parody" of Malcolm' argument, but exactly the same premise will be crucial in the "parodies" of the arguments of Hartshorne, Gödel and Plantinga. (I put the word "parody" in quotation marks, because those parallel arguments are intended to be serious objections, not jokes.)

with a question, what reasons can somebody have to claim that a certain being is impossible? Of course, that reason is a *proof* of the impossibility: for example, we can prove that the combination of being omnipotent, omnibenevolent and knowing only geometry is plainly inconsistent, because an omnibenevolent being will use its infinite power to gain knowledge about the world to spread goodness and fight evil in the most effective way.[9] But, on the other hand, the combination of being omnipotent, omniscient and not being omnibenevolent does not seem inconsistent, because, as I already said, infinite power and knowledge may be used for many different purposes, also for evil ones, including greatest possible evil. Probably we cannot prove that this concept is consistent, but the proponents of modal ontological arguments have *the very same* problem: they cannot prove that the concept of God is consistent, they simply assume it as an additional axiom in their deductions. So, since they cannot show that God is possible, they are in no position to claim that (for example) Evil God is impossible, unless they deliver an explicit proof of its impossibility. Is there any such proof?

Some theists support the following argument: Evil God is impossible, because as an omniscient being, it is also morally omniscient, and therefore is unable to perform any evil acts. What shall we say about this objection? Some people may be tempted to reject it on meta-ethical grounds: there is no such thing as moral knowledge, because sentences expressing moral valuations do not have any truth-value, so (by classical definition of knowledge as justified true belief) they cannot be an object of knowledge. But this objection, involving an acceptance of meta-ethical antirealism, noncognitivism and/or emotivism, is not the one I would support: firstly, I am committed to meta-ethical intuitionism; secondly (and more importantly, since my personal views are irrelevant in this matter), this argument is ineffective, because moral anti-realism is controversial in itself, there are no decisive arguments supporting it. So it would again put us in a philosophical impasse.

However there is a much simpler and better argument against the incompatibility of omniscience with omnimalevolence. For the sake

[9] Although somebody could insist that any talk of "gaining" (implying change) is inappropriate in the case of eternal beings, we may neglect this problem, because analogous problems arise with respect to God itself: we could argue that God, as eternal and immutable being, cannot act, cannot know anything, cannot be conscious, cannot love, cannot hate, cannot judge, etc., and this would pose a very serious challenge for the consistency of theism itself.

of the argument let's assume the existence of genuine moral knowledge. Now, the possession of moral omniscience by some subject does not imply that this subject will act in accordance with this knowledge. By rejecting this view we would fall into ethical intellectualism, which is very implausible. On its basis it seems unlikely to explain the phenomenon of *weak will*, when a subject knows that he or she shouldn't act in a certain way, but cannot help himself or herself, for example due to extreme lust. Another phenomenon unlikely to be explained by intellectualism is *bad will* itself: it seems that an ethical intellectualist should eventually endorse a view that all subjects are essentially good, but some of them (like Devil) are handicapped by a lack of moral knowledge. It would seem that even the most loathsome villain acts with a good will. Some subjects create objective evil and harm, but only because they do not know it to be so: should they realize it, they would cease doing this. It is not only counter-intuitive, but also morally dubious, for it would seem that condemnation and persecution of villains is equally unjustified as condemnation and persecution of children for their inability to solve differential equations. And if someone would retort that a villain is guilty of not acquiring appropriate moral knowledge, we will fall into a vicious regress, because we could say that he or she *did not know* that he or she *should* acquire any moral knowledge.

Those consequences of ethical intellectualism are even more destructive for the religious perspective: we should come to the conclusion that Devil – the alleged symbol of ultimate evil and corruption – is a confused, but noble mutineer, who hates God and rebelled against him, because God wrongly seems to him to be an evil tyrant and oppressor. Someone could object that phenomena of weak and bad will occur only in the case of finite and temporal beings, like humans (or even angels), not in the case of eternal beings. But the plausibility of the very attribution of such a human and temporal thing as will to eternal beings is pretty dubious, so if a theist accepts such an attribution, then there seems to be no reason to think why this will cannot be weak or bad. If we accept the possibility of infinitely good will, then acceptance of the possibility of infinitely bad will would be equally justified. What's more, it seems that moral omniscience is not only compatible with omnimalevolence, but it is also a necessary *condition* of the latter. For if a subject is not in a possession of moral omniscience, then it is possible that some of its evil actions are merely accidentally evil; the lack of moral omniscience may be at least a partial excuse for those actions, and the existence of

such excuses makes omnimalevolence impossible: omnimalevolence excludes every possible excuse. A subject which performs all evil actions on purpose is worse than a subject which performs some of its evil actions unintentionally. Infinite and unsurpassable evil is possible only if some subject is in possession of complete and well-established moral knowledge and in all possible circumstances intends to act *contrary* to what it *knows* to be good and decent.

Another argument for the impossibility of Evil God employed by some theists goes on in the following way: the concept of Evil God contains one imperfection (omnimalevolence) among all other perfections (except omnibenevolence), so this imperfection is something like a "black hole" in the plenitude of perfections. But perfections cannot exist separately: if we have some collection of perfections, we cannot simply add to them any property we please. Such a grave imperfection as omnimalevolence cannot exist in such a perfect surrounding, composed of so many perfections: it just doesn't fit them, they are metaphysically opposite and cannot coexist. But why should we agree with that? From an argument for the impossibility of Evil God we would normally expect to find something showing a reason why a certain property with some specific content is incompatible with some other properties with their specific contents, like in the case of the alleged incompatibility of omniscience with omnimalevolence. But here one is not appealing to the specific content of properties, only to some abstract features of those properties, like "being a perfection" and "being an imperfection" and some pretty vague and unclear intuitions of general incompatibility of perfections and imperfections.

To substantiate those intuitions, some theists appeal to certain ancient metaphysical doctrines, like the mediaeval doctrine of transcendentals, which identifies Being, Good, Beauty and Truth (and some other properties, like Unity) and has some antecedents in the Greek, especially Platonic, thought. But such an argument is endangered by circularity: the transcendental identification of Being with Good and Beauty is due to the assumption that every being is a creation of God, and everything which good God creates must be good and beautiful. The doctrine of transcendentals *presupposes* the existence of God, so using this doctrine to defend ontological arguments for the existence of God would beg the question. The claim that it is metaphysically impossible for an imperfection to exist among the plenitude of perfections slightly reminds of a "metaphysical" argument against the existence of sunspots,

discovered by Galileo: Aristotelian opponents of the astronomer were *a priori* demonstrating that there can be no dark places on Sun, since Sun and light, by virtue of their "nature", exclude any darkness. In our case, Sun is the plenitude of perfections (except omnibenevolence) and sunspot is the imperfection of omnimalevolence. Some explanation for the intuitions of the incompatibility of omnimalevolence with the plenitude of almost all perfections may be the ambiguity of the notion of perfection, pointed to in earlier discussion. When we conceive "perfection" unambiguously, then we may be tempted to feel that the imperfection of omnimalevolence is somehow out of place in the plenitude of all perfections (except omnibenevolence). But after we realize the ambiguity, this impression should disappear.

Out of the popularly discussed divine attributes, the only perfection in the axiological sense is omnibenevolence,[10] while all other attributes (like omnipotence, omniscience, necessary existence, etc.) are perfections in the neutral sense. So, when we subtract omnibenevolence from the set of all other perfections, we arrive at a concept containing purely neutral perfections, and since omnimalevolence is imperfection in the axiological sense, then there is no reason to suppose why it should be incompatible with them, since omnimalevolence and other properties are (im)perfections with respect to very different criteria. The impression of incompatibility was caused by overlooking the ambiguity.

Probably more arguments for the inconsistency of the concept of Evil God could be formulated. But, as we saw it in the case of two examples of such arguments, probably they would eventually be as inconclusive as well-known atheistic arguments that the concept of God is inconsistent, like the paradox of stone against omnipotence or the claim that omnipotence is inconsistent with omniscience. What I am trying to show is a *relative consistency proof* for the concept of Evil God. Relative consistency proofs are known from mathematical logic: for example, we cannot prove that Peano arithmetic is consistent, but we can prove that Peano arithmetic is consistent *if* Heyting arithmetic is consistent.

A slightly similar situation occurs here: we cannot prove that Evil God is possible, but if someone believes – without a proof – that God is possible, then he or she is in no position to say that Evil God is impossible, unless an explicit proof of impossibility is delivered. Somebody could

[10] One could also add infinite justice, infinite love, etc., but I think that those attributes can be treated as *immanent parts* of omnibenevolence.

object that certain people, most notably Leibniz and Gödel, presented proofs of the consistency of the concept of God, so this concept has an advantage over the other ones. Those proofs are highly disputable, but this is not a proper place to go into any details. Apart from that, any proof of the consistency of the concept of God does not show that the concepts of quasi-Gods and Evil God *are* inconsistent. If we don't have proofs for the inconsistency of the concept of quasi-Gods and Evil God, then we have no reason to claim that those concepts are inconsistent, when there is no *prima facie* inconsistency in them. Many people, including many theists, claim that it is legitimate to assume the possibility of something as long as there is no explicit proof of its impossibility. This principle is sometimes used by supporters of ontological arguments to establish rational acceptability of the premise "God is possible". But this stick has two ends: we may use the same principle to establish rational acceptability of the analogous premises of possibility of the existence of quasi-Gods and Evil God.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Considerations about the inconsistency objection seem to show that eventually there is an epistemic equilibrium between modal ontological arguments for the existence of God and the existence of quasi-Gods and Evil God, and that adherents of the proofs for God cannot escape the acceptability of the proofs for pseudo-Gods on the grounds of their theories. But what does that conclusion really mean? Firstly, it has not been shown that the joint acceptance of the existence of these deities is inconsistent or false, and secondly, it has not been shown that modal ontological arguments for the existence of God contain any fallacies, whether formal or material. But, I hope, it has been shown that modal ontological arguments are, in a sense, incompatible with (mono)theism, the view that there is only one deity – God, because a theist, using modal ontological arguments, is unable to block undesired instances of those arguments, which prove the existence of other deities.

This result does not show that modal ontological arguments are fallacious, but it shows that almost all of their proponents (who are theists) cannot use such arguments, because it would lead to inconsistency within their views. Such a result may seem very weak and unsatisfactory: it may seem that to refute the ontological arguments is to show *where* and *why* they are wrong. But if it really is the case that ontological

arguments are theistically unacceptable, it is a most important result, because it allows us to finish the discussion about ontological arguments and herald a victory for the opponents of those arguments. What is more, their supporters (assuming that the arguments outlined here shall convince them) will give up ontological arguments and help the others find where and why they are wrong. Recognition of the incompatibility of ontological arguments with (mono)theism is the first step in this inquiry, but it is sufficient to establish the generally negative attitude to ontological arguments.

Although this result is partial, it is much more beneficial than criticisms which aim at precise identification of fallacies of ontological arguments, but pay a high price for it: they are highly inconclusive, and therefore unable to establish an effective, general argument against ontological arguments. It is hard to decide whether modal ontological arguments are sound or not, but if my considerations are correct, then ontological arguments are useless in the role of establishing theistic beliefs – a role which those arguments were intended to play by almost all of its proponents.

If some manicheists, maltheists or even polytheists would happily employ ontological arguments to prove the existence of the multitude of deities they believe in, it could be not an easy task to show that they are wrong. We cannot show that modal ontological arguments are *invalid* or *unsound*, but we can show that they are *dialectically ineffective*, not merely by pointing to the obvious empirical fact that people usually aren't very impressed by them. And this is a sufficient reason to reject those arguments.

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RATIO ANSELMI REVISITED

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Abstract. The proof of God's existence, known as *Ratio Anselmi*, is being analyzed. Four first-order theories are constructed to mirror versions of Anselm's reasoning. God's existence is shown to be provable in all of them. A traditional objection to the employment of a concept of God is overruled. And yet, Anselm's proof is eventually found to be incorrect. The error attributed to Anselm consists in an illegitimate use of the words "greater" and "conceivable", and is identified as *quaternio terminorum* or *petitio principii*, depending on circumstances. It is claimed that there is no direct way to improve the argument.

By *Ratio Anselmi* I understand the original proof of God's existence, provided by Anselm of Canterbury in chapter 2 of his work called *Proslogion*. The proof is usually regarded as the first attempt to prove God's existence *a priori* (ontologically) in history. My objective is to analyze that original proof as carefully as possible and evaluate it, as correct or not, on a precisely indicated ground. The so widely discussed and often formalized proof of chapter 3 of *Proslogion* as well as later ontological proofs are disregarded in this paper.

INTERPRETATIONS

What Anselm claims in chapter 2 of *Proslogion* is so difficult to understand that among scholars there is no agreement even regarding what kind of text one has to do with. M. Cappuyns, in his excellent summary[1] of all

[1] M. Cappuyns, 'L'argument de S. Anselme', *Recherches de theologie ancienne et medievale*, 6 (1934), pp. 313–330.

studies concerning *Ratio Anselmi* until 1934, distinguishes four general kinds of interpretations or attitudes towards Anselm's text: logical, psychological, cosmological and theological. Cappuyns' summary seems to remain standing. Only in the first interpretation is *Ratio Anselmi* regarded as an argument (either sound or not) from some premises to a conclusion. In the psychological interpretation, Anselm simply affirms the fact of God's presence in mind, in the cosmological interpretation one has to do with a supplement to *Monologion,* and in the theological interpretation one has to do with an affirmation of the act of faith. It should be claimed that in this paper it is just assumed that *Ratio Anselmi* is an argument, an attempt to prove God's existence.

Even if one is convinced that Anselm's text is an argument, there is still a lot of philosophical interpretations of its meaning. Hence why *Ratio Anselmi* is so difficult to understand; I am going to analyze it on the purely logical level. The only non-vernacular meaning I am going to attribute to Anselm's statements is the meaning required by a formal structure of premises. To achieve such an objective, one must use a formal tool that is most transparent and uncontroversial. That would be the first order logic.

PROSLOGION, CHAPTER 2

In the chapter 2 of *Proslogion* Anselm concludes to God's existence as follows. God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Suppose than there be no God in reality. By the supposition itself God exists in someone's mind and it is thinkable that God exists in reality. A being that exists in one's mind only is not a being than which no greater can be conceived, for its real existence is clearly conceivable. And real existence is something greater than existence in one's mind only. So, Anselm concludes, a being than which no greater can be conceived exists in reality.[2] Anselm's argument rests on five premises. Four of them appear straightforwardly in *Proslogion*:

(P0) God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived,
(P1) a being is conceivable than which nothing greater can be conceived,
(P2) if x is conceivable, then x is conceivable qua existent,
(P3) x qua existent is greater than x qua non-existent.

[2] Anselm, *Proslogion*, chapter 2.

There is another vital premise to be accepted:

(P4) if *x* is conceivable, but not conceivable qua non-existent, then *x* exists.

The premise (P4) is hidden. As far as I am aware Anselm never admitted it, but the premise is inevitable. It will shortly be shown formally.

The premise (P0) may be found in Anselm's opening words: "and indeed, we believe that you are a being than which nothing greater can be conceived" ("*et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*").[3] Some readers find here a definition of God, which is neither necessary nor obvious. The famous formula "a being than which nothing greater can be conceived" may be a definition as well as a partial description of God. It may even be just a postulate. It depends on whether the uniqueness of such a being is determined or not. This is why the indefinite article "a" is better and more safe English translation of "aliquid" than the definite article "the".

The premise (P1) is based on the fact that, even to deny God's existence, one simply must conceive of God. Anyone who takes the question of God into consideration makes some use of the concept of God. Anselm invokes the fool figured in the Holy Scripture, mostly in Psalms (cf. *The Book of Psalms* 14:1 and 53:1, in the *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, the Latin version Anselm used, 13:1 and 52:1 respectively). The fool figures that there is no God: "is there no such nature [God], since the fool has said in his heart, there is no God?", says Anselm ("*an ergo non est aliqua talis natura, qia dixit insipiens in corde suo: «non est Deus?»*")[4]. Thus, according to Anselm, the fool determines God's conceivability: "but, at any rate, the very fool, when he hears of the being I speak of – a being than which nothing greater can be conceived – understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding, although he does not understands it to exist" ("*sed certe ipse idem insipiens, cum audit hoc ipsum quod dico: aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest, intelligit quod audit; et quod intelligit, in intellectu eius est, etiam si non intelligat illud esse*")[5]. And again: "hence, even the fool is convinced that something, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists at least in understanding; for, when he hears of it, he understands it, and whatever is understood, exists in understanding" ("*convincitur ergo etiam insipiens esse vel in intellectu aliquid quo maius cogitari potest, quia*

[3] Ibidem.
[4] Ibidem.
[5] Ibidem.

hoc, cum audit, intelligit, et quidquid intelligitur, in intellectu est")[6]. So, if one affirms God's existence, they conceive of God, and if one denies it, they also conceive of God. All in all, God is conceivable. To avoid a kind of criticism most naive, it should be immediately noticed that Anselm is perfectly aware of an ontological commitment. Although he has no proper terminology, he determines straightforwardly the difference of existence and conceivability (existence in reality and existence in understanding). An artist, Anselm says, first conceives of what he is going to perform, and, until he does not perform it, it exists in the artist's understanding only. Hence, objects existing in an understanding only are just objects of the understanding. It was examined and explained by N. Malcolm: "Anselm [...] uses «intelligitur» and «in intellectu est» as interchangeable locution; the same holds for another formula of his: whatever is thought is in thought (*quidquid cogitatur in cogitatione est*)".[7]

In the premise (P2) a relation is affirmed between general conceivability and conceivability qua existent. First, according to Anselm, when a being is conceived of, it may be conceived either qua existent or qua non-existent. And those are two distinct thoughts. To conceive of an object is not the same as to conceive the object to exist: "for an object to be in understanding and to understand an object to be are two different things" ("*aliud enim est rem esse in intellectu, alium intelligere rem esse*").[8] But, Anselm continues, if an object is conceived at all it is also conceivable qua existent. You can always think an object to exist, provided you can think of the object: "even if [an object] exists in understanding alone, then it can be conceived to exist in reality" ("*si enim vel in solo intellectu est, potest cogitari esse et in re*").[9]

According to the famous premise (P3), to exist in reality is something *greater* than to exist in understanding alone ("*si enim vel in solo intellectu est, potest cogitari esse et in re, quod maius est*").[10] The discussion dedicated to the passage just quoted is enormous. Plenty of ontological ideas came into being as regards the mysterious concept of Anselmian greatness. The problem is that Anselm seems to consider the hierarchy of greatness to be obvious, whereas for a contemporary philosopher it is

[6] Ibidem.

[7] N. Malcolm, 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments', *The Philosophical Review*, 69 (1960), pp. 41–62 (p.41).

[8] Anselm, *Proslogion*, chapter 2.

[9] Ibidem.

[10] Ibidem.

hardly imaginable. I only refer to the features of the hierarchy formally determined by the premises themselves. No further philosophical analysis seems to me substantial for evaluation of the argument.

The hidden premise (P4) allows one to infer an object's existence from the inconceivability of its non-existence. It is a version of the assumption of some intelligibility of being. It is stated here that an object x exists, provided x is inconceivable qua non-existent, but conceivable generally. Although the premise is hidden, it may seem quite reliable. Actually, the whole science rests on the assumption of intelligibility of being.

THE THEORY *Pros*

To analyze *Ratio Anselmi* I will employ the first-order logic. In some formalizations modal logic is employed, which is even more controversial than *Ratio Anselmi* itself. Furthermore, Anselm's original thought is difficult to recognize in some formal constructions. They are at most inspired by Anselm, and more so by Descartes or Leibniz.

I provide four first-order theories of Ratio Anselmi: *Pros*, *Pros*(a), *Pros*(b) and *Pros*(c) – where *Pros* stands for *Proslogion*. They differ in a position and interpretation of the premise (P0), the alleged definition of God. The crucial point of the formalization I deliver is the relativization of an object to an agent. It seems vital for Anselm's thought, and yet rarely respected. The first theory, *Pros*, is an extended and substantially improved version of a theory I provided in an earlier work of mine.[11]

The language of the theories I provide is typical for a first-order theory. In the alphabet there are the connectives of negation "$\neg$", conjunction "$\wedge$", disjunction "$\vee$", implication "$\rightarrow$" and equivalence "$\equiv$", the identity sign "$=$", the universal quantifier "$\forall$", the existential quantifier "$\exists$" and the unique existential quantifier (for exactly one, for one and only one) "$\exists!$", definable as follows:

(1) $\exists!x\colon A(x) \equiv \exists x\colon A(x) \wedge \forall x,y\colon (A(x) \wedge A(y) \rightarrow x = y)$.

Individual variables "u", "w", "x", "y" and "z" range over two domains – possible agents and objects they may conceive of. I do not determine yet whether the agents are perfectly rational (logically omniscient) or not. The objects conceivable by the agents are mere objects of the agents' understanding, intensional objects. They need not – although they may

[11] M. Tkaczyk, 'Is the Ontological Proof of God's Existence an Ontological Proof of God's Existence?', *Logic and Logical Philosophy*, 16 (2007), pp. 289–309.

– exist in reality. In the alphabet there are four specific predicates to form atomic formulas:

$C(x, y)$ - x is conceived of by y,
$Q(x, y)$ - x is conceived of qua existent by y,
$H(x, y, u, w)$ - x, conceived of by y, is greater than u, conceived of by w,
$E(x)$ - x exists (in reality).

The letter "C" stands for "conceived", the letter "Q" stands for "qua existent", the letter "H" stands for "hierarchy" and the letter "E" stands for "exists". In some strengthened versions of *Pros* there will be an extra specific term, namely the individual term "g" (for "God"), either primitive or defined. There may also appear a one-place derivative predicate "G", which is going to mean "is a god" or "is divine". If it is used, it will be introduced by a definition. Punctuation signs and formation rules are typical. So is the order of operations in absence of parentheses: $\exists$, $\forall$, $\neg$, $\wedge$, $\vee$, $\rightarrow$, $\equiv$. Tautologies are accepted as logical axioms, logical rules are applicable, free variables in theorems are universally quantified.

In the theory *Pros*, four specific axioms (A1)–(A4) are to be accepted, respectively to Anselm's premises (P1)–(P4). The first axiom:

(A1) $\exists x,y\colon (C(x, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y))$

is a counterpart of Anselm's premise (P1). It is stated that there is such an object x that x is conceived of by some agent and no object conceived of by any agent is greater than x conceived of by any agent. The second axiom:

(A2) $C(x, y) \rightarrow \exists u\colon Q(x, u)$

is a counterpart of Anselm's premise (P2). If any object x is conceived of by any agent, then, for some agent u, u conceives of x qua existent. The third axiom:

(A3) $Q(x, y) \wedge \neg Q(x, u) \wedge C(x, u) \rightarrow H(x, y, x, u)$

is a counterpart of Anselm's premise (P3). According to the axiom an object x conceived by y is something greater than the same object x conceived of by u, provided y conceives of x qua existent and u conceives of x qua non-existent. There is another axiom:

(A4) $\exists y\colon C(x, y) \wedge \forall y\colon (C(x, y) \rightarrow Q(x, y)) \rightarrow E(x)$

which is a counterpart of the hidden premise (P4). According to it an object x exists (in reality), provided x is generally conceived by some agent and no agent conceives of x qua non-existent. Anselm's premise (A0) has no counterpart among axioms for the time being. Hence, we do

not use the term "God" yet. The definition of a proof and of a theorem is typical. The theory *Pros* is consistent, which is important, for any formula is provable in an inconsistent theory. It is worth noting that many formalizations lack a proof of consistency. We are going to provide the proof of consistency of *Pros*, but we postpone it until we consider all the versions of *Pros*.

Within the confines of the theory *Pros*, the existence (in reality) is provable of an object than which nothing greater can be conceived. The derivation seems quite straightforward.

1. $\exists x,y\colon (C(x, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y))$	axiom (A1)
2. $C(x, y) \rightarrow \exists u\colon Q(x, u)$	axiom (A2)
3. $Q(x, y) \wedge \neg Q(x, u) \wedge C(x, u) \rightarrow H(x, y, x, u)$	axiom (A3)
4. $\exists y\colon C(x, y) \wedge \forall y\colon (C(x, y) \rightarrow Q(x, y)) \rightarrow E(x)$	axiom (A4)
5. $\exists x\colon (\exists y\colon C(x, y) \wedge \exists u\colon Q(x, u) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y))$	1, 2
6. $Q(x, y) \wedge \neg Q(x, u) \wedge C(x, u) \rightarrow \exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y)$	3
7. $Q(x, y) \wedge \neg\exists y, u, w\colon H(u, w, x, y) \rightarrow \neg(\neg Q(x, u) \wedge C(x, u))$	6
8. $Q(x, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y) \rightarrow (C(x, u) \rightarrow Q(x, u))$	7
9. $Q(x, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y) \rightarrow \forall y\colon (C(x, y) \rightarrow Q(x, y))$	8
10. $\exists u\colon Q(x, u) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y) \rightarrow \forall y\colon (C(x, y) \rightarrow Q(x, y))$	9
11. $\exists x\colon (\exists y\colon C(x, y) \wedge \forall y\colon (C(x, y) \rightarrow Q(x, y)) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y))$	5, 10
12. $\exists x\colon (E(x) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y))$	4, 11

In the row 12 the theorem appears to state that, for some x, x exists (in reality) and no object conceived of by any agent is greater than x. That is the formal counterpart for Anselm's conclusion within the confines of the theory *Pros*.

Notice, nothing has been spoken of God explicitly thus far, the term "God" has not been used in any way yet, for no use has been made of Anselm's premise (P0). So there has been no prejudice made as regards a concept of God. Hence, the theory *Pros*, as well as the derivation just presented, may be considered as a general template to formalize *Ratio Anselmi*. A genuine formalization requires the complement of a counterpart of the premise (P0), and versions of the theory *Pros* depend on one's philosophical preferences regarding the premise in question. There are three considerable and reliable analyses of the premise (P0): (a) a definition of a singular term "God", (b) a definition of a predicate "is a god" or "is divine", and (c) a constraint, a partial characterization of God. Those will be the three versions of the theory *Pros*: *Pros*(a), *Pros*(b) and *Pros*(c).

THE THEORY *Pros*(*a*)

If one is convinced that a proper definition of God is provided in the premise (P0), the introduction of an individual term denoting God may be a considerable solution to state an explicit claim of God's existence. To do so, however, another premise is required in *Ratio Anselmi*, stating the uniqueness of the object than which nothing greater can be conceived:

(P5) there is at most one being than which nothing greater can be conceived.

This is required for the consistency of a definition of an individual term. Together with the premise (P1) it secures the condition of existence and uniqueness to the individual term to be defined. The claim of the uniqueness of God is hardly questionable in the case of a Christian thinker and future bishop. Furthermore, it is admitted by Anselm explicitly in a succeeding passage of *Proslogion* ("*quid es, nisi id quod summum omnium solum existens per seipsum, omnia alia fecit de nihilo?*"),[12] although it is not even mentioned in chapter 2. Nevertheless, it is a real strengthening of the theory. And anyone who thinks of future justification of premises should consider that profit and loss account. For it is a well known fact that to philosophically justify the uniqueness of God is a highly complicated matter even within the confines of Aquinas' ontology. However, if such price is to be paid, the new axiom:

(A5a) $\neg\exists z,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, z) \wedge \neg\exists z,u,w\colon H(u, w, y, z) \rightarrow x = y$

would serve as a counterpart for the premise (P5). It is stated here that any two objects, x and y, than which nothing greater can be conceived, are identical. A theory *Pros* strengthened with the new axiom (A5a) will be called *Pros*(*a*). The axiom (A5a), together with the axiom (A1), with respect to the definition (1) allows to derive the existence and uniqueness condition:

(2) $\exists!x\colon \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y)$.

Hence, since (A1) and (A5a) are axioms of *Pros*(*a*), the formula (2) is a theorem of *Pros*(*a*). That legitimates a definition of the individual term as consistent:

(3) $g = x \equiv \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y)$.

The term "g" so defined stands for "God" and the definition is, of course, a counterpart of Anselm's premise (P0). It is stated here that God is *the* object than which nothing greater can be conceived. That would

[12] Anselm, *Proslogion*, chapter 5.

complete the description of the theory *Pros*(*a*). As *Pros*, the theory *Pros*(*a*) is consistent. A derivation of Anselm's key theorem within the scope of *Pros*(*a*) may look as follows.

1.	$\exists x,y\colon (C(x, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y))$	axiom (A1)
2.	$C(x, y) \rightarrow \exists u\colon Q(x, u)$	axiom (A2)
3.	$Q(x, y) \wedge \neg Q(x, u) \wedge C(x, u) \rightarrow H(x, y, x, u)$	axiom (A3)
4.	$\exists y\colon C(x, y) \wedge \forall y\colon (C(x, y) \rightarrow Q(x, y)) \rightarrow E(x)$	axiom (A4)
5.	$\neg\exists z,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, z) \wedge \neg\exists z,u,w\colon H(u, w, y, z) \rightarrow x = y$	axiom (A5a)
6.	$\exists!x\colon \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y)$	1, 5
7.	$g = x \equiv \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y)$	definition based on row 6
8.	$\exists y\colon C(g, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y)$	1, 7
9.	$C(g, y) \rightarrow \exists u\colon Q(g, u)$	2
10.	$Q(g, y) \wedge \neg Q(g, u) \wedge C(g, u) \rightarrow H(g, y, g, u)$	3
11.	$\exists y\colon C(g, y) \wedge \forall y\colon (C(g, y) \rightarrow Q(g, y)) \rightarrow E(g)$	4
12.	$\exists y\colon C(g, y) \wedge \exists u\colon Q(g, u) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y)$	8, 9
13.	$Q(g, y) \wedge \neg Q(g, u) \wedge C(g, u) \rightarrow \exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y)$	10
14.	$Q(g, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y) \rightarrow \neg(\neg Q(g, u) \wedge C(g, u))$	11
15.	$Q(g, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y) \rightarrow (C(g, u) \rightarrow Q(g, u))$	12
16.	$Q(g, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y) \rightarrow \forall y\colon (C(g, y) \rightarrow Q(g, y))$	13
17.	$\exists u\colon Q(g, u) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y) \rightarrow \forall y\colon (C(g, y) \rightarrow Q(g, y))$	14
18.	$\exists y\colon C(g, y) \wedge \forall y\colon (C(g, y) \rightarrow Q(g, y))$	12, 17
19.	$E(g)$	11, 18

Hence, the theory *Pros*(*a*) is a little more complicated than *Pros*. But the reward is the theorem that appears in row 19: God exists (in reality). And, no matter what the traditional objection against *Ratio Anselmi* is, no logical error has been committed when introducing the term "*g*" by means of the definition (3) (cf. row 7).

THE THEORY *Pros*(*b*)

Instead of a term "God", a predicate "is a god" or maybe "is divine" could be introduced and defined to avoid the question of the uniqueness of God. If the derivative formula

$$G(x)$$

is to be read: *x* is a god, the axioms (A1)–(A4) are sufficient and may remain unchanged. The definition:

(4) $G(x) \equiv \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y)$

may complement the theory. That would be a counterpart for Anselm's premise (P0) here. It is stated here that any x is a god if and only if the x is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. And no assumption regarding the number of such beings is being made. There may be exactly one god among objects of thought, as well as many gods, even infinitely many, or, finally, no gods whatsoever. Such a definition, if properly constructed, requires no further conditions to be consistent. The theory *Pros*(b) described like that is consistent. It is actually *Pros* itself, enriched with one derivative term.

To prove God's existence within the confines of the theory *Pros*(b) we proceed exactly as we do in the theory *Pros*, until row 12 (cf. page 6). Then proceed as follows.

13. $G(x) \equiv \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y)$ definition
14. $\exists x\colon (E(x) \wedge G(x))$ 12, 13

The theorem proven in the theory *Pros*(b) claims, for some x, x exists (in reality) and is a god (is divine). Which means, there is at least one god among existent objects. The introduction of Anselm's premise (P0) in that way is practically costless. As it has been already mentioned, *Pros* and *Pros*(b) are practically equivalent. On the other hand it is at least disputable to what degree Anselm's original philosophy has been faithfully recounted.

THE THEORY *Pros(c)*

There is a third solution. Anselm's premise (P0) may be considered a partial description of God rather than a normal definition. To say that an elephant is a mammal may not be a definition of an elephant, although it is a statement concerning the elephant. Similarly, to say that God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived may not be a definition of God. Such a view is formalized in the theory *Pros*(c). The term "g" is an individual name of God. However, it will not be defined, but rather included into the alphabet as a primitive term. So, the term "g" may appear in specific axioms and it is at least partially characterized by the axioms. In the theory *Pros*(c), the axiom (A1) is to be replaced with another one:

(A1c) $\exists y\colon C(g, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y)$.

The axiom (A1c) will serve for a counterpart of both premises (P0) and (P1): the first conjunct is a counterpart of the premise (P1), whereas the other one is a counterpart of the premise (P0). In the axiom it is

stated that God is conceived of by an agent – the premise (P1) – and that nothing greater than God can be conceived of by any agent – the premise (P0). The axioms (A2)–(A4) remain unchanged and no further assumption is to be made. Again, the theory *Pros*(*c*) is consistent. The proof of God's existence within the confines of the theory *Pros*(*c*) may be conducted as follows.

1. $\exists y\colon C(g, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y)$	axiom (A1c)
2. $C(x, y) \rightarrow \exists u\colon Q(x, u)$	axiom (A2)
3. $Q(x, y) \wedge \neg Q(x, u) \wedge C(x, u) \rightarrow H(x, y, x, u)$	axiom (A3)
4. $\exists y\colon C(x, y) \wedge \forall y\colon (C(x, y) \rightarrow Q(x, y)) \rightarrow E(x)$	axiom (A4)
5. $C(g, y) \rightarrow \exists u\colon Q(g, u)$	2
6. $Q(g, y) \wedge \neg Q(g, u) \wedge C(g, u) \rightarrow H(g, y, g, u)$	3
7. $\exists y\colon C(g, y) \wedge \forall y\colon (C(g, y) \rightarrow Q(g, y)) \rightarrow E(g)$	4
8. $\exists y\colon C(g, y) \wedge \exists u\colon Q(g, u) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y)$	1, 5
9. $Q(g, y) \wedge \neg Q(g, u) \wedge C(g, u) \rightarrow \exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y)$	6
10. $Q(g, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y) \rightarrow \neg(\neg Q(g, u) \wedge C(g, u))$	9
11. $Q(g, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y) \rightarrow (C(g, u) \rightarrow Q(g, u))$	10
12. $Q(g, y) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y) \rightarrow \forall y\colon (C(g, y) \rightarrow Q(g, y))$	11
13. $\exists u\colon Q(g, u) \wedge \neg\exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, g, y) \rightarrow \forall y\colon (C(g, y) \rightarrow Q(g, y))$	12
14. $\exists y\colon C(g, y) \wedge \forall y\colon (C(g, y) \rightarrow Q(g, y))$	8, 13
15. $E(g)$	4, 14

The theorem derived in row 15 refers to God's existence straightforwardly. The theory *Pros*(*c*) combines the simplicity of the theory *Pros* with the efficiency of the theory *Pros*(*a*). That seems to be quite a recommendation, but still the choice between the presented variants of the theory *Pros* remains open and should depend mainly on philosophical investigations.

FORMAL FEATURES OF THE THEORIES

As has already been mentioned a few times, all the formal theories we presented, i.e. *Pros*, *Pros*(*a*), *Pros*(*b*) and *Pros*(*c*), are consistent. It may be easily shown by means of interpretation in arithmetic of natural numbers including zero. To transform formulas of the theories in question into formulas of arithmetic, read

$C(x, y)$	as $x = y$,
$Q(x, y)$	as $x = y$,
$H(x, y, u, w)$	as $x>y+u+w$

and

$E(x)$ as $x = x$.

Furthermore, regarding the theory *Pros*(*c*) only, read "*g*" as zero. Under such interpretation, all the axioms in question - (A1), (A1c), (A2), (A3), (A4) and (A5a) - turn out to be true statements of arithmetic. Derivative terms - "*g*" in *Pros*(*a*) and "*G*" in *Pros*(*b*) - do not require interpretation, for the respective definitions - (3) and (4) - are formally correct.

A similar interpretation shows the hidden premise (P4) to be vital. As it has been claimed, although the premise (P4) does not appear in Anselm's text explicitly, it is definitely unavoidable in the reasoning. So, if one reads

$C(x, y)$ as $x = y$,
$Q(x, y)$ as $x = y$,
$H(x, y, u, w)$ as $x > y + u + w$

and

$E(x)$ as $x \neq x$

the axioms (A1), (A2) and (A3) are transformed into true statements of arithmetic, whereas the axiom (A4) is transformed into a false statement of arithmetic. Similarly Anselm's theorem of God's existence, derived in the theory *Pros* (cf. the derivation on the page 6, row 12) is also transformed into a false statement of arithmetic. This proves that both the axiom (A4) and the theorem derived are independent from axioms (A1), (A2) and (A3). So, the axiom (A4) is substantial. Analogical considerations show the premise (P4) to be inescapable in all versions of the theory *Pros*.

THE CONCEPT OF GOD

The chief objection voiced commonly to *Ratio Anselmi* concerns the way Anselm makes use of the concept of God. It is claimed to be illegitimate to conclude from a definition or a concept of an object to the existence of that object ("*l'objection calassique contre l'argument de S. Anselme est qu'il fait sortir l'existence de la pens´e*").[13] And what Anselm did appears to be exactly such a conclusion, so he seems to prejudice the case in favour of God's existence at the starting point. Of course, the premise (P0) sits in the dock.

[13] E. Gilson, 'Sens et nature de l'argument de Saint Anselme', *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et litteraire du moyen age*, 9 (1934), pp. 5–51 (p. 6).

The objection was raised immediately, when Anselm had issued *Proslogion*, by a mysterious monk called Gaunilo of Marmoutiers, the author of *Liber pro insipiente*. Gaunilo points out a concept of a perfect desert island, lost somewhere in oceans and absolutely unknown ("*aiunt quidam alicubi oceani esse insulam, quam [. . .] fabulantur multo amplius quam de fortunatis insulis fertur, diuitiarum deliciarumque omnium inaestimabili ubertare pollere, nulloque possessore aut habitatore uniuersis allis quas incolunt homines terris possidendorum redundantia usquequaque praestare*").[14] If Anselm's reasoning was correct, no one, who understood the concept, might doubt such an island to exist in reality. For an existent island is greater (i.e. better) than a nonexistent one, and so the non-existent one is not perfect ("*non potest ultra dubitare insulam illam terris omnibus praestantiorem uere esse alicubi in re* [...] *quia nisi fuerit, quaecumque alia in re est terra, praestantior illa erit, ac sic ipsa iam a te praestantior intellecta praestantior non erit*").[15]

The objection took classical shape in *Contra Gentiles* by Thomas Aquinas. He claimed clearly that there was no legitimate conclusion to be drawn from a concept to existence in reality, although there may be a legitimate conclusion drawn from a concept to existence in understanding (i.e. conceivability or conceivability qua existent). So, Anselm's reasoning must not be correct ("*eodem enim necesse est poni rem et nominis rationem; ex hoc autem quod mente concipitur quod profertur hoc nomine «deus» non aequitur Deum esse, nisi in intellectu* [...] *et ex hoc non sequitur quod sit aliquid in rerum natura, quo non majus cogitari non possit*").[16] The objection of Gaunilo and Aquinas was to be repeated over and over again during the following centuries, but no one put it better than they.

Although Gaunilo and Aquinas' objection shows a probably right feeling that something is wrong about *Ratio Anselmi* and that it has something to do with the concept of God, the objection thus voiced is certainly illegitimate. Nothing, but adversaries' feelings, may prohibit one from using definitions in proofs of the existence of any objects. On the contrary, no proof can be conducted until it has been determined, at least partially, what the object of the proof is. For instance, to prove that in any set of natural numbers there is the smallest one, it is necessary to

[14] Gaunilo of Marmoutiers, *Liber pro insipiente*, chapter 6.
[15] Ibidem.
[16] Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, I, 11.

know what a natural number and the smallest number in a set is. The objection I speak of may be easily and immediately discredited by a brief observation of any of Aquinas' proofs of God's existence (the so called *Five Ways*). Each of those five proofs ends with a similar statement: and that is what everyone calls God. For example, at the end of the kinetic argument (*ex motu*) one can read: "therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God" ("*ergo necesse est devenire ad aliquid primum movens, quod a nullo moveatur, et hoc omnes intelligunt Deum*").[17] Such a phrase is perfectly analogical to that of Anselm: "truly there is, then, a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being you are, o Lord, our God" ("*sic ergo vere est aliquid quo maius cogitari non potest, ut nec cogitari possit non esse; et hoc est tu, Domine Deus noster*").[18]

So, Aquinas makes no less a use of a concept of God than Anselm. The only difference is that Anselm puts it forward at the beginning, while Aquinas delays it to the end. And the difference is a matter of writing style only. Notice, there is no difficulty whatsoever to rephrase Anselm's proof in, say, Aquinas' style or contrarily.

To rephrase Anselm's proof, consider the theory *Pros*. Within its confines, a theorem has been derived in row 12:

(5) $\exists x\colon (E(x) \wedge \neg \exists y,u,w\colon H(u, w, x, y))$

with no use of any concept of God whatsoever. It is now legitimate to add the definition (4) in row 13, and immediately derive the statement of the existence of a god:

(6) $\exists x\colon (E(x) \wedge G(x))$,

like in the theory *Pros*(*b*). And if one is ready to strengthen the theory *Pros* by the addition of the axiom (A5a), to the effect of the uniqueness of the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, one can, again, derive the theorem (5) with no use of any concept of God. And finally, on the base of (A5a) and (5), the definition (3) may be introduced properly, which allows us to derive the existence of God:

(7) $E(g)$,

like in *Pros*(*a*). And remember, in the theory *Pros*(*c*) Anselm's reasoning is absolutely definition-free. So, generally, like Aquinas, Anselm may

[17] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 2, 3.

[18] Anselm, *Proslogion*, chapter 3.

forget any concept of God and argue for the existence of an object than which nothing greater can be conceived. And, like Aquinas, finally, once everything has been done, he may call the object God on behalf of all of the human genus.

On the other hand, any Aquinas' proof may be immediately rephrased to mirror *Ratio Anselmi*. Consider Aquinas' kinetic proof[19] in a slightly new version, say, Anselmian style. "Who are you, o God? We believe you are a first mover, put in motion by no other. Is there no such an object, since the fool has said in his heart, there is no God? But, if there is no first mover, there is no motion whatsoever, for whatever is in motion, is put in motion by another, and that by another again, and this cannot go on to infinity. So moving things do not actually move, but this is not possible." If you rephrase Aquinas' argument slightly like that, it appears to derive existence from a definition no less than that of Anselm.

A transformation of the objection I speak of concerns the ontological commitment of the first order logic. It is sometimes argued that any use of the existential quantification prejudices in favour of the existence of the object. That is a pure misunderstanding, for the existence expressed by the existential quantification is exactly belonging to the domain of quantification and nothing more, and the domain must not be empty. This does not determine either real or any other form of the existence of the objects the domain consists with. Imagine, for instance, two mathematicians: Tweedledum and Tweedledee. Tweedledum is a Platonist while Tweedledee is a nominalist. They may perfectly agree that there exists a natural quotient of the numbers 27 and 9, and yet in Tweedledum's view numbers exist, whereas in Tweedledee's view they do not. Similarly, existential quantification in Anselm's proof – at least if formalized like the theory *Pros* and its versions – determines that there is at least one object of understanding, i.e. at least one object is conceivable, not that it exists in reality.

THE WORD "GREATER"

Neither presence nor location of a definition is vital for evaluation of a proof. However, the content of the definition is vital, unless one has to do with a purely terminological convention. And it may be judged adequate or not, and hence, affirmed or rejected.

[19] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 2. 3.

When the existence (or non-existence) of God is being proved, the issue is not an arbitrary object to be called God or anything else, by mere convention, for short. The issue is rather some object people think and speak of in common vernacular. And those thinking or speaking of God have at least an indefinite feeling of what God approximately is. What is generally in force refers especially to Jewish, Christian and Muslim thinkers. Particularly Christians face the challenge to justify the existence of God that is spoken of in the *Nicene Creed*.

Consider the premises (P0) and (P3). In the latter it is stated that to exist is something greater (in a sense) than not to exist. Philosophers have put a lot of effort into the elucidation of the concept of greatness, achieving rather modest success. However, philosophical views concerning greatness are not substantial and may be disregarded without loss. It is enough to take into account the fact that existence is included into some hierarchy of being in a way described strictly in the axiom (A3). The term "greater" may be understood in any sense, provided the axiom (A3) is satisfied.

Proceed now to the premise (P0), according to which God is a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Together with the premise (P3), that means God is more similar to existent objects than to non-existent ones. God stands closer – in the sense of the premise (P3) – to existent than to non-existent objects. Now, if one believes in God, the maker of all that is, seen and unseen (cf. the *Nicene Creed*), the premise (P0) is a considerable view. However, if one is an atheist, one clearly must not accept the premise (P0). Atheism simply consists of the notion that the God that Christians believe in is not a being than which nothing greater can be conceived (in the sense of the premise in question). According to any atheist, any existing object, including the piece of paper you read, is greater than God. For God simply does not exist. Hence, the premise (P0) simply states what is to be concluded to. Such an error is usually called *petitio principii*.

On the other hand, if the premise (P0) governs the term "greater", the Christian God is by definition a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. That concept would be something close to the concept of the Almighty of the *Nicene Creed*. According to Cappuyns this is just the case; namely, the definition of God as a being than which nothing greater can be conceived is most obvious and most common ("*admise par tout*

le monde et, en realite, tautologique").[20] An atheist is ready to accept such a concept of God, for it is deeply rooted in common vernacular. However, in that case the atheist simply must reject the premise (P3), for at least in one case a non-existent being – namely, God as understood in the premise (P0) – is greater than an existent object – namely any existent being. And again, it is no sign of the atheist's malice; it is just the content of the claim of atheism. Similarly, *petitio principii* has been committed in *Ratio Anselmi*. Thomas Aquinas was probably quite close to revealing it. Arguing against Anselm, Aquinas wrote that to state that something greater can be thought than anything given in reality is a difficulty only to a person who admits that there is in reality something than which nothing greater can be conceived ("*non enim inconveniens est, quolibet dato vel in re, vel in intellectu, aliquid majus cogitari posse, nisi ei qui concedit esse aliquid, quo majus cogitari non possit in rerum natura*").[21] It might be the case that Aquinas, having accepted the premise (P0), understood that (P3) is simply illegitimate, false under such a sense of the word "greater".

There is one more eventuality. Perhaps the term "greater" appears in *Ratio Anselmi* in at least two different meanings. Once, in the premise (P0), in a sense close to the common vernacular, and again in the premise (P3), in the technical sense, rather obscure, but described sufficiently in the premise. Well, such an error is called traditionally *quaternio terminorum*. No other policy seems to be imaginable. All in all, unfortunately, Anselm's proof proves nothing.

THE WORD "CONCEIVE"

There is another, quite similar, error in *Ratio Anselmi*. It is connected with the expressions "x is conceivable" and "x is conceivable qua existent". They have been formalized as "$\exists y$: $C(x, y)$", which means that some agent (e.g. the fool) conceives of x in a way, and "$\exists y$: $Q(x, y)$", which means that some agent conceives of x qua existent, respectively. Conceivability may be understood in several ways, but in Anselm's proof, because of the premise (P2), it must be a way that includes possibility somehow. Objects of inconsistent descriptions, like a square circle, should be considered as inconceivable. It may be questioned whether or not physically impossible

[20] M. Cappuyns, 'L'argument de S. Anselme', p. 324.
[21] Thomas Aquinas, C*ontra Gentiles*, I, 11.

or similar objects – like a cheese moon – are conceivable in that sense. Fortunately, that question may be disregarded here.

The crucial question to be posed refers to the domain of agents that the variables range over. There are two eventualities: either all agents are admissible, including logically fallible ones, or only those that are ideal, i.e. those perfectly rational. The point is, whether all agents being considered enjoy logical omniscience, i.e. the unrestricted ability to see logical consequences and the absolute freedom of logical errors (a nightmare of all those occupied with epistemic logic). Now, look through the two eventualities.

Suppose first, all agents are perfectly rational. In such a case the premise (P1) is completely unjustified. Both the Biblical fools and sincere believers appear to conceive of God, for they think and speak of him. However, perhaps God is actually inconceivable, but they do not realize it. They may not be able to see or correctly judge all the logical consequences of the description of God. They may not be able to see, say, inconsistencies in the description of God, like Gottlob Frege had not noticed inconsistencies in his description of sets, until he received the famous letter from Bertrand Russell. So, in such a case it would only *appear* that God is conceivable, because an irrational agent often judges by appearances. No perfectly rational agent would ever judge such a God as being conceivable – at least in a sense meeting the premise (P2). In such a case Anselm must be reproached with *petitio principii*.

Consider in turn the other eventuality. Suppose irrational, or at least fallible, agents are admissible. In such a case the premise (P1) is certainly justified. However, the hidden premise (P4) is not only unjustified, but it is certainly false. (And I proved that the axiom (A4), the counterpart of the premise (P4) is inevitable, cf. page 11.) It is stated in the premise in question that an object x exists (in reality), provided x is conceivable, but inconceivable qua non-existent. That would be a kind of principle of the rationality of being. Now, suppose an object x is conceived of by a single irrational agent a, who cannot see the impossibility of its existence. And a conceives of x qua existent. No other agent conceives of x, especially no perfectly rational agent ever conceives of x. Clearly, due to the agent a, the first conjunct of the antecedent of the axiom (A4) or the premise (P4) is satisfied. And so is the other conjunct, for there is no agent which conceives of x qua non-existent. Nevertheless, x must not exist. So, if fallible agents are admissible, the premise (P4) is not justified or even strictly false. That is, however, *petitio principii* once again.

Gaunilo took some note of the problem of the abilities of the agents when he claimed that no proof of God's existence would have been necessary if God had been truly inconceivable qua non-existent ("*uix umquam poterit esse credibile, cum dictum et auditum fuerit istud, non eo modo posse cogitari non esse, quo etiam potest non esse deus; nam si non potest: cur contra negantem aut dubitantem quod sit aliqua talis natura, tota ista disputatio est assumpta*").[22] And it was John Duns Scotus who first claimed clearly that conceivability in Anselm's sense is not sufficient to justify the possibility of God's existence.[23]

CONCLUSIONS

On the purely formal level, *Ratio Anselmi* is a piece of proper deduction. No illegitimate use of a concept of God is being made. However, it is not sound and proves nothing except entailment between premises and conclusions of a sort. The meaning of the terms "greater" and "conceived" is indefinite, which causes the collapse of the whole proof. There is no direct remedy, for the meaning of a term required by one premise is excluded by the other and conversely. Some medieval thinkers, like Aquinas, Gaunilo and Duns Scotus, might have been partially aware of some of those problems. However, none of them was able to phrase them in an adequate way. Perhaps it is the formalization which enables us to see assumptions and other interrelations between premises and other theorems, provided the formalization is accurate enough and the formal tool employed is transparent.

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TWO TYPES OF ONTOLOGICAL FRAME AND GÖDEL'S ONTOLOGICAL PROOF

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Abstract. The aim of this essay is twofold. First, it outlines the concept of *ontological frame* (or *structure*). Secondly, two models are distinguished on this structure. The first one is connected to Kant's concept of possible object and the second one relates to Leibniz's. Leibniz maintains that the source of possibility is the mere logical consistency of the notions involved, so that possibility coincides with analytical possibility. Kant, instead, argues that consistency is only a necessary component of possibility. According to Kant, something is possible if there is a cause capable of bringing it into existence; to this end consistency alone is not sufficient. Thus, while the Leibnizian notion of consistency is at the root of the concept of *analytical possibility*, the Kantian notion of possibility is the source of *real possibility*. This difference plays an important role in the discussion of Gödel's ontological proof, which can be formally interpreted on the *ontological frame of the pure perfections*. While this proof, under some emendation condition, is conclusive in the context of Leibniz's ontological model, it is not so within the Kantian one. This issue will be the subject of the second part of the present essay.

I. ONTOLOGICAL FRAME *S*

An ontological structure *S* is a set of possible worlds correlated and determined according to the objects existing in them. Formally:

$$S = <W, R, U, E, Q>$$

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where:

- W is a set of possible worlds
- R is a total relation over W
- U is a universal structure formed by a set U of possible objects characterised by attributes (properties and relations) taken from a set P, i.e. $U = \langle U, P \rangle$
- E : is a function from possible worlds to the power set of U
- Q is a non empty subset of W

1.1 Possible worlds and accessibility relation: W and R

W is a set of ontologically possible worlds. An ontologically possible world is an analytically possible world. As is well known, an analytically possible world is a simply consistent and maximal set of states of affairs. The relation R of accessibility between worlds is a total relation. It establishes that every world is a possible alternative to every other. The relation R expresses the metaphysical and, hence, unconditional nature of the notion of possibility inherent in the structure that we are presenting. We use the symbols u, v, w, ... as variables for worlds.

Of course, the normal definition of modal ontic operators holds:

$$S \models_u \Box\alpha \Leftrightarrow \forall v(uRv \Rightarrow S \models_v \alpha)$$
$$\Leftrightarrow \forall v(S \models_v \alpha) \qquad \text{(because the totality of } R\text{)}$$

and

$$S \models_u \Diamond\alpha \Leftrightarrow \exists v(uRv \wedge S \models_v \alpha)$$
$$\Leftrightarrow \exists v(S \models_v \alpha) \qquad \text{(because the totality of } R\text{)}$$

1.2 Universal ontological substructure: U

The universal ontological substructure U is made up of a set U of possible objects characterised by attributes (properties and relations) of a set P:

$$U = \langle U, P \rangle$$

– U (objectual domain) is a set of possible objects.

A possible object is an analytically possible object, i.e. an object that necessarily satisfies the only requirement of coherence. The set of analytically possible objects is, in turn, subdivided into two disjoint subsets: the subset of really possible objects and the subset of purely possible objects (simply consistent). This distinction is introduced below. Now it is important to stress two issues. Firstly, that the set U is the *same*

in every world. The reason for this is that the objectual domain is a set of possible objects and these are present (as possible), although not (as actual existent), in all worlds. Secondly, it is worth noting that the objects are *individual*, i.e. completely determined with respect to all properties. The reason for this is the fact that an object can only exist as complete.

As usual, the elements of U are indicated with the signs x, y, z, ... It should be noted that the individual names are intended as *rigid* designators, that is to say that for any name x, x designates the same entity in all possible worlds. In the following, allow me to use some signs of the language as metalinguistic signs. For example, the signs x, y, z, ... will be used both as linguistic individual variables and as metalinguistic signs for objects. Similarly, expressions such as $S \models_u \Diamond\alpha$ and $S \models_u \Box\alpha$ will often be abbreviated to $\Diamond\alpha$ and $\Box\alpha$. The context will be sufficient to understand the level of expressions.

- P is the set of attributes (properties and relations) on U.

Given the modal context, the attributes can be intended both intensionally and extensionally. The *intension* is given as a function establishing the extension of the attribute at each world. However, the intension of the attribute fixes the *same extension* in every world. In fact, they are conceived in a *rigid* way, because the attributes belonging to P are all essential attributes, in Kantian language *real*, and the individuals of U are possible objects, that do *not vary* for essential attributes but just for the fact that they exist in a world or not.

The attribute of existence will be discussed separately since it is the only attribute considered as non-rigid.

1.3 Existence Predicate **E**

1.3.1 Difference between essential/real predicates and existence predicate

The basic idea of the ontological structure that we are presenting is that possible objects are the same in all worlds, only the extension of the existence predicate changes from world to world. As stated above, this is based on the distinction between *essential* or *real* (in Kantian terminology) predicates and the existence predicate. A real predicate states how the object is determined (order of *sosein*). Conversely, the existence predicate states if it is actual in one world or another (order of *dasein*). Consequently, an object can be actual in one world and non-actual in an alternative possible world, despite being identical with respect to essence.

1.3.2 Intension of the predicate E

As previously stated, it is a fundamental assumption of the semantics of the ontological structure that the objectual domain is constant for all possible worlds. However, the possibilia *actualised* in each of the possible worlds are not the same. The possibilia actualised in a world are only the possibilia *existing* in that world, i.e. the possibilia for which the property of existence E is valid in it. So, the possible denoted by x is actualised in the world u if and only if E(x) is true in u. In formal terms:

$$S \models_{u} \mathrm{E}(\mathrm{x})$$

This amounts to saying that the extension of E varies from world to world, i.e. that the intension of E is the function $E : W \mapsto \wp(\mathrm{U})$ and that this function is not constant. Moreover it meets the requirement of the existence condition:

$$(\forall \mathrm{u})(\emptyset \neq E(\mathrm{u}) \subset \mathrm{U})$$

The existence condition ensures that the extension of the predicate of existence is never (in any of the possible worlds) empty. This means that, for every world, at least one possible must be actualised. The rationale of this condition is obvious. A possible world is a possible alternative to the actual world, which could not be if none of the possible objects of the world were existent in it.

1.4 The set Q of really possible worlds

The mere consistency of a world does not guarantee that this world is *really* possible. Real possibility requires, besides consistency, a *foundation*. It should not be simply based on the *pure power of being* but on a *productive force*, a *power to make be*. This power belongs to the cause of a state of affairs if it is a *contingent* state of affairs, and to the state itself, as an actual state of affairs, if it is a non-caused, i.e. *necessary*, state of affairs. For this reason we must distinguish within the set *W* of all *analytically possible* worlds the set *Q* of *really possible* worlds. The relation between *W* and *Q* is expressed by this formula:

$$\emptyset \neq Q \subseteq W.$$

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION: Why can we not assume that *W* is made up of only analytically possible worlds? The answer lies in the *non-essentialist* nature of the theory of being, formalised in the *S* structure. In any ontological theory based on the distinction between

essential predicates and existence, existence cannot be deduced from the essential order of things. Therefore, affirming that ontologically possible (i.e. really possible) worlds are analytically possible amounts to saying that existence is a property that can be banally derived from the essential order of things, in the sense that existence can be attributed to any analytically possible world just because of its essential consistency. Conversely, if existence cannot be reduced to essence – as Thomas said – it must come from outside. So, the fact that a specific possible world has been or could be realised cannot be deduced from its essential structure. Therefore, we cannot determine *a priori* (*ex essentia*) which worlds are really possible. We can only *experience* the existence of the actual world and we may consider the real possibility of other ones since the necessary conditions are met in the actual world for their creation, or there are traces of their existence. Anyway, we do not have logically sufficient reasons to equate the set of analytically possible worlds with the set of really possible worlds.

We can, at this point, introduce some new definitions:

1.5 Definitions

Definition 1: Existence in a really possible world (Real existence)

Let Q be a new propositional constant describing the *real* accessibility of the world in which it is true. In formal terms:

$$S \models_u Q \Leftrightarrow u \in Q$$

Then we can introduce the new predicate E* of existence in a really possible world (*real existence*):

$$E^*(x) \Leftrightarrow Q \wedge E(x)$$

(x really exists iff x exists in a really possible world)

Definition 2: Modal ontic operators of real necessity and real possibility

These arise by restricting the range of accessible worlds under the condition of belonging to the set *Q*.

$$S \models_u \Box^*\alpha \Leftrightarrow \forall v(uRv \wedge v \in Q \Rightarrow S \models_v \alpha)$$
$$\Leftrightarrow (\forall v \in Q)(S \models_v \alpha)$$

and

$$S \models_u \Diamond^*\alpha \Leftrightarrow \exists v(uRv \wedge v \in Q \wedge S \models_v \alpha)$$
$$\Leftrightarrow (\exists v \in Q)(S \models_v \alpha)$$

Corollary 1:

$\Box\alpha \Rightarrow \Box^*\alpha$ by def. of $\Box$ and $\Box^*$

but not:

$\Diamond\alpha \Rightarrow \Diamond^*\alpha$ by def. of $\Box$ and $\Box^*$

Definition 3: Analytically possible individuals

The above reflections on the notion of analytically possible world also apply to the notion of analytically possible entity. As analytically possible worlds are such only by virtue of their consistency, similarly analytically possible entities are such only by virtue of their consistency. But, a possible world is an analytically possible world. Therefore, x is analytically possible iff there is some possible world in which x exists. In formal terms:

$$P(x) \Leftrightarrow \exists v(S \models_v E(x))$$
$$\Leftrightarrow \Diamond E(x)$$
(x is possible iff it is possible that x exists)

Corollary 2 (Main principle of ontological frame PS): Every possible is existent in some possible world. In formal terms:

$$\forall x \exists v(S \models_v E(x))$$
$$\forall x \Diamond E(x))$$
(for every x it is possible that x exists)

Proof:

$P(x) \Leftrightarrow \exists v(S \models_v E(x))$	def. P(x)
$\forall x P(x) \Leftrightarrow \forall x \exists v(S \models_v E(x))$	logic
$\forall x P(x)$	def. *W*
$\forall x \exists v(S \models_v E(x))$	logic
$\forall x \Diamond E(x)$	def. $\Diamond$

The above reflections on the notion of really possible world also apply to the notion of really possible entity. Just as the set of analytically possible worlds cannot be equated with that of really possible worlds, the

set of analytically possible entities cannot be identified with that of really possible entities. This is due to the close relation between really possible world and really possible entity. So, as hereafter the notion of analytically possible entity has been introduced through that of analytically possible world, now the notion of really possible entity will be actually introduced through the notion of really possible world.

Definition 4: Really possible individuals

Given any possible world, all the analytically possible entities are *present* in it since all the consistently definable objects are analytically possible in every possible world. Note: we used the word 'present' – not 'existent' – since existence, in a world, does not necessarily pertain to all analytically possible entities but only to the entities that would really exist if the world in which they exist were actualised. These are, therefore, the possibilia that exist in that world. The *really* (and not just *analytically*) possible entities are the possibilia that exist *at least* in some *really* possible world.

$$\mathrm{RP}(x) \Leftrightarrow (\exists v \in Q)(S \models_v \mathrm{E}(x))$$

$$\Leftrightarrow \Diamond \mathrm{E}^{\star}(x)$$

(x is really possible iff it is really possible that x exists)

Corollary 3: x is really possible iff it is possible that x really exists.

$$\mathrm{RP}(x) \Leftrightarrow \exists v(S \models_v \mathrm{E}^{\star}(x))$$

$$\mathrm{RP}(x) \Leftrightarrow \Diamond \mathrm{E}^{\star}(x)$$

Proof:

$\mathrm{RP}(x) \Leftrightarrow (\exists v \in Q)(S \models_v \mathrm{E}(x))$		def. RP(x)
$\mathrm{RP}(x) \Leftrightarrow \exists v(v \in Q \wedge S \models_v \mathrm{E}(x))$		logic
$\mathrm{RP}(x) \Leftrightarrow \exists v(S \models_v \mathrm{Q} \wedge S \models_v \mathrm{E}(x))$		def. Q
$\mathrm{RP}(x) \Leftrightarrow \exists v(S \models_v \mathrm{Q} \wedge \mathrm{E}(x))$		logic
$\mathrm{RP}(x) \Leftrightarrow \exists v(S \models_v \mathrm{E}^{\star}(x))$		def. E*
$\mathrm{RP}(x) \Leftrightarrow \Diamond \mathrm{E}^{\star}(x)$		def. ◊

Definition 5: Purely analytically possible individuals

These are the analytically possible individuals that are not really possible.

$$PAP(x) \Leftrightarrow (\exists v)(S \models_v E(x)) \wedge \neg(\exists v)(v \in Q \wedge S \models_v E(x))$$

$$PAP(x) \Leftrightarrow \Diamond E(x) \wedge \neg\Diamond E^*(x)$$

1.6 Propositions on the ontological structure S

There are many laws that characterize the ontological structure. Here, we are interested only in the most important for our discourse. They concern the necessity character the real predicates possess as rigid predicates and the splitting between the Kantian and Leibnizian models of ontological frame.

1.6.1 Law of necessitation of the essential properties

Let $\alpha(x)$ be an essential predicate (i.e. E do not occur in α), then $\alpha(x) \rightarrow \Box\alpha(x)$.

This law finds its justification in the rigid character of the individual variables and of all essential predicates. Only the existence predicate is not rigid.

1.6.2 Splitting between Kantian and Leibnizian interpretations of ontological frame S

1. The Kantian model is characterized by the fact that:

$$Q \neq W \qquad \text{and then} \qquad \text{not } (\Diamond\alpha \Rightarrow \Diamond^*\alpha)$$

Consequently:

$$\text{not}(\forall x\Diamond Ex \Leftrightarrow \forall x\Diamond E^*x)$$

(The really possibles do not coincide with the analytically possibles)

2. On the contrary, the Leibnizian model is characterized by the identity:

$$Q = W \qquad \text{and then} \qquad \Diamond\alpha \Leftrightarrow \Diamond^*\alpha$$

Consequently, for Leibniz holds:

$$1.\ \forall x\Diamond Ex \Leftrightarrow \forall x\Diamond E^*x$$

(The really possibles coincide with the analytically possibles)

2. Principle PL: $\forall x\Diamond E^*x$ (by the Main principle PS)

(Every possible can really exist)

Philosophically, the fact that there are models of the ontological structure in which not all analytical possibilia are existing in some real world is very important. It means that the analytical possibility of

a concept is not a sufficient condition for that concept to be exemplifiable (actuable). To be precise, this element underlies the insurmountable component of the Kantian criticism of the modal ontological proof.

In fact, the aim of the second part of this paper is to analyse specifically this question in order to show that also the last version of ontological proof, Gödel's one, falls under the Kantian criticism of the purely analytical notion of possibility. We will consider, first, the Leibnizian formulation of modal proof and then Gödel's one. For both formulations we shall present only the relevant aspects from the Kantian versus Leibnizian point of view about possibility.

II. THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT IN THE MODAL FORMULATION OF LEIBNIZ AND GÖDEL

Leibniz's version of the ontological argument stands out for being endowed with modal structure. This is quite evident in all formulations Leibniz assigns to the argument along every step of his reasoning. The same is found, in a less developed fashion and with a few features of its own, also in Descartes' Meditation V. The advantage of the modal formulation of the argument is that the modal structure of it allows the narrowing down of all premises to one main premise, more precisely, the one stating the possibility of the maximally perfect Being.

2.1. Leibniz's formulation of modal ontological proof (1676, 1701)

Leibniz's version of the ontological argument (see Leibniz 1676 and 1701) is based on two premises.
Descartes' Principle (PC):

1. $\forall x\Box(Gx \wedge E^{*}x \rightarrow \Box(Gx \wedge E^{*}x))$ (Strong Principle)
(if x is G and x really exists then it is necessary that x is G and x really exists)

2. $\forall x\Box(Gx \rightarrow \Box Gx)$ (Weak Principle)
(if x is G then it is necessary that x is G)

Main Premise: $\exists x\Diamond(Gx \wedge E^{*}x)$
(some really possible x is G)

To prove is: $\exists x(Gx \wedge E^{*}x)$
(some x that is G really exists)

Proof:

Part 1. Leibniz's Rule (LR) (where X is a set of formulas)

$$\frac{X\ \alpha \vdash \Box\alpha}{\Box(X)\ \Diamond\alpha \vdash \alpha}$$

Derivation (in S5):

$X\ \alpha \vdash \Box\alpha$	Hypothesis
$X\ \neg\Box\alpha \vdash \neg\alpha$	Contraposition
$X\ \Diamond\neg\alpha \vdash \neg\alpha$	Transf $\Box\Diamond$
$\Box(X)\ \Box\Diamond\neg\alpha \vdash \Box\neg\alpha$	Necessitation
$\Box(X)\ \Diamond\neg\alpha \vdash \Box\neg\alpha$	by Axiom 5
$\Box(X)\ \neg\Box\neg\alpha \vdash \neg\Diamond\neg\alpha$	Contraposition
$\Box(X)\ \Diamond\alpha \vdash \Box\alpha$	Transf $\Box\Diamond$
$\Box(X)\ \Diamond\alpha \vdash \alpha$	by Axiom T

Part 2.

$Gx\wedge E^{*}x \rightarrow \Box(Gx\wedge E^{*}x)\ Gx\wedge E^{*}x$	
$\vdash \Box(Gx\wedge E^{*}x)$	A, MP
$\Box(Gx\wedge E^{*}x \rightarrow \Box(Gx\wedge E^{*}x))\ \Diamond(Gx\wedge E^{*}x)$	
$\vdash Gx\wedge E^{*}x$	by LR
$\forall x\Box(Gx\wedge E^{*}x \rightarrow \Box(Gx\wedge E^{*}x))\ \exists x\Diamond(Gx\wedge E^{*}x)$	
$\vdash \exists x(Gx\wedge E^{*}x)$	$\forall$I, I$\exists$, $\exists$I
$\exists x\Diamond(Gx\wedge E^{*}x) \vdash \exists x(Gx\wedge E^{*}x)$	by PC1

ad Descartes' Principle (PC):

For Leibniz this principle is plausible since it is utterly befitting that the most perfect Entity, provided it does exist, be necessary. An entity that possesses perfections or existence contingently cannot be most perfect. Gödel too believes that necessary existence is a perfection. Note that the affirmation of the positivity of necessary existence is not axed even by the Kantian criticism. As a matter of fact, as for the existence, this criticism is justified for two reasons. Not only does the existence add nothing to

the perfection of an object but neither does it indicate any perfection of the essence. All essences (the possibilia) are prone to existence; hence the fact that an essence is exemplified does not mean that this essence is more perfect than another. Neither does necessary existence add, of itself, any perfection to the essence of a thing. However, as it cannot be equally attributed to all essences, it is an *indicator* of greater perfection of the essences to which it is indeed attributed. In other words, not any essence may be endowed with necessary existence, but only that privileged one, which is essence able to exist necessarily. There is, then, a strong reason for considering necessary existence susceptible to evaluation. This does not mean, though, that necessary existence may be considered a perfection to the same extent as essential perfections. Indeed, as stated above, existence (hence necessary existence, too) belongs to a different *modal* level from the essential layer. What truly allows necessary existence to count as a highly plausible requisite for the maximally perfect Entity is that necessary existence is most certainly a more perfect form of existence than mere existence. Hence, the former is not assessed as such against essential properties, but against existence. Finally, viewing divine perfection not only in terms of its essential properties but – being existing – also in terms of its modality of being, its perfection requires necessary existence (with reference also to such a layer).

ad Main Premise: $\exists x \Diamond (Gx \wedge E^{*}x)$

Leibniz's attempt to justify the premise, as featured in his 1676 writing, consists of proving that pure perfections are compatible with one another, and to the extent that it is possible to postulate that the intersection of all perfections – that is, the maximally perfect Being, as the bearer of all perfections – is itself possible. In our language that means to obtain $\exists x \Diamond (Gx \wedge E^{*}x)$ (some really possible x is G). The argument consists of two parts:

Part 1.

The starting point is the definition of positive absolute perfection:

"I call a perfection every simple quality which is positive and absolute, i.e. which expresses whatever it expresses without any limitations" (Leibniz 1676: 261)

Let A, B, C ... be positive properties

Let Gx be $Ax \wedge Bx \wedge Cx \ldots$

Let F(x) be a conjunction of a finite number of positive properties

Then:

Cons F(x)	by definition

In fact, from the above definition it can be easily derived that the perfections cannot be incompatible. As a matter of fact, since they are simple, they do not result from the composition of other perfections and, consequently, neither can they be the negation of any other. Therefore, the conjunction of any finite number of perfections is consistent. But, at this point, Leibniz's principle comes into play according to which every consistent property is exemplifiable, i.e. the principle stating that there is at least one possible in which that property inheres. In formal terms:

Cons F(x) $\Rightarrow$ $\exists$xF(x)	because Consistency = satisfiability = analytical possibility

then:

$\exists$xGx	by passage to infinity

Part 2.

At this point, to achieve $\exists x\Diamond(Gx\wedge E^*x)$ requires the use of Leibniz's axiom PL $\forall x\Diamond E^*x$. In fact:

$Gx\ E^*x \vdash Gx\wedge E^*x$	by Assumption
$\Box Gx\ \Diamond E^*x \vdash \Diamond(Gx\wedge E^*x)$	Possibilitation
$\Box Gx\ \Diamond E^*x \vdash \exists x\Diamond(Gx\wedge E^*x)$	I$\exists$
$\Box Gx\ \forall x\Diamond E^*x \vdash \exists x\Diamond(Gx\wedge E^*x)$	$\forall$I
$\Box Gx \vdash \exists x\Diamond(Gx\wedge E^*x)$	by PL
$Gx \vdash \exists x\Diamond(Gx\wedge E^*x)$	by PC2
$\exists xGx \vdash \exists x\Diamond(Gx\wedge E^*x)$	$\exists$I

Leibniz's process contains two problem areas. The first concerns the passage to infinity dealt with at the end of Part 1. The second regards the use of Leibniz's principle PL on analytical possibility.

(1) The passage to infinity, which takes place at the end of the first part of the argument, is formally expressed by the following implication: if (for any *F*) $\exists$xFx then $\exists$xGx. Now, this very implication is not guaranteed if the logic that regulates the relations between the concepts is not complete. It should be noted that the passage from the satisfiability of all finite subsets of an infinite set to the satisfiability of

the latter is legitimate only if the theorem of semantic finiteness (or compactness) is valid. However, this theorem is not unconditionally valid; as a matter of fact, the theorem of semantic finiteness is guaranteed only by completeness.

(2) The second objection regards the use of Leibniz's principle, which is refuted by Kant. It is not guaranteed that from the analytical possibility of G ($\exists xGx$) follows the real possibility of G ($\exists x\Diamond(Gx \wedge E^*x)$), unless the Leibnizian axiom on identity between analytical and real possibility has been accepted.

2.2 Gödel's modified version of the ontological proof (1970)

Gödel's version of the ontological proof is interesting because, compared to that of Leibniz, it is a new attempt to overcome the objection to Leibniz's unjustifiable passage to infinity. This objective is pursued by showing that the system of pure perfections has a principal ultrafilter structure. The objection to the passage is overcome under rather strong conditions. However, the proof is incapable of overcoming the second objection based on Kantian criticism. To show this, however, it is convenient to adapt Gödel's ontological proof to the semantics of the structure *S*. This forces us to make some changes, but allows two kinds of advantages:

(1) Firstly, in order to obtain the main premise of the proof, it is possible to use only part of Gödel's argument, reducing the number of the necessary axioms, i.e. to only three.

(2) Secondly, the semantics of the structure *S* allows us to avoid some problems associated with Gödel's concept of existence. There are five important issues in this regard.

   (a) Gödel's notion of perfection is independent, as Gödel says, from the accidental features of the world. This means that the extensional meaning of a property would have to be referred to sets of *possible* entities and not to sets of *actual* entities. In other words, the range of variables would be a domain of possible and not of actual individuals.

   (b) As a consequence of point a, it is difficult to conceive of existence as an exemplification in some world. According to extensional interpretation, all the possibles are by definition exemplified in every world.

   (c) If the entities are interpreted as possibles, the domain of possibles is the same in all the worlds. Therefore, a semantics based on

a fixed domain is more appropriate than a semantics based on a variable domain.

(d) It is convenient to conceive the essential predicates of the individual possibles as rigid predicates, i.e. predicates that hold for the same individual in every world.

(e) Consequently, it is also convenient to introduce a new predicate of existence, as it is in the ontological frame *S*.

Therefore, Gödel's ontological proof may be presented in the semantic context of the structure *S* enriched with the deontic component, i.e. in the *ontological structure of the pure perfections SP*. Gödel's proof is set out in two parts. The first part demonstrated the possible existence of a substance that, according to the definition provided, is God (similarly to the main premise). The second part demonstrated that God necessarily exists, based on the fact that maximum divine perfection requires divine existence to be necessary (similarly to principle PC). For our purpose, we shall consider only the first part as the other is already covered by Leibniz's formulation presented above. We follow Gödel in presenting the proof (although the numbers of the axioms differ) as for A1 and A2. As for A3, we keep to the formulation provided by Fitting (2002: 148), where A3 coincides with the Axiom 11.10. The reasons underlying this change will become clear later on.

2.2.1 Extension of the language used to describe the ontological structure SP

The language is extended in standard way to second order variables (for technical aspects see Fitting 2002, pp. 145-172). X, Y, Z, ... are predicative variables for properties (intensions) or sets (extensions) of possibilia. $\neg$X indicates the negation of X (intension) or the complement of X (extension). Similarly, the usual set theoretical operations are allowed.

P is the first new sign for a third-order property. It is the sign of positivity (or any specific evaluation operator) concerning the essential properties of the elements of U, i.e. the sets corresponding to the properties of possible objects (according to the extensional interpretation). In Gödel's view, a property is positive when it represents a perfection. A perfect property is a property expressing unlimited value.

It should be noted that: 1. Only real properties are susceptible of being positive. 2. Being possible is positive (compared to not being possible) but being actual (Ex) cannot be considered positive if compared to being possible; neither is the property of being necessary (Ex $\rightarrow$ $\Box$Ex)

assessable through predicate P, since it is not a real property. 3. In Leibniz's wake, Gödel deems it appropriate to speak of the positivity of necessary existence rather than contingency. The positivity of necessary existence is determined through axiom 4, where the property P is attributed directly to necessary existence. This seems to be justified in Gödel's language, in that it does not make any difference between existence properties and real properties. As pointed out above, though, this triggers a number of issues related to Gödel's semantics, which will be analysed shortly. 4. The fact that necessary existence may not be the subject of assessment in terms of P, does not imply that it is not a perfection with respect to simple existence, hence it does not justify the assumption of Descartes' principle PC. Indeed, in this particular instance the comparison takes place within the modality of being and not within the modality of essence or between the former and the latter. The reasons for that have already been explained.

Z is the second new sign for a third-order property. Z is a variable that designates any collection of properties. The following abbreviations may also be used (see Fitting 2002: 148):

(1) $pos(\mathsf{Z}) \Leftrightarrow \forall X(\mathsf{Z}(X) \rightarrow \mathsf{P}(X))$

(2) X *intersection of* $\mathsf{Z} \Leftrightarrow \Box\forall x(X(x) \leftrightarrow \forall Y(\mathsf{Z}(Y) \rightarrow Y(x)))$

2.2.2 Additional Axioms

The ontological structure of perfections *SP* is characterized, besides the other statements characteristic of structure *S* and previously formalised, by the following three additional axioms:

Axiom 1: $\forall X(\mathsf{P}(X) \leftrightarrow \neg\mathsf{P}(\neg X))$
(Exactly one of a property or its complement is positive)

Axiom 2: $\forall X\forall Y((\mathsf{P}(X) \wedge X \subset Y) \rightarrow \mathsf{P}(Y))$
(The properties entailed by positive properties are positive)

Axiom 3: $\forall Z[pos(Z) \rightarrow \forall X\,[(X$ *intersection of* $Z) \rightarrow \mathsf{P}(X)]]$
(The conjunction of any collection of positive properties is positive)

I am not interested in explaining the details of these axioms. I would like only to present some brief remarks about them.

The first axiom is true because contradictory perfections cannot be both positive and because either a property or its negation is positive. It should be noted that X can be not positive, not because it does not

express value, but because the value it expresses has a constitutive limit: this is true, for instance, for the concept of human being. In this regard, it is also understandable why, conversely, not being a human being is positive. It is positive because it excludes the limit.
The second axiom is true because if $X \subset Y$ then being Y is a prerequisite for being X, so if X is positive, Y must also be positive.

The third axiom is a generalization up to infinite of the principle stating that if two properties are positive their intersection is also positive. The importance of this principle will be illustrated below.

2.2.3 Main Theorem: Consistency of the intersection of all perfections

Let us define the concept of predicate G as the intersection of all perfections:

$$G =_{def} \cap X(PX)$$

Then $\exists xGx$, because in virtue of A1-A3 $\cap X(PX)$ is not empty.
The proof consists in showing that A1-A3 define on the set U of possibles a *principal ultrafilter* SP that guarantees the truth of $\exists xGx$. *SP*, the system of pure perfections, includes the ultrafilter SP as a central core.

Proof:
SP is a *filter* in virtue of the following statements:

(1) $SP \subseteq \wp(U)$

In fact, the perfections are subset of U.

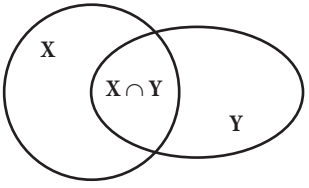
(2) $X \in SP$ and $Y \in SP \Rightarrow X \cap Y \in SP$

The proof is articulated in two parts: the first part shows that given two positive properties, their intersection is not void. The second shows that the intersection of any pair of positive properties is itself positive.

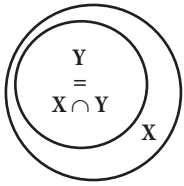
1. Part: if X and Y are positive then $X \cap Y$ is not empty

Given two positive properties X and Y, only
two cases are possible:

1. Case:

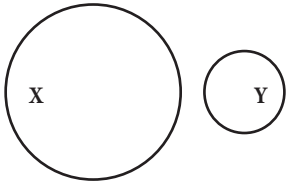


2.Case:



On the contrary the following case is excluded, where the intersection is empty:

3. Case:



In fact:

$\mathsf{P}(X)$	assumption
$\neg\mathsf{P}(\neg X)$	by Axiom 1

On the other side:

$\mathsf{P}(Y)$	assumption
$Y \subset \neg X$	contradictory hypothesis
$\mathsf{P}(\neg X)$	by Axiom 2

Then:

$Y \not\subset \neg X$	by refutation

Therefore, there exists a non empty intersection of every two positive properties.

2. Part: it follows from Axiom 3.

(3) $X \in SP$ and $X \subseteq Y \subseteq U \Rightarrow Y \in SP$

Proof: it follows from Axiom 2.

Moreover, SP is a *proper filter*, because ∅ is not a positive property: the proof that follows from Axiom 1 ad Axiom 2 is well known (see Fitting 2002, pp. 147-148).

SP is an *ultrafilte*r because holds:

(4) $X \in SP$ or $\neg X \in SP$ (SP is maximal)

Proof: it follows from Axiom 1.

(5) Finally, SP is a *principal ultrafilter*.

The demonstration follows from A3. The intersection of all perfections is therefore positive. But positive properties cannot be empty. Therefore, the generator of the ultrafilter exists. This coincides with the singleton of the entity characterized by all perfections.

Remark: Gödel's original system contains, instead of A3, the weaker axiom $\forall X \forall Y([\mathsf{P}(X) \wedge \mathsf{P}(Y)] \rightarrow \mathsf{P}(X \wedge Y))$ (If two properties are positive, their combination is also positive). However, this axiom is not sufficient to ensure the derivation of $\exists xGx$. As stated by Szatkowski (2005: 319), a system of axioms such as A1-A2 + Gödel's axiom, which was just mentioned in place of A3, could be interpreted on a non-principal ultrafilter containing all co-finite subsets of U. In such an ultrafilter, the proposition $\exists xGx$ would be false since in it the intersection of all co-finite sets is empty. It is therefore necessary to reinforce the system with an axiom such as A3 (corresponding to Fitting's 11.10 axiom). An alternative axiom to this could be the assertion of the positivity of G (which is equivalent to A3, as shown by Fitting 2002: 153), an axiom that was also proposed by D. Scott in place of the original one (see Sobel 2004: 145). Of course, the reinforcement of the third axiom diminished the meaning of Gödel's proof. In fact, the meaning of a proof is determined by the greater accessibility of the axioms compared to the conclusion and, in our case, there is hardly any difference between the effort to reach the axiom and the effort to reach the conclusion, which is not far from circularity. In the context of these reflections, in order to guarantee the principal character of the ultrafilter and, consequently, to ensure the truth of the conclusion, it could be useful to require the presence of at least one finite positive property. It is well known, in fact, that the principality of an ultrafilter is equivalent to the existence of at least one finite subset of the ultrafilter domain (see Bell Machover 1977: 140). This would mean that at least some perfections could not be shared by an infinite number of subjects. In this case, the perfection

would lie in the exclusivity of the attribution, of which unicity would be the highest expression. Hence, to assume axiomatically that a positive property owned by a single subject exists would imply that that subject owns them all. After all, the property of being One is traditionally one of the divine attributes and, therefore, its being positive appears highly plausible. In conclusion, an axiom stating that being One is a perfection or, in general, an axiom stating the existence of a perfection which can be shared only by a finite number of subjects would have a greater founding meaning than the axiom of divine perfection or equivalents.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) Within the scope of the ontological structure *S*, axioms A1, A2 and A3 (with the emendation of the third axiom) provide that the system of perfections *SP* contains a principal ultrafilter. Not only does this mean that the intersection of any two (hence *n*) perfections does exist, but also that the intersection of all perfections, that is $\cap X(PX)$, in virtue of the infinite passage (being perfections infinite), also exists. Now, it should be noted that this passage is entirely sound. As a matter of fact the model that satisfies the existence of non-empty intersections of any two (or a finite number of) perfections is the same that satisfies the existence of the intersection of all perfections. No property of compactness should be resorted to.

We have not obtained:

(for every finite set *F* of perfections)
(there exists a model *M* of *F* such that) [*M* satisfies *F*],

but

(there exists a model (being, roughly speaking, the principal ultrafilter *SP*) such that (for every finite or infinite set *A* of perfections) [*SP* satisfies *A*],

hence the aforementioned result.

Despite the severe limitations of the abovementioned observations, Gödel's proof allows for the first flaw of the Leibnizian proof to be overcome.

(2) Gödel's proof, too, features the second problem to Leibniz's proof: $\exists x\Diamond(Gx \wedge E^{*}x)$, does not follow from $\exists xGx$ unless one accepts Leibniz's principle about the reality of analytically possibilia PL.

In conclusion, Gödel's proof, too, is affected by the same basic flaw that was detected in Leibniz's proof. There is no guarantee that the analytical possibility is a real possibility.

Final Critical Remarks

Remark 1: The manuscript left by Gödel features two other axioms. These are instrumental for the second part of the proof, that is, proving Descartes' Principle PC. Indeed, one states that perfections are rigid; the other that necessary existence is positive. However the second one is problematic for the above mentioned reasons.

Remark 2: As has already been mentioned before, the language used to formulate our version of Gödel's ontological proof is similar to that used by Fitting (2002; see also Hájek 2002b). As within our language, and in Fitting's too, the quantification is construed in a possibilistic way; that is, the domain of quantifiers is the set of possibles and actual existence is expressed by existence predicate E. For instance, the expression $\exists xPx$ states that a possible object is characterized by property P, whilst if we want to affirm that this object is actually existing, then it is necessary to also attribute the existence predicate E to it. In an analogous manner, the objectual domain is fixed and the existence predicate defines the extensions of existent objects in each possible world. It would be fair to assume that according to Fitting too, the properties that may be evaluated from the standpoint of their perfection were essential properties; that is, the properties rigidly defined in an extensional manner on the set of possible – and not of existent – beings. On the other hand, that does not appear to stem from Fitting's formulation (which can be found in Hájek's work, too) of Axiom 2: $\forall X\forall Y((\mathsf{P}(X) \wedge \Box\forall x(Ex \rightarrow (X(x) \rightarrow Y(x)))) \rightarrow \mathsf{P}(Y))$ (Axiom 11.5), where the inclusion relation among positive properties is restricted to the respective extensions defined on the set of existent beings. This, though, implies unacceptable consequences, as it will be clear in the following two remarks.

Remark 3: The analogous of Fitting's Axiom 11.5 in our language is $\forall X\forall Y((\mathsf{P}(X) \wedge \Box\forall x(E^*x \rightarrow (X(x) \rightarrow Y(x)))) \rightarrow \mathsf{P}(Y))$. Nevertheless such rewording deprives the axiom of all its plausibility, since the logic of real existence does not obey any deontic principle. It is possible, then, that among the existing beings of all really possible worlds there be inclusion relations that are not compatible with the logic of perfections. For the sake of argument, it would be fair to postulate that in all really possible

worlds every existing honest individual is an existing farmer. Hence, being a farmer would be a pure perfection, which is absurd.

Remark 4: The above note voids Fitting's proof of Gödel's theorem 1 (translated into our language, $\mathsf{P}(X) \vdash \Diamond\exists x(E^{*}x \wedge X(x))$) of all pertinence. It may be easy to note that this theorem is obtained in Fitting (2002: 147), by virtue of Axiom 11.5 in Fitting's wording disputed above.

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A COSMO-ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF A FIRST CAUSE – PERHAPS GOD

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Abstract. The paper presents a new version of the "Cosmological Argument" – considered to be an *ontological* argument, since it exclusively uses ontological concepts and principles. It employs famous results of modern physics, and distinguishes between event-causation and agent-causation. Due to these features, the argument manages to avoid the objection of infinite regress. It remains true, however, that the conclusion of the argument (just like the conclusion of Thomas Aquinas's causal argument) is too unspecific to be unambiguously considered an argument for the existence of *God*.

I should say a few words about why I presented at the Bydgoszcz conference about "ontological proofs" ideas that are relevant for what has come to be known as "cosmological proofs". First, aside from the special meaning Kant has given the designations "ontological proof" and "cosmological proof", a so-called cosmological proof is at least as much an ontological argument as a so-called ontological proof. Both sorts of argument aim to establish the *existence* of God, and *existence* is, of course, a central – perhaps *the* central – ontological concept. Second, one might even say that so-called cosmological arguments, if they exclusively use ontological concepts, like the argument I am going to present here, are more ontological in kind than many so-called ontological arguments. After all, Anselm's original version of what Kant was the first to call an ontological argument, and many later versions, involve an *epistemic* and an *axiological* concept: the being such that no *greater* being can be *conceived*. Third, in my view, the interest of so-called ontological proofs is mainly logical, not theological, and not metaphysical. – Well, may this suffice as my excuse for what follows.

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There is a kind of causation where the cause is *sufficient* for the realization of the *effect* (that is, for the realization of *what is caused*), the effect being some *event*: an entity involving a finite temporal region, particulars, and properties (relational and non-relational ones) had by these particulars within that temporal region:

(A1) Effects (i.e. what is caused) are always events.

In *sufficient* causation, the cause *determines* the coming-about of the effect-event; the cause does not make the effect-event merely probable, or more probable than it would be without the cause, and the cause is not merely an indispensable factor for the coming-about of the effect-event. In sufficient *event-causation*, *the coming-about of an event* determines the coming-about of the effect-event. In sufficient *agent*-causation, simply *the agent* determines the coming-about of the effect-event.

In what follows, the phrase "a cause of" will always mean the same as "a sufficient cause of", and "to cause" will always mean the same as "to be a sufficient cause of". And these phrases will always be understood to exclude *self-causation*: *Nothing is a cause of itself*. (One may wish to count this as axiom (A0).) The definition of the concept that is central to this paper is this:

(D) A first cause is a cause without a cause, in other, fully explicit words: *a first sufficient cause is a sufficient cause (of some event), but a sufficient cause that itself has no sufficient cause*.

It is easily seen:

(T1) If agents are not events, then every agent that is a cause is a first cause.

Suppose we have an agent that is a cause, i.e. that causes some event. If agents are not events, then that agent is not an event, hence it has no cause (for otherwise it would be an effect, and therefore an event, since *effects are always events* according to (A1)).

Now indeed:

(A2) Agents are not events, but substances.

And therefore:

(T2) Every agent that is a cause is a first cause.

Hence:

(T3) If there are agents that are causes, then there are first causes.

But are there agents that are causes? That there are such items is doubted by many, even denied. Doubtless, however, there are *events* that are

causes. And if one could find an event that is a cause, but has no cause, then this causal event – though not a causal agent – would also serve as a perfect first cause. But are there events that are causes without having a cause? We do not have purely scientific evidence for the existence of such events. What we do have purely scientific evidence for is merely this:

(A3) Some physical events are causes, but there is no physical event that causes them.

Now, at this point, there is a crucial decision to be made in causation-theory. It is not an empirical, it is not a scientific, it is not a conceptual decision; it is a *genuinely metaphysical* decision. A choice is to be made between two very plausible metaphysical principles. One of these two principles is known as *the principle of (sufficient) causation*:

(A4.1) Every event has a cause.

The other principle is one of the principles known as *principles of physical causal closure*:

(A4.2) Every physical event that has a cause is caused by a physical event.

One cannot adopt *both* principles – because, unfortunately, their conjunction is not compatible with (A3). On the other hand, each of the two principles under consideration has so many credentials on its side that it seems rationally inappropriate to reject *both*. Let's see what the consequences would be if one accepted the one, *or* the other.

(A4.2) is the modernization of a materialist, or physicalist, principle that emerged as a metaphysical side-effect of the rise of modern physics. This original principle is the following:

(A4.2) Every physical event is caused by a physical event.*

This latter principle was adopted by all who, inspired by impressive scientific progress, considered a purely immanent world-view – a world-view without transcendence – to be the only rational world-view. The insertion of "that has a cause" after "Every physical event" – which is of no detriment to the original metaphysical motivation – became necessary due to the developments in physics in the 20th century; these developments make modern physics entail the falsity of (A4.2*). (A4.2), however, is left quite untouched by them.

Now, obviously, the conjunction of (A3) and (A4.2) logically entails that there are physical events that are causes, but have no cause. Thus, if we add (A4.2) to our list of axiomatic principles (and *not* (A4.1)), then

the existence of first causes is established. There are, then, first causes in the form of physical events that are causes without having a cause.

In contrast, it is a straightforward logical consequence of (A4.1) that no event is a first cause. For if an event is a cause, (A4.1) requires that it also *be* caused, that is: have a cause. (A4.1) is a principle that throughout the roughly 2500 years of the history of philosophy was almost universally accepted by the philosophers as an absolute requirement of rationality, comparable in this to a law of logic. And when (A4.2*) became prominent in the philosophical consciousness (roughly 300 years ago), it peacefully coexisted there with (A4.1); indeed, one could regard (A4.2*) as a mere specialization of (A4.1), as merely spelling out what it is that (A4.1) means for physical events. All that changed in the 20th century with the establishment of quantum physics and empirical cosmology, and hence of the scientific fact that is stated by (A3). (A3) refutes (A4.2*), and it also refutes *the conjunction* of the logically weaker (A4.2) with (A4.1). But (A3) neither refutes (A4.2) *taken by itself*, nor does it refute (A4.1) *taken by itself*. If, tentatively, we add (A4.1) to our list of axiomatic principles (and not (A4.2)), continuing thereby the very long and almost univocal philosophical tradition *in favour* of (A4.1), we get an interesting result: *There are physical events that have a cause, though they are not caused by any physical event.*

Given (A3), one cannot adopt (A4.1) and (A4.2) together, and it does not seem rationally right to reject both. A choice, therefore, has to be made between these two principles. There is no argument that would rationally *force* one to choose (A4.1) rather than (A4.2). But since (A4.1) involves much less of a metaphysical commitment than (A4.2); since, in other words, the rational appeal of (A4.1) is more general than that of (A4.2), and less dependent on the rationality of a specific metaphysical motivation, I herewith adopt (A4.1) as axiomatic, and as a consequence change its label from "(A4.1)" to simply "(A4)":

(A4) Every event has a cause.

And with both (A4) and (A3) as axioms, we now have as a *theorem*:

(T4) There are physical events that have a cause, though they are not caused by any physical event.

But, of course, with (A4) as an axiom, there is no chance that an event is a first cause; if there are first causes, then they must be something other than events. In fact, they must be *agents*, since the following is true:

(A5) Every cause is an agent or an event.

(A5) makes it possible to derive:

(T5) Every first cause is an agent.

Assume that X is a first cause, and assume also that X is an event. But then, according to (A4), X has a cause, and is, therefore, *not* a first cause – contrary to the first assumption. Therefore (holding on to that assumption): X is *not* an event, and therefore: X is an agent (because of (A5), and because X is, qua first cause, also a cause).

I am well aware that some philosophers have proposed facts, or even properties, as causes. But causes must be causally effective, and a property, taken by itself, is not causally effective; a property is only then causally effective – in an analogical way – if it is *had*, *exemplified*, *instantiated* by an object in such a way that the resulting *fact* is causally effective. But a fact, in its turn, is only then causally effective – in a derivative, secondary way – if it is replaceable in this role by a causal event. Causation by facts, in other words, is reducible to causation by events. There is, therefore, no substantial reason to reject (A5).

(T4) gives rise to the following considerations: Suppose E* is one of the physical events that – according to (T4) – have a cause, though there is no physical event that causes them. Thus:

(a) E* is a physical event.

(b) E* has a cause.

(c) There is no physical event that causes E*.

Hence, by making use of (A5), we have:

(d) E* has a cause that is a nonphysical event or an agent.

Assume now the following additional axiomatic principles:

(A6) Every event that is caused by an event is also caused by an event that is not caused by any event.

(A7) For all x, y and z: if x causes y, and y causes z, then x causes z.

(A7) expresses the transitivity of (*sufficient!*) causation – one of the most uncontroversial principles in causation theory. (A6), in turn, is *the Limit Principle for the Causation by Events*. This, to some, may seem like a very problematic principle; it actually is no such thing. Suppose (A6) is wrong, and E is an event that is caused by an event, but there is no event that causes E *and* is not caused by any event. It is easily seen (employing (A7)) that a consequence of this supposition is the following: *all causal chains of events that end with E are infinite or incomplete*.

Suppose C is a causal chain of events which ends with E and which is neither infinite nor incomplete. (Note that for a normal conception of a causal chain – i.e. for the exclusion of its being a loop – the truth of (A0) is necessary.) Since C is *not an infinite* causal chain of events, there is a first event in C, call it "E_1". Since C is *a complete* causal chain of events, there is no event that causes E_1. Given the transitivity of causation (i.e. the truth of (A7)) and given that C ends with E, E_1 causes E. Thus there is an event (namely, E_1) that causes E and is not caused by any event – *contradicting* the supposition which introduced E in the first place.

Is this consequence of negating (A6) for some event E – the consequence that all E-ending causal chains of events are *infinite or incomplete – more reasonable a priori* than (A6)? I don't think so. Is this consequence *more reasonable on empirical grounds* than (A6)? I don't think it is, certainly not given today's physics.

Using the two principles last introduced, we obtain from (d):

(e) E* is caused by an agent.

The first alternative in (d) leads to the result that E* is caused by an agent, just as does (trivially) *the second alternative* in (d). Suppose *the first alternative* in (d) is true: E* is caused by a nonphysical event. With (A6) we obtain: E* is caused by an event E' that is not caused by any event.[1] But according to (A4): E' has a cause, G. Since E' is not caused by any event, G must be an agent (according to (A5)). Since G causes E' and E' causes E*, it follows according to (A7): G causes E*. Therefore: E* is caused by an agent.

Consequently we get on the basis of (T2):

(f) There is an agent that is a first cause.

And this result – since, ultimately, it is a logical consequence purely of the axiomatic principles (A0) *to* (A7) – *is a theorem*: a statement logically proven on the basis of those *axioms*:

(T6) There is an agent that is a first cause.

This result chimes perfectly with *the penultimate result* of what has traditionally, since Kant, been called "the Cosmological Argument for the Existence of God". But although Thomas Aquinas nonchalantly concludes from *the penultimate conclusion* of the Cosmological Argument – *that there is a first cause* (which Thomas certainly thought to be an *agent*) – its

[1] Note that E' must be a nonphysical event. Otherwise, E' would be a physical event that causes E* – contradicting (c).

ultimate conclusion: *that there is God*,[2] it must nonetheless be emphasized that this is a *very* problematic last step. Nothing in Thomas Aquinas's argument, and nothing in the modernization of it here presented: nothing in (T6) and the axiomatic principles on which (T6) is based, justifies the conclusion that this agent which is a first cause is God or even *a* god.

But, of course, the modernized Cosmological Argument I have presented can be strengthened. In order to see just at what point it can be strengthened, consider first the compact presentation of the argument as it is now:

(A0) Nothing is a cause of itself.
(A1) Effects are always events.
(A2) Agents are not events, but substances.
(*A3*) *Some physical events are causes, but there is no physical event that causes them.*
(A4) Every event has a cause.
(A5) Every cause is an agent or an event.
(A6) Every event that is caused by an event is also caused by an event that is not caused by any event.
(A7) For all x, y and z: if x causes y, and y causes z, then x causes z.

_____[together logically entail among other things]

(T6) There is an agent that is a first cause.

Replace now (A3) by (A3*) (leaving the other axioms – or premises – just as they are):

(A3) The Big Bang is a physical event that is a cause, but there is no physical event that causes it.*

The specific principle (A3*) is just as true from the point of view of modern physics as the unspecific (A3). With it and the rest of the axioms as premises, one can logically deduce:

(T6) There is an agent that is a first cause of the Big Bang.*

From (A3*) and (A4) we get: BB is a physical event that has a cause, but there is no physical event that causes BB. Let A be a cause of BB. According to (A5), A *is an agent or an event*.

[2] "Ergo est necesse ponere aliquam causam efficientem primam: quam omnes Deum nominant" (*S. Th.* I, qu. 2, a. 3; see the conclusion of the *secunda via*).

In case A *is an agent*, A is not an event (according to (A2)), and therefore A is not an effect (according to (A1)), i.e. A is not caused, in other words: A has no cause. But A causes BB. Thus: there is an agent (namely, A) that is a first cause of BB.

In case A *is an event*, it follows on the basis of (A6) that BB is also caused by an event that is not caused by any event. Let E' be such an event. It follows on the basis of (A4) that there is a cause of E', and on the basis of (A5) it follows that that cause (any such cause) can only be an agent (it cannot be an event, since E' is not caused by any event). Let A′ be such an agent. A′ causes E', and E' causes BB, and therefore (according to (A7)): A′ causes BB. Moreover, since A′ is an agent, it is not an event (see (A2)), and therefore not an effect (see (A1)), i.e. A′ is not caused, in other words: A′ has no cause. Thus we have again: there is an agent (namely, A′) that is a first cause of BB.

An agent that is a first cause of the Big Bang – that is: of the initial event of the Physical World – does seem to be *godlike*. By excluding the causation of the same event (any event) by *several* agents – which is a plausible theoretical step – we can even obtain that *there is one and only one* agent that is a first cause of the Big Bang. Moreover, also in line with traditional theism, the agent that causes the initiation of space-time-energy-matter can hardly be denied to be *nonphysical*. However, nothing so far shows that this agent is different from, say, what Schopenhauer called "the Will", different from a blind, irrational, and basically evil – but *transcendent* – source of the Universe. That the First Cause of the beginning of the Universe is different from such a being is a matter of faith. But, note, it is also a matter of faith that God Himself is different from *such* a being.

Neither *the axioms* nor *the theorems* in this paper seem to me utterly speculative, epistemologically irresponsible, or irrational. I certainly believe that they provide food for serious thought. Yet there are, of course, objections. I will consider three of them (which actually came up when I presented the paper at the Bydgoszcz conference).

Objection 1 (against (A3*)): The Big Bang does not exist, because the Big Bang, if it is anything, is the total physical event which occurs at the first moment of time, and there is no first moment of time (as Stephen Hawking has famously held). *Response*: Even if there is no first moment of time, it does not follow that there is no initial physical event. Note that events, though they are required to be temporally finite according to the notion of event here employed (see the beginning of this paper), are not required by that notion to have a first or a last moment. An initial physical event is a physical event whose temporal region is the initial

interval of time – and that interval may be an interval that is *open* on one side, even on both sides. The Big Bang, then, is the total physical event whose temporal region is the initial interval of time. One might further object that there is not only no first moment of time, but also no initial interval of time. But, by the lights of modern physics (which may be wrong of course, but there is no guide in these matters that is known to be better), the initial interval of time is simply the first interval of time whose duration is *the Planck-time* (that is, 10^{-43} sec). There certainly is such an interval of time (even if there is no first moment of time), and the corresponding event – the Big Bang – is, as far as we know, correctly described by (A3*).

Objection 2 (against (A3) being the entire scientifically warranted truth): There is purely scientific evidence not only for (A3) but also for the existence of physical events that are causes without having a cause. For it is a scientific principle that if a physical event is not caused by any physical event then it is not caused by anything. *Response*: The objection relies on (A4.2) – which is a principle of causal closure – being a scientific principle. No doubt, many scientists employ that principle; but that, by itself, does not make it a *scientific* principle.[3] In fact, (A4.2) is not a scientific, but a *metaphysical* principle – just like (A4.1), the principle of causation. It is a metaphysical principle because logical, mathematical, empirical, and methodological-esthetical considerations alone are not sufficient for warranting its assumption.

Objection 3: The notion of agent causation, which is necessary for obtaining (T6) and (T6*), is an irremediably unclear notion. When, for example, does agent causation *happen*? *Response*: This is a stock objection, the merits of which are doubtful. For one thing, the notion of event causation is not so clear either (and yet we continue to use it, and could not well do without it). For another thing, I have offered a detailed analysis of agent causation in my books *Ereignis und Substanz* and *The Two Sides of Being*, in the former regarding both creatural and divine agency, in the latter regarding only creatural agency. A comprehensive theory of causation, both of event causation and agent causation, can be found in my book *Theorie der Kausalität,* also containing extensive

[3] Many scientists in the past have made successful use – within the very context of their *scientific* endeavours – of the hypothesis that God exists and has created the Universe (for example, Johannes Kepler in his arduous search for the laws of planetary motion). But that, of course, does not imply that the existence of God is a *scientific* principle.

discussions of the literature. Some of the main results of *Theorie der Kausalität* are presented in my paper "Causation in a New Old Key". The emergence of creatural agent causation in the course of natural history is defended in several of my papers, for example, "The Emergence of Rational Souls" and "New Perspectives for a Dualistic Conception of Mental Causation".

And when does agent causation "happen"? Instances of agent causation do not happen, since they – in contrast to the effects involved in them – are not events (and only events can *happen*). But if one absolutely wishes to assign *a time* to an instance of agent causation, then it is simply the time of the effect that is involved in it.

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MODAL LOGIC VS. ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

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Abstract. The contemporary versions of the ontological argument that originated from Charles Hartshorne are formalized proofs (in the metalogical sense of the word) based on unique modal theories. The simplest well-known theory of this kind arises from the B system of modal logic by adding two extra-logical axioms: (AA) "If the perfect being exists, then it necessarily exists" (Anselm's Axiom) and (AL) "It is possible that the perfect being exists" (Leibniz's Axiom). In the paper a similar argument is presented, however none of the systems of modal logic is relevant to it. Its only premises are the axiom (AA) and, instead of (AL), the new axiom (AN): "If the perfect being doesn't exist, it necessarily doesn't". The main goal of the work is to prove that (AN) is no more controversial than (AA) and – in consequence – the whole strength of the modal ontological argument lies in the set of its extra-logical premises. In order to do that, three arguments are formulated: ontological, "cosmological" and metalogical.

1. Pursuant to the definition presented by Boethius and Anselm, the perfect being (i.e. the greatest being or simply God) is something than which nothing greater can be thought. This definition is the key premise in the original argumentation of Anselm supporting the thesis about the existence of the perfect being.[1] This is a popular summary of the argumentation: "Now that which is such that nothing greater can be conceived cannot exist only in the intellect. For indeed, to exist in reality is greater than to exist in the intellect only. If, then, that which is

[1] It is well known that both different versions of this argumentation and its criticism (started by Gaunilon) have had many centuries of tradition. This tradition will not be further discussed here.

such that one can conceive nothing greater exists only in intellect, that than which is nothing greater can be conceived is that than is something greater can be conceived, which is contradictory. The being than which none greater can be conceived then necessarily exists both in the intellect and in reality." (Gilson 1955: 133).

2. One of the assumptions of Anselm's argumentation – expressed in the last sentence of the above mentioned citation – is a thesis according to which if the perfect being exists, it does so out of necessity; formally:

(AA) $p_0 \to \mathrm{L}p_0$,

where p_0 is the propositional constant representing the sentence "The perfect being exists". This premise seems not to be very controversial. It stems from the Boethius-Anselm's definition and an intuitive assumption that a non-contingent being is greater than a contingent being.

The so-called Leibniz's axiom says that the existence of the perfect being is possible:

(AL) $\mathrm{M}p_0$

Leibniz was the first philosopher who considered this premise crucial in the ontological proof and analysed it in detail (including an argument attempt). The AL principle is not as obvious as the AA one, but it seems – at least at first sight – not to be very strong: in order to prove the possibility that a given being exists, it is enough to prove its cohesive theory (in this case – a cohesive theory of the perfect being; this issue will not be further discussed here).

3. I will now present a proof that is a possibly simpler version of the ontological argument in Hartshorn's style. This version is formulated within the framework of the B system of the modal logic (a sub-system of the popular S5 system of the modal logic) supported by additional AA and AL axioms.

1. $\mathrm{L}(p_0 \to \mathrm{L}p_0)$	Gödel's rule, AA,
2. $\mathrm{M}p_0 \to \mathrm{ML}p_0$	1, modal logic: $\mathrm{L}(p \to q) \to (\mathrm{M}p \to \mathrm{M}q)$,
3. $\mathrm{ML}p_0 \to p_0$	B system: $\mathrm{ML}p \to p$,
4. $\mathrm{M}p_0 \to p_0$	2, 3,
5. p_0	4, AL.

There are also more complex versions of the modal ontological argument (e.g. Alvin Plantinga's) which involve an advanced ontology of possible worlds. These versions usually employ the S5 modal logic principle that is stronger than the B one.

4. Irrespective of these differences, usually two sources of the surprising strength of the modal ontological argument are named: a) AL and b) B thesis used in step 3 or a stronger S5 thesis. It is supported by a fragment of the "Ontological argument" entry presented in a popular philosophy dictionary: "This concession is much more dangerous than it looks, since in the modal logic involved, from possibly necessarily *p*, we can derive necessarily *p*." (Blackburn 1994: 269)

A similar point of view was presented by John L. Mackie, the author of a well-known work on the arguments for and against theism. According to him, AL only looks innocent, while this postulate, taking account of the specific S5 thesis (saying that everything that is possibly necessary is indeed necessary), is in fact a Trojan horse rather than an innocent, insignificant option. As said by Mackie, a change in the basis for reasoning into a relevant system of the modal logic would not allow Plantinga's argumentation to develop (Mackie 1982).

In the context of discussions focused on the modal ontological argument, such opinions emphasise the popularity of a conviction according to which certain specific principles of the modal logic are crucial premises of this argument and that adopting a weak system of this logic, e.g. T or S4 system, blocks the argument.[2] Further considerations will prove that this conviction is faulty.

5. Let's call a thesis claiming that 'if the perfect being does not exist, it does not exist out of necessity' the axiom of the non-existence of the perfect being (in short: AN); formally:

(AN) $\neg p_0 \rightarrow \mathrm{L}\neg p_0$

Based on this premise, a very simple version of the modal ontological argument can be formulated. This can be done within *any* system of the modal logic supported by additional AN and AL axioms.

1. $\neg \mathrm{L}\neg p_0 \rightarrow p_0$ AN, law of transposition,

[2] Jerzy Perzanowski presents a similar point of view: "The ontological argument requires a legitimate and careful selection of the basic logic". (Perzanowski 1994: 95)

2. $Mp_0 \rightarrow p_0$ 1, definition: $Mp \equiv \neg L \neg p$,
3. p_0 2, AL.

Various formulations of the AN axiom were considered by Hartshorn (1965), Plantinga (1974) and Malcolm (1960). For example Norman Malcolm wrote: "What Anselm has proved is that the notion of contingent existence or of contingent nonexistence cannot have any application to God. His existence must either be logically necessary or logically impossible. [...] If God, a being a greater than which cannot be conceived, does not exist then He cannot come into existence. [...] Since He cannot come into existence, if He does not exist His existence is impossible." (Malcolm 1960: 49)

In fact, it seems that AN is not more controversial than AA. It becomes even clearer after taking account of some theoretical contexts typical of such considerations: ontological, "cosmological" and metalogical.

6. The AA content can be expressed in the language of the ontology of possible worlds in the following way: if the perfect being exists in the actual world, it exists in every possible world. The AN content is the following: if the perfect being does not exist in the actual world, it does not exist in any possible world. Both principles follow from a stronger postulate:

(P) The perfect being exists either in every possible world or in none of them.

If the perfect being existed only in some of the possible worlds, it would be a contingent being rather than the perfect one. Thus, the (P) principle seems to be an entirely natural explanation of intuitions included both in AA and AN. If so, AN is not more controversial than AA.

7. A similar conclusion can be reached taking account of an additional, "cosmological" assumption, according to which the perfect being is the only creator of the world. Let's assume a reality different than the one propagated by AA. Namely, the perfect being exists but it is not necessary. In consequence, the world has been created, although it did not have to be. This outcome does not seem to be logically contradictory, taking account of an intuition according to which the perfect being does not need any other being to exist.

Let's now assume that the reality contradicts the AN postulate, i.e. the perfect being does not exist, although it is possible. In consequence, the world was not created, although it could have been. This seems impossible: a world cannot be created if its potentially sole creator does

not exist. One way or another, taking the "cosmological" context into account in no way makes the AN postulate more controversial (easier to be refuted) than the AA one.

8. The aim of this point is to use metalogical tools to prove that the argument presented in point 5 is based on significantly weaker assumptions than the modal argument in Hartshorn's style.

Let Cn be a standard (classical) consequence operation defined on the power set of formulas of the propositional modal logic extended by the p_0 form. Let's use the following indications:

TH = Cn(B $\cup$ {AA, AL}),
TN = Cn({AL, AN}).

Hence, **TH** is a theory created by extending the B system of propositional modal logic with the AA and AL axioms, while **TN** is a theory created by extending the system of the classical propositional logic with the AL and AN axioms.

METATHEOREM 1. AN $\in$ **TH**

PROOF. Based on the reasoning conducted in point 3, we know that the p_0 sentence is the **TH** thesis. This substitution of Scotus's law is also a **TH** thesis:

$p_0 \rightarrow (\neg p_0 \rightarrow L\neg p_0) \in$ TH.

So we obtain by Modus Ponens:

$(\neg p_0 \rightarrow L\neg p_0) \in$ **TH.** Q.E.D.

Since AL and AN are **TH** theses, **TN** is a subset of **TH**. At the same time, **TH** is not identical to **TN**: Gödel's rule and B-system axioms are not present in **TN**. In consequence, the **TN** theory is essentially weaker than the **TH** theory:

CONCLUSION 1. **TN** $\subsetneq$ **TH.**

METATHEOREM 2. $p_0 \in$ **TN**.

PROOF. The proof is very similar to the argument presented in point 5. Q.E.D.

CONCLUSION 2. The sentence "The perfect being exists" is a thesis of the modal theory which: a) is a part of a theory which is the standard basis for the modal ontological argument and b) does not contain any specific principles of the modal logic.

9. Therefore, it has turned out that specific theses of the modal logic – i.e. B or S5 – are not essential in the modal version of the ontological argument. In other words, the whole strength of the modal ontological argument lies in its premises rather than in its logical principles. This outcome undermines a quite popular conviction according to which such principles are indispensable.

Taking account of the persuasive strength of the AA and AN assumptions and (indicated in point 4) interpretations in which it is Leibniz's axiom (and specific principles of some of the modal logic systems) to be treated as the Trojan horse of the ontological argument, a question arises whether the main source of strength of this argument indeed comes down to this axiom.

According to Leibniz, the basis for the modal ontological argument is the conditional thesis saying that if the perfect being is possible, it exists (line 2 in the proof presented in point 5). Taking account of the fact that it was deduced from the obvious law of the classical logic (law of transposition) and from the definition of the possibility operator, it could be adopted instead of AN as a premise of this argument. Similarly to AA and AN, it has a character of a semantic postulate for the notion "perfect being". Together with Leibniz's Axiom it creates a specific **TN'** theory built of two axioms:

$$\mathbf{TN'} = \mathrm{Cn}(\{\mathrm{M}p_0 \rightarrow p_0, \mathrm{M}p_0\}).$$

(This theory is equivalent of **TN** on the basis of a standard definition of the operator M.) Using these axioms to generate the thesis on the existence of the perfect being is the most trivial deduction of all. This, however, is under one condition. Namely, both premises, i.e. the whole theory, need to be accepted jointly.

The final diagnosis of the source of the quite surprising strength of the modal ontological argument is the following. No specific laws of the modal logic can constitute this source. In other words, selecting the modal logic does not matter in the argument construction. This source is not Leibniz's axiom (AL) or Anselm's principle (AA) or the condition for the non-existence of the perfect being (AN) either – if every of these postulates is taken into consideration separately. The Trojan horse for this argument is Leibniz's theory of perfection, **TN'**.

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DESCARTES' ONTOLOGICAL PROOF: AN INTERPRETATION AND DEFENSE

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Abstract. It is widely assumed among contemporary philosophers that Descartes' version of ontological proof, among other weaknesses, makes an impossible and unjustified move from the mental world of concepts to the real (actual) world of things. Contrary to this opinion I will try to show that Descartes' famous principle of clear and distinct perception suffices to find an adequate inferential connection between the contents of the human mind and extra-mental reality. In a clear and distinct way we cognitively grasp the concept of supremely perfect being as the concept that we do not construct by an arbitrary definition of the word 'God'.

Descartes' ontological proof (or ontological argument) remains a mystery. On the one hand Descartes based his reasoning on simple and convincing premises, but on the other he proceeded as though he did not notice that he so quickly and easily resolved such an important and complicated problem as the problem of the existence of God. The impression of mystery increases when we turn our attention to the fact that so many important philosophical figures from the past and from recent times strongly criticized Descartes' version of ontological proof by pointing out that in his reasoning (if it was reasoning at all) he had committed a decisive error: the conclusion seems not to follow from the premises. Many of these criticisms were put to Descartes by official objectors to the *Meditations*, but his responses were complicated and not always as clear as they could be.[1]

[1] J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, D. Murdoch (eds. and trans.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

Is it reasonable to assume that such a great thinker as Descartes didn't notice that he had committed an elementary error? Was it possible that he didn't notice an almost obvious error in the reasoning that he planned to become a fundament of his entire philosophical and scientific system? This system not only contributed to the development of modern science, but first of all changed the whole western philosophical thought in an important way. This historical state of affairs, can, I think, motivate the hypothesis that Descartes was in possession of some good response to the objection that he committed an elementary error. In what will follow I will try to reconstruct Descartes' possible reaction to the objection that he was completely wrong in the conviction that he proved the existence of God.

Descartes' version of ontological proof appears mainly in his *Mediations* and can be formulated in the following way.

(1) I have an idea of supremely perfect being (the idea of God)
(2) Existence is a perfection
(3) Therefore, a supremely perfect being (God) exists.

I will begin with the second of Descartes' two premises, i.e. with the assumption that existence is a perfection. As is well known, the most famous objection against this assumption was delivered by I. Kant, who claimed that existence is not a property or a predicate. Kant's example was that there is no intrinsic difference between the concept of a hundred real thalers and the concept of a hundred possible thalers.[2] According to Kant, when we claim that God exists we are affirming that there is an object to which our concept of God refers, but existence as such adds nothing to the concept of a thing. But is it reasonable to suppose that Descartes was not aware of this rather not particularly sophisticated state of affairs? Did he not notice that in order to ascribe to whatever object whatever perfections, one must first in some way get to know that this object exists? It seems to me that Descartes would agree with Kant that existence is not a predicate that refers to some property, but that he would still accept that, where a supremely perfect being is concerned, existence is contained in the concept of that being. How is it possible?

I think that Descartes' intentions can be summarized in the following way. In a clear and distinct way we cognitively grasp the concept of supremely perfect being as the concept that we do not construct by an arbitrary definition of the word 'God'. In the content of that

[2] I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1990), A599/B627.

concept we discover an element of existence, but this does not mean that we assume that 'existence' is some general property among other such properties, the property which could be predicated on whatever content we can think of. Clear and distinct perception of existence as contained in the concept of supremely perfect being can be compared to the perception of a property which makes some object unique. It is a kind of cognitive access to the strongly individuating property, e.g. to something more or less comparable to Duns Scotus' '*haecceitas*'. In our present cognitive situation we human beings do not have cognitive access to strongly individuating properties which are not predicates. We do not have such access except to the content of the concept of God. If this is so, then 'being a predicate' and 'being an element of a concept' are different things. Descartes was convinced that existence, which in all other cases is not contained in the content of a concept, in the case of God is an element of the concept referring to Him. This fact can be seen as the reason why today there appear interpretations stressing that Descartes' ontological argument is not an argument in the sense of some discourse or reasoning but that here we rather have to make do with an 'insight' into the content of some peculiar concept, 'insight' in which we cognitively grasp a property (perfection) that is not a predicate. In this way we intuitively come to know that God exists.[3]

[3] "He [Descartes] should be able to dismiss most objections in one neat trick by insisting on the non-logical nature of the demonstration. This is especially true of objection that the ontological argument begs the question. If God's existence is ultimately self-evident and known by simple intuition of the mind, then there are no questions to be begged." (L. Nolan, *Descartes' Ontological Argumen*t, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E.N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/descartes-ontological, 2011). Responding to the difficulty raised by B. Leftow (*The Ontological Argument*, in: W. J. Wainwright [ed.], *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion* [Oxford: OUP, 2005], pp. 90-115 [p. 82]), that even if existence were an element contained in the concept of God, this fact should be demonstrated independently from ontological proof, I. Ziemiński stresses that this objection is not a decisive one, because the impossibility of showing independently from ontological proof that existence is an element of the concept of God points to the fact that in the case of Descartes' argument we do not have to deal with any formal reasoning, but we only explicate our intuition concerning the essence of God. In effect we get the sentence 'God exists' and this sentence should be treated as obvious, in the same way as we accept as obvious the sentence 'Something exists'. The falsity of that sentence is excluded *a priori*. From this it follows that Descartes does not beg the question but explicates the content of the concept of God which is unique and necessarily has a real referent (I. Ziemiński, *Argumenty za istnieniem Boga*, [Arguments for the Existence of God] in: S. T. Kołodziejczyk [ed.], *Przewodnik po metafizyce* [A Companion to Metaphysics] [Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2011], pp. 549-591 [p. 562]).

Even if we accepted that 'being a predicate' and 'being an element of a concept' are different things, the question would remain in what sense is existence a perfection? What did Descartes have in mind when he maintained that existence is a kind of perfection? There are three principal senses of perfection. First, in the narrow axiological sense we talk about moral perfection. This kind of perfection we ascribe to those people who possess the capability of maximum moral sacrifice. Also to this narrow axiological sense of perfection belong our evaluative attitudes towards works of art. In this case we talk about aesthetic perfection. Although this narrow axiological understanding of perfection reflects our human feelings and cognitions of what is positively valuable and what is negatively valuable, this fact does not preclude that in our axiology we can refer to values and antivalues which are objective, i.e. obligatory (or antiobligatory) for all finite subjects capable of evaluation. But when Descartes maintained that existence is a perfection, he was not referring to perfection in this narrow axiological sense.

In the second sense we interpret 'perfection' as a maximal realization of potentialities that belong to some object but this object does not need to be susceptible to any moral or aesthetic assessment. In every-day life it very often happens that we are talking about objects or things more or less perfect, which depends on how we assess the degree of realization of their potentialities. 'Perfection' as the maximal realization of potentialities belonging to some object I propose here to call perfection in the formal sense. We apply this formal sense of perfection to empirical things, for example a perfect sword, but also to the objects which – at least at first glance – do not seem to be empirical things. An idea of a triangle is perfect in the formal sense of 'perfect' but an idea of a triangle is not an empirical thing. None of the real triangles ever exactly realizes all requirements which ideally are realized in the idea itself. According to Plato the degree of realization of potentialities is the measure of goodness for every object or thing and from this Plato concluded that the idea of the Good is the highest idea of all. Plato's understanding of what is good and of what is perfect became universally accepted in Western philosophy and culture.

Formal and narrowly axiological interpretations of what is perfect overlap. On the one hand what for us human beings is morally positive we measure by the degree of realization of moral sacrifice. On the other hand, the degree of realization of some property or properties very often requires axiological evaluation in the broader sense of 'axiological'.

In some circumstances a sharper sword is better than the sword that is less sharp and then we talk about practical or utilitarian values.

When Descartes claimed that existence is a kind of perfection he was neither referring to the narrowly axiological sense of perfection nor to the broader sense of this term but he meant the third sense of perfection which I propose here to call metaphysical. Perfection in this metaphysical sense means existence itself, i.e. existence taken against the background of possible total non-existence or against the background of 'absolute nothingness'. Not only Kant's real thalars but also his possible thalars, i.e. possible as only thought by some thinking subject, or possible in the sense of being 'objectively possible' – all these 'things' already exist, which means that they are different from radical non-existence or from an 'absolute nothingness'. If nothing existed at all, if nothing was thought by any subject capable of thinking, if nothing was even 'objectively possible', and if in this situation something began to exist, then it would appear to be some perfection. Even purely possible existence, i.e. existence not realized in some medium or dimension of realization, is perfection in this metaphysical sense of perfection, because even pure possibilities exist somehow and as such they must be different from 'absolute nothingness'. This shows that 'existence' can be taken to be a perfection, although 'existence' is not a general property contained in the concept of a thing - except in the concept of a 'supremely perfect being'. In this unique case 'existence' not being a predicate is nevertheless a property, i.e. a strongly individuating property.

Now I would like to reformulate Descartes' version of ontological proof as follows:

(1) I have an idea of supremely perfect being (the idea of God)
(2) Existence, i.e. existence as contrasted with 'absolute nothingness', is a perfection
(3) Therefore, a supremely perfect being (God) exists.

Even this reformulation leaves us with the famous principal objection that Descartes made an unjustified move from the mental world of concepts to the real (or actual) existence of a supremely perfect being. Critics have very often pointed out that from his reasoning it only follows that the concept of existence is inseparably connected to the concept of a supremely perfect being. If such logical inferences were justified, we could apply ontological arguments to perfect islands, ideal lions, etc., i.e. to all kinds of contingent things. We would only need to build existence into the concept of a perfect island or into the concept of an ideal lion,

and from that then we could infer that a perfect island or an ideal lion exists.[4] This objection in my opinion involves two interrelated confusions. The first one concerns the relation between words and meanings and the second one is connected with three kinds of meanings with which human mind is able to operate. Here I think about the meanings referring to artefacts, the meanings referring to empirical things and the meanings for which the best examples come from elementary mathematics and logic.

The meanings which refer to artefacts can be freely changed. The meaning which we associate with the English word 'table' can be defined as referring to the things which are made of wood or to the things which are made of wood and of ice, etc. We can assume that the word 'table' refers only to the things which are used to write on them or to refer to the things which are used not only for writing but also for eating, etc.

The meanings we use to refer to empirical things found in this world can also be changed, but not in an arbitrary way. We change some elements of these meanings as a result of new observations, experiments and investigations (scientific or 'folk investigations'). In the meaning of the English word 'water' is contained the fact that water is a colourless,

[4] N. Everitt claims that we can freely form some word, for example 'shunicorn', and then define it as a being in the case of which existence belongs to its essence. From this we can then infer that 'shunicorn exists': "if a made-up word like 'God' can refer to something with true and immutable nature, why cannot the same be true of a made-up word like 'shunicorn'?" (N. Everitt, *The Non-Existence of God* [London and New York: Routledge, 2004], p. 39). J. H. Sobel interprets Descartes' ontological proof in the following way: "Any supremely perfect being exists" and stresses that this sentence is necessary but at the same time lacks an existential character. It is grounded in a 'stipulative definition' (J. H. Sobel, *Logic and Theism. Arguments For and Against Beliefs in God* [Cambridge: CUP, 2004], p. 37). The ontological proof is interpreted in the same way by G. Oppy, who describes Descartes' reasoning as belonging the class of 'definitional ontological arguments'. According to Oppy the structure of this class of ontological arguments is characterized by the following reasoning: "God is a being which has every perfection. (This is true as a matter of definition). Existence is a perfection. Hence God exists." Oppy thinks that "The inference from 'By definition, God is existent being', to 'God exists' is patently invalid". (G. Oppy, *Ontological Arguments*, in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, red. E. N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/Ontological-Arguments/, 2007; cf. also G. Oppy, *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), pp. 20-24. Even D. A. Dombrowski, who supports C. Hartshorne's version of ontological argument, has written: "in the *Meditations* Descartes speaks as if existence, in contrast to non-existence, is a predicate or quality such that to lack it is to fall short of perfection. He thereby appears vulnerable to Kant's critique of the ontological argument." (D. A. Dombrowski, *Rethinking the Ontological Argument: A Neoclassical Theistic Response* [Cambridge: CUP, 2006], p. 20).

odourless substance, which is found in rivers and lakes, but this meaning also contains a scientific element: water is H_20. Nevertheless future scientific investigations can provide us with reasons to think that water has a different chemical composition than H_20. The meanings by which we refer to empirical things are not arbitrary but they are 'open' to changes, open to future observations, experiments, investigations. This can be taken as the reason why it does not make sense to talk about a perfect lion. We human beings are not in a position to clearly and distinctively grasp the nature of a lion. In other words, the elements contained in this concept are not accessible to us in the same way as we apprehend the idea of a triangle. We are not able to do this, because the nature of a lion is open to future investigations.

It is a totally different state of affairs in the realm of meanings belonging to elementary mathematics and logic. We can clearly and distinctively grasp the elements contained in these meanings. By grasping these meanings, we also become aware that we only discover them. All elements contained in them are not made by any arbitrary definition, but they are discovered as necessary. We cannot define the meaning of the English word 'triangle' in such a way that it will refer to objects made of wood, used in kitchens, or define it as referring to objects which are carnivorous, which sometimes roar, etc. We also strongly believe that no future investigations will be able to change the elements contained in the meaning which we associate with the English word 'triangle'. The meanings or ideas of this third kind Descartes interpreted as innate and his reason for doing so were characteristics of our human experience of them: we only encounter these meanings by using the memory of our mind and we encounter them as having an obvious trait of necessity.

At this stage of the interpretation of Descartes' version of ontological proof someone could object that we are also in a position to change meanings expressed even by elementary mathematical sentences as was the case with non-Euclidian geometries. In the course of the development of mathematical sciences it turned out that the sum of angles in a triangle does not have to be equal to the sum of two right angles. 'A Triangle' in one geometrical system means and refers to something different than 'a triangle' in another geometrical system, because the meaning of 'space' was changed. Is it possible to make a similar change to the meaning contained in the expression 'supremely perfect being'? Is it possible to give some new interpretation to the elements contained in the expression 'supremely perfect being'? As I can see it, it is not possible,

because if someone wanted to say that a supremely perfect being must not be omnipotent, or that it must not be omniscient, he would not be referring to the supremely perfect being (God) at all. This is the reason why the existence of God must be seen as more certain than even the most certain logical and mathematical truths.

Now Descartes' version of ontological proof can be formulated once more:

(1) I have an idea of supremely perfect being (the idea of God), i.e. I encounter the meaning that I am not in a position to define in an arbitrary way,
(2) Existence, i.e. existence as contrasted with 'absolute nothingness', is a perfection
(3) Therefore, a supremely perfect being (God) exists.

Now it will not be especially difficult to find an adequate response to the objection that in the case of Descartes' version of ontological proof we have to do an illicit leap from what is mental to the extramental reality or actuality. In the same way as we have to think that the fact that its angles equal two right angles cannot be separated from the idea of a triangle, we must also think that existence (or necessary existence) cannot be separated from the idea of a supremely perfect being. If we accept truths expressed by elementary mathematical sentences, we also have to accept this elementary metaphysical truth that the idea of a supremely perfect being contains its existence. Nevertheless, someone could still object that from the acceptance of the mathematical truth about the sum of angles in a triangle, it does not follow that triangles exist. But is there any sense in the supposition that in the possibly non-existing triangles their angles equal two right angles? Would it be reasonable to suppose that we must only think in this way but that in reality we do not know anything about triangles and their properties? It seems to me that we can only entertain such a possibility but we will not believe that it is possible.[5]

[5] P. van Inwagen (*Ontological Arguments*, in: C. Taliaferro, P. Draper, P. L. Quinn (eds.), *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion,* Second Edition [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010], pp. 359-367 [p. 360]) assumes that Descartes' argument establishes that the idea of a perfect being which does not exist is an inconsistent idea (just as the idea of a body that has no shape is an inconsistent idea). According to van Inwagen "from this it does not follow that a perfect being exists. That it does not follow is easy to see, for the idea of an X that does not exist is an inconsistent idea, no matter what X may be. The idea of a non-existent unicorn, for example, is an inconsistent idea, for nothing could possibly be a non-existent unicorn. But that fact does not entail that there are unicorns, and neither does the fact that "non-existent perfect being" is an inconsistent idea entail that there is perfect being". But it seems as though van Inwagen did not notice

Does it make any sense to expect something more from the Descartes' version of an ontological proof? Is it not enough that it is true that to the idea of a supremely perfect being belongs its existence? Here we must not lose from our sight the fact that a supremely perfect being (God) is not real, when by 'real' we wanted to understand something which is located in spatio-temporal framework. Supremely perfect being is also not actual, if by 'actual' we meant 'realized in some medium of realization' or 'exemplified in some dimension of exemplification'. In the case of triangles we can imagine that all sentences referring to them are true, but that nevertheless it is still possible that there are no real or actual triangles. Can we accordingly imagine that it is true that to the idea of a supremely perfect being belongs its existence but that nevertheless God is not realized or not exemplified or that He is not actual? But the supremely perfect being (God) exists absolutely, and if the sentence concerning the relation between His nature and His existence is true then this truth cannot be separated from the fact of His absolute existence.

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that the starting point of Descartes' reasoning was not a negative state of affairs. It was not a negative supposition that the idea of a non-existent perfect being is an inconsistent idea but a positive one, namely the fact that existence is a perfection, although, as I tried to show, it is not a predicate. From this positive state of affairs Descartes inferred that perfect being exists. van Inwagen seems also to confuse things which can exist only in the mind but not in reality with the strange suggestion that in extramental realm there could exist non-existent things, for example non-existent unicorns. The traditional scholastic distinction between 'essence' and 'existence' did not contain any suggestion that in extramental reality there could be non-existent things or objects. The philosophical distinction between essence and existence expresses a common-sense belief that in our minds we can have many objects which do not exist in reality.