that God could have actualized and that contains as much moral good as the actual world displays, contains at least 10¹³ turps of evil;

or

(42) God is the omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect creator of the world; and every world that God could have actualized and that contains less than 10¹³ turps of evil, contains less broadly moral good and a less favourable over-all balance of good and evil than the actual world contains.

Now if a proposition *p* confirms a proposition *q*, then it confirms every proposition *q* entails. But then it follows that if *p disconfirms q, p* disconfirms every proposition that entails *q*. (40) does not disconfirm (41) or (42); (41) and (42) each entail (1); therefore, the existence of the amount of evil actually displayed in the world does not render improbable the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good God. So far as this argument goes, of course, there may be *other* things we know such that (41) and/or (42) is improbable with respect to the

conjunction of (40) with *them*. It may be that (41) and (42) are improbable with respect to our *total evidence*, the totality of what we know. (41), for example, involves the idea that the evil that is not due to free human agency, is due to the free agency of *other* rational and significantly free creatures. Do we have evidence against this idea? Many people find it preposterous; but that is scarcely evidence against it. Theologians sometimes tell us that this idea is repugnant to "man come of age" or to "modern habits of thought". I am not convinced that this is so; in any case it does not come to much as evidence. The mere fact that a belief is unpopular at present (or at some other time) is interesting, no doubt, from a sociological point of view; it is evidentially irrelevant. Perhaps we do have evidence against this belief; but if we do, I do not know what it is.

At any rate, I cannot see that our total evidence disconfirms the idea that natural evil results from the activity of rational and significantly free creatures. Of course our total evidence is vast and amorphous; its bearing on the idea in question is not easy to assess. So I conclude, not that our total evidence does not disconfirm (41), but that I have no reason to suppose it does. And the same holds for (42); here too I can see no reason for supposing that our total evidence disconfirms it. So I see no reason to think that the existence of the amount of evil the world contains, taken either by itself or in connection with other things we know, makes God's existence improbable.

The upshot, I believe, is that there is no good atheological argument from evil. The existence of God is neither precluded nor rendered improbable by the existence of evil. Of course suffering and misfortune may none the less constitute a *problem* for one who believes in God; but the problem is not that presented by holding beliefs that are logically or probabilistically incompatible. He may find a *religious* problem in evil; in the presence of his own suffering or that of someone near to him, he may fail to maintain a right attitude towards God. Faced with great personal suffering or misfortune, he may be tempted to rebel against God, to shake his fist in God's face, to curse God. He may despair of God's goodness, or even give up belief in God altogether. But this is a problem of a different dimension. Such a problem calls for pastoral rather than philosophical counsel.

X God and Necessity

Abstract: In Ch.10, I apply the previous chapters' account of modality to the

Ontological Argument for the existence of God. I begin the chapter by attempting to develop a sound version of the Ontological Argument based on the work of St. Anselm. I conclude that this argument fails, as does a more recent attempt by Charles Hartshorne and Norman Malcolm. I then give a modal version of the Ontological Argument that is sound and is based on the claim that the property of unsurpassable greatness is possibly exemplified. I grant that this premise is not likely to be accepted by those who do not already hold that the property is actually exemplified, but I argue that it is still rational to accept the premise.

Alvin Plantinga

Although the subject of this chapter—the Ontological Argument for the existence of God—looks, at first sight, like a verbal sleight of hand or a piece of word magic, it has fascinated philosophers ever since St. Anselm had the good fortune to formulate it. Nearly every major philosopher from that time to this has had his say about it. Such comment, furthermore, has been by no means exclusively adverse; the argument has a long and illustrious line of defenders extending to the present and at the moment including, among others, Professors Charles Hartshorne and Norman Malcolm. What accounts for this fascination? First, many of the most knotty and difficult problems in philosophy meet in this argument: is existence a property? Are existential propositions ever necessarily true? Are existential propositions about what they seem to be about? How are we to understand negative existentials? Are there, in any respectable sense of 'are', some objects that do not exist? If so, do they have any properties? Can they be compared with things that do exist? These issues and a score of others arise in connection with St. Anselm's argument.

Second: we noted that the argument has about it an air of egregious unsoundness or perhaps even trumpery and deceit; yet it is profoundly difficult to say exactly where it goes wrong. The fact, I think, is that no philosopher has ever given a really convincing, conclusive, and *general* refutation—one relevant to all or most of the myriad forms the argument takes.[1] Too often philosophers are content to remark that Kant refuted St. Anselm by showing that "existence is not a predicate" and that "one cannot build bridges from the conceptual realm to the real world". But Kant never specified a sense of 'is a predicate' such that, in that sense, it is clear both that existence is *not* a predicate and that St. Anselm's argument requires it to be one.[1] Nor are

[1] See *God and Other Minds*, Chapter 2.
[1] See *God and Other Minds*, Chapter 2.

the mere claims that no existential propositions are necessary (or the above comment about bridge building) impressive as refutations of St. Anselm—after all, he claims to have an *argument* for the necessity of at least one existential proposition. In this chapter I shall take a fresh look at this argument—this time from the perspective of what (as I hopefully take it) we have learned about possible worlds. These ideas permit a much clearer understanding of the argument; and they may enable us to see (as I shall claim) that at least one version of the argument is sound.

1. The Anselmian Statement

And so, Lord, do thou, who dost give understanding to faith, give me, so far as thou knowest it to be profitable, to understand that thou art as we believe; and that thou art that which we believe. And indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Or is there no such nature, since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God? . . . But, at any rate, this

very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak—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 understand it to exist.

For, it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists. When a painter first conceives of what he will afterwards perform, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand it to be, because he has not yet performed it. But after he has made the painting, he both has it in his understanding, and he understands that it exists, because he has made it.

Hence, 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.[1]

Thus St. Anselm. I think we may best understand him as giving a *reductio ad absurdum* argument; postulate the non-existence of God and show that this supposition leads to absurdity or contradiction. Let us use the term 'God' as an abbreviation for the phrase 'the being than which nothing greater can be conceived'. Then, sticking as closely as possible to Anselm's wording, we may put his argument more explicitly as follows: suppose

   (1) God exists in the understanding but not in reality.

   (2) Existence in reality is greater than existence in the understanding alone.

   (3) God's existence in reality is conceivable.

   (4) If God did exist in reality, then he would be greater than he is (from (1) and (2)).

   (5) It is conceivable that there be a being greater than God is ((3) and (4)).

   (6) It is conceivable that there be a being greater than the being than which nothing greater can be conceived ((5), by the definition of 'God').

But surely

   (7) It is false that it is conceivable that there be a being greater than the being than which none greater can be conceived.

Since (6) and (7) contradict each other, we may conclude that

   (8) It is false that God exists in the understanding but not in reality.

So if God exists in the understanding, he also exists in reality; but clearly enough he does exist in the understanding, as even the fool will testify; therefore he exists in reality as well.

2. The Argument Restated

First, a couple of preliminary comments. When St. Anselm says that a being

exists in the understanding we may take him, I think, as saying that someone has thought of or conceived of that

[1] *Proslogion*, Chapter 2.

being. When he says that something *exists in reality*, on the other hand, he means to say what we would mean by saying simply that the thing in question exists. And when he says that a certain state of affairs is *conceivable* he means to say (or so, at any rate, I shall take him)[1] that it is a logically possible state of affairs—possible in our broadly logical sense. So, for example, step (3) in the above argument is more clearly put as

(3′) It is possible that God exists in reality;

and step (7) may be put as

(7′) It is false that it is possible that there is a being greater than the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater.

In the argument as I outlined it, we have step (1) as the assumption to be reduced to absurdity, steps (2), (3), and (7) as premisses in the argument, and the remaining steps as consequences of these premisses. I think it is fair to say that it is step (2)—the assertion that existence in reality is greater than existence in the understanding alone—that is the troublemaker here. What could St. Anselm have meant? He takes it for granted that some beings are greater than others. A man who displays such qualities as wisdom and courage is greater, so far forth, than one who does not. Furthermore, a cat, let us say, is not as great a being as a man, in that the latter has properties of intelligence and knowledge that the former lacks. Such qualities as life, consciousness, knowledge, wisdom, moral excellence, power, courage, and the like are what we might call 'great-making' properties; the more of these properties a being has and the greater the degree to which it has them, the greater, all else being equal, it is. Of course there will be appropriate weightings; perhaps the modest degree of wisdom displayed by your average candidate for public office counts for more than the cheetah's singular locomotive swiftness; and no doubt moral excellence outweighs power. Further, there may be cases where comparison with respect to greatness is difficult or impossible; how shall we compare a really splendid inanimate object—the Grand Teton, let us say—with a fairly undistinguished living

[1] My concern throughout will be less with fidelity to St. Anselm's actual intentions than with the various arguments his words suggest. For a determined attempt to get at what St. Anselm himself most probably had in mind, see D. P. Henry, *Medieval Logic and Metaphysics* (London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 1972), pp. 101-18.

thing—an earthworm, perhaps? Or how compare the latter with a number? Perhaps these items cannot be compared with respect to greatness; perhaps the relation *is at least as great as* is not connected. But St. Anselm need not suppose that it is. Of course he *is* committed to the claim that there is or could be a being bearing this relation to everything; he need not add that for any beings *A* and *B, A* bears it to *B* or *B* bears it to *A*.

Furthermore, a given object may have more greatness in one possible state of affairs than in another. In the actual world, for example, Raquel Welch has many impressive assets; in some other world she may be fifty pounds overweight and mousy. In this world, Leibniz is a very great man; he discovered the calculus, made some contributions to biology and optics, wrote some great philosophy and did all this in his spare time. Things could have gone differently, however; suppose he had joined Captain Cook on a voyage of exploration, visited the Islands of the South Seas, became enamoured of their climate and inhabitants, eschewed the life of the mind, and never been heard of again. Then, by certain standards, at least, he would not have been as great a

man as he was in fact.

There may be some problems with St. Anselm's conception of greatness; still, I think we can see roughly, at any rate, what he had in mind. But in step (2) St. Anselm suggests that *existence* is a great-making property. And how, exactly, are we to understand that? In Chapter VIII, I argued that there are no possible but unactual objects, no possible things that do not exist. Step (2) and indeed St. Anselm's entire argument receives a smoother and more intelligible formulation, however, if we concede or pretend that there *are* such objects. So suppose we temporarily go along with this idea; later we shall see what happens if we reject it. The relation *being at least as great as*, then, is to be thought of as relating merely possible objects as well as actual objects; and it may relate some of the former to some of the latter. This notion in mind, we may find it tempting to take step (2) as suggesting a comparison between existing beings and things like Pegasus or Superman that do not exist; he seems to be suggesting that an existing being has the advantage, so far forth, over a nonexistent being. C. D. Broad reads him thus: St. Anselm's argument, he says, "presupposes that . . . there is sense in talking of a comparison between a nonexistent term

and an existent term; and it produces the impression that this is like comparing two existing terms, e.g. a corpse and a living organism, one of which lacks life and the other of which has it". But this, he says, "is nonsensical verbiage".[1] In *God and Other Minds*, I took step (2) as something like

    (2a) If A has every property B has (except for nonexistence and any property entailing it) and A exists and B does not, then A is greater than B.[2]

Like Broad, I believed that St. Anselm's fundamental idea involved a comparison of *different* beings, one of them existent and the other not. And for reasons we need not enter here, this makes the argument exceedingly difficult to state.[3]

Now perhaps St. Anselm did mean to suggest something like (2a). Another look at his argument, however, shows that at the least he also meant to suggest something else.[4] As he puts it,

    . . . that than which nothing greater can be conceived does not 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.

Here his idea is pretty clearly this: if this being *did* exist in reality, it would be greater than it is. St. Anselm means to be speaking of just one object; and he says of *that* thing, supposed for the moment not to exist, that it would be greater if it *did* exist. He means to compare the greatness it has in *one* state of affairs with the greatness it has in some other state of affairs; he means to suggest that this object is greater in the worlds in which it exists than it is in this one, where it does not. More generally, perhaps St. Anselm means to suggest that if an object x exists in a world W and does not exist in a world W', then its greatness in W exceeds its greatness in W'. But given this premiss, we can restate the ontological argument as follows. Let us concede that there is just one possible being than which it is not possible that there be a greater; and suppose again we use the term 'God' to abbreviate the description 'the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater'. The argument

[1] *Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research* (London, 1953), p. 182.

[2] p. 67.

[3] pp. 66 ff.

[4] As David Lewis points out in his "Anselm and Actuality", *Nous*, 5 (1970), p. 178.

then aims to show that this being must be actual as well as possible. For

suppose

    (9) God does not exist in the actual world.

(10) For any worlds W and W' and object x, if x exists in W and x does not exist in W', then the greatness of x in W exceeds the greatness of x in W'.

(11) It is possible that God exists.

(12) So there is a possible world W such that God exists in W (from (11)).

(13) God exists in W and God does not exist in the actual world (from (9) and (12)).

(14) If God exists in W and God does not exist in the actual world, then the greatness of God in W exceeds the greatness of God in the actual world (from (10)).

(15) So the greatness of God in W exceeds the greatness of God in the actual world ((13) and (14)).

(16) So there is a possible being x and a world W such that the greatness of x in W exceeds the greatness of God in actuality (15).

(17) So it is possible that there be a being greater than God is (16).

(18) Hence it is possible that there be a being greater than the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater (from (17) by definition of 'God').

Our supposition at step (9), therefore, with the help of the premisses expressed by (10) and (11), implies a false statement; for surely

(19) It is not possible that there be a being greater than the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater.

Step (9) accordingly must be false and the existence of God established.

3. The Argument Examined

Now where, if anywhere, can we fault this argument? Step (9), of course, is the hypothesis for a *reductio* argument and is thus entirely above reproach. Steps (12) to (18) appear to follow quite properly from the items they are said to follow from. (19) certainly seems correct on the face of things; is it not

contradictory to suppose that there is a being greater than the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater? So that leaves only the premisses. Step (11) is just our supposition that there is a possible being than which it is not possible that there be a greater; but what about step (10)? Well, is (10) not plausible? A being that does not even *exist* in a given world certainly cannot have much by way of greatness in *that* world, however good its credentials in other worlds. But in fact a vastly weaker premiss than (10) will serve in the argument; we can replace (10) by

(10′) For any world W and object x, if x does not exist in W, then there is a world W' such that the greatness of x in W' exceeds the greatness of x in W.

(10′) does not assert that a being is greater in all the worlds in which it exists than it is in any of the worlds in which it does not; it says merely that for any world W in which a thing does not exist, there is at least one world in which it has more greatness than it has in W. This is compatible, of course, with the existence of a pair of worlds W and W' such that x exists in W and does not exist in W', but is none the less greater in W' than in W. What (10′) says is only that a thing does not attain its *greatest* greatness in any world in which it does not exist; and this seems eminently plausible.

But now suppose we think a bit more about the being than which it is not

possible that there be a greater. This being possesses a maximal degree of greatness; a degree of greatness that is nowhere excelled. That is to say, its greatness is not exceeded by the greatness of any being in any possible world. But *which* greatness of this being are we speaking of?[1] We said earlier that a being may have different degrees of greatness in different worlds; in which world does the being in question possess the degree of greatness in question? All we know so far, really, is that there is *some world or other* where it has this greatness; what step (11) really tells us is that among the possible beings there is one that in some world or other has a degree of greatness that is nowhere excelled; this being has a degree of greatness, in some world *W*, so impressive that there is no being

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[1] See Lewis, op. cit., p. 179. My criticism (pp. 202-5) of this version of St. Anselm's argument substantially follows Lewis.

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x and world *W′* such that *x* has a greater degree of greatness in *W′*. So when the argument speaks of the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater, we should take it that this phrase is meant to denote the possible being whose greatness *in some world or other* is nowhere exceeded. And then step (12) should be read as

(12′) There is a possible world *W* such that the being whose greatness in some world is nowhere exceeded, exists in *W*.

This certainly follows from (11). Further, all the steps of the argument through (16) seem right. (17) and (18) also follow quite properly from preceding steps; we can see that this is so if we restate (18) as

(18′) There is a possible world *W* and a possible being *x* such that the greatness of *x* in *W* exceeds the greatness of God in the actual world;

W is any world in which God exists (and where his greatness is maximal) and *x* is God himself. But what about (19), according to which it is impossible that there be a being that is greater than the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater? Initially this sounds convincing; but does it really have the solid ring of truth? Let *W* be any world in which God exists and achieves maximum greatness. It is certainly not possible that there be a being with a degree of greatness that exceeds that enjoyed by God in *W*; and if this is what (19) said, then (19) would be true. Unfortunately, if this is what is said, it would not follow that (18′) is false, and the *reductio* argument would fall to pieces. (19) is of use in the argument only if it contradicts (18′). But understood in the above fashion—that is, as

(19′) There is no possible world *W′* and being *x* such that the greatness of *x* in *W′* exceeds the greatness of God in *W*

it is not inconsistent with (18′), which says that God's greatness in the *actual* world, is somewhere exceeded; this is quite compatible with saying, as (19′) does, that God's greatness in that world *W* is nowhere exceeded. For so far, of course, we have no reason to think that *W* is the actual world. If, on the other hand, we take (19) as

(19″) There is no possible world *W* and being *x* such that the

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greatness of *x* in *W* exceeds the greatness of God *in the actual world*

then indeed it contradicts (18′); but then we have no reason to think that it is true. What we know about this being, about God, is that *in some world or other* his greatness is at an absolute maximum; in some world or other he enjoys a degree of greatness that is not excelled by any being in any world. What (19″) says, however, is that the *actual world* is a world in which the greatness of this being is at such a high pitch; and so far we have no reason at all for supposing that true. This version of the argument therefore fails; (19′) is clearly true but contributes nothing to the argument; (19″) contributes mightily to the argument, but we have no reason at all for supposing it true.

4. A Mistaken Modal Version

But is it not *possibly* true at any rate? Is it not possible that the actual world is one of the worlds in which God's greatness is maximal? Or to put the same thing differently, is it not possible that one of the worlds in which his greatness is at a maximum, is actual? Of course; *every* world is possibly actual; and so, therefore, are those worlds in which God's greatness is at a maximum. But perhaps we can use this fact to revise the argument. Let us suppose as before that the term 'God' simply abbreviates the longer phrase 'the being whose greatness in some world or other is nowhere exceeded'. And let us take as our first premiss the statement that possibly God exists—that is

> (20) There is just one possible being whose greatness in some world W is unexceeded by the greatness of any being in any world.

Further, suppose we add a premiss that corresponds to step (10) and (10′) but is a bit weaker and hence even more plausible:

> (21) If a possible being x does not exist in a world W, then there is a possible being y and a world $W′$ such that the greatness of y in $W′$ exceeds the greatness of x in W.

What (21) says is that if a being does not exist, then it is possible that there be a being greater than it is. Now we know that God

exists in some world where his greatness is maximal. Let W be any such world and suppose that

> (22) W obtains.

If so, then

> (23) W is the actual world.

But God's greatness in W is nowhere exceeded; so God's greatness in the actual world is nowhere exceeded. That is to say, for any possible object x and world W, the greatness of God in the actual world equals or exceeds the greatness of x in W. Suppose we give a name to the property a possible object has if there is no world in which its greatness exceeds that enjoyed by God in the actual world: call this property 'P'. What follows from (22), therefore, is

> (24) Every possible being has P.

But

> (25) Possibly W obtains.

Hence

> (26) Possibly everything (every possible being) has P.

Now this property P has a certain interesting peculiarity. For many properties Q there are objects x such that x has Q in some worlds, but has its complement $\bar{Q}$ in others. Snubnosedness, for example, characterizes Socrates in this world; but clearly enough there are plenty of possible worlds in which he has its complement. *Other* properties, however, are not like that. Consider now, not snubnosedness, but the world-indexed property *being-snubnosed-in-α*. As we have seen (Chapter IV, Section 11) if Socrates has this property, then there is no world in which he has its complement. Let us say that a property is a *universal* property if it resembles the property of *being-snubnosed-in-α* in that if an object has it in any world, then there is no world in which it has its complement. That is to say, let us adopt the following definition:

> D $_1$ A property P is a universal property if and only if it is impossible that there be an object that has P in one world and $\bar{P}$ in some other world.

Clearly enough, world-indexed properties will be universal. And now consider

this property of nowhere exceeding the greatness of God in the actual world. That too, surely, is a universal property; if in a given world W, it is true of x that in no world does its greatness exceed that enjoyed by God in the actual world, then (see Chapter IV, Section 6) there will be no world in which x has the property of being such that in some world its greatness *does* exceed that of God in the actual world. So

    (27) P is a universal property.

But if there is a world in which everything, that is every possible object, has a given universal property, then obviously there is no world in which there is a possible object that has the complement of that property; hence

    (28) If there is at least one world in which everything has P, then in no world is there something that has $\overline{P}$.

Now (26) tells us that there is a world in which everything has P, hence

    (29) In no world is there anything that has $\overline{P}$.

But if so, then nothing has $\overline{P}$ in the actual world; that is to say, it is in fact true that nothing anywhere exceeds the greatness of God in the actual world. Now from (21) it follows that

    (30) If God does not exist in the actual world, then there is a possible being x and a world W such that the greatness of x in W exceeds the greatness of God in the actual world;

But (29) tells us that there is no such possible being and world W; it follows, therefore, that God exists in the actual world.

What shall we say about this argument?

Unfortunately it suffers from a serious defect: it rests upon confusion. Subtle confusion, no doubt, but confusion none the less. Consider again the alleged fact (alleged by step (27)) that P is a universal property. This means that if there is any world at all in which a thing has P, then there is no world in which that thing has $\overline{P}$. Now is this really true? Let W be one of the worlds in which God's greatness is at a maximum. *God* has this

property P in W; for if W has obtained, W would have been the actual world; hence

    (31) Nothing anywhere exceeds the greatness of God in the actual world

is a true statement in W. Had W obtained, *it* would have been the actual world, and nothing anywhere exceeds the greatness of God in W; so if W had obtained, (31) would have been a true statement. But if (31) is true in W, then everything, including God, has P in W; so God has the property P in W.

But now consider a world W^* in which God does not exist. Does God have P in *that* world? He does not exist in that world; so his greatness there is inferior to his greatness in W. So if W^* had been the actual world, then there would have been a world —i.e. W—where his greatness exceeded that of God in the actual world. But if so, then in W^* God has the complement of P; so it looks as if P is not a universal property after all. God has it in some worlds and has its complement is others—this is true, at any rate, if there are worlds in which God does not exist. So we can say that P is a universal property only if we already know that God exists in every world—which, after all, is what the argument was supposed to prove.

But if this is so, what initially led us to suppose that P *is* a universal property? The answer is that we were treating the phrase 'the actual world' as a *proper name* or like a proper name of a certain possible world—the one which happens to be actual. We were supposing that in using the phrase 'the actual world' we would be talking about α, even if we were reasoning about what things would have been like had some world other than α had the distinction of obtaining. We were thinking of the phrase, 'the property of nowhere exceeding the greatness of God in the actual world' as meaning the same thing as the

phrase 'the property of nowhere exceeding the greatness of God in α'. And the latter phrase *does* denote a universal property. But can we not use the phrase 'the actual world' in that way if we wish? Can we not use it to mean the same as 'α', so that even if some other world had obtained, that world would not have been the actual world? Of course; but suppose we do use it in that way; then look again at the inference of

(23) W is the actual world

from

(22) W obtains.

If we are using 'the actual world' as a name like 'α', then this inference is equivalent to inferring

(23′) W is α

from (22); and this inference is manifestly fallacious. From the supposition that W obtains—W being one of the worlds in which God's greatness is at a maximum—we cannot properly infer that α obtains; we do not know that α is one of those worlds. So if we use this phrase as a name like 'α' then the proof fails because (23) does not follow from (22); if we use it in such a way that (23) follows from (22), then we have no right to the premiss that P is a universal property. We may put the same point another way. On the one hand we might take P to be the property a thing has if and only if its greatness nowhere exceeds that of God in α. Then P is a universal property, but

(24) Every possible being has P

does not follow from the supposition that W, a world in which God's greatness is maximal, obtains. On the other hand, P might be the property of nowhere exceeding God in the actual world, where we understand that phrase in such a way that if some other world W had obtained, then W rather than α would have enjoyed the distinction of being the actual world. But then we have no right to suppose that P is a universal property.

5. The Argument Without Possible Objects

These versions of the argument, therefore, are based upon confusion. Both involve, furthermore, the idea that there are or could have been possible but nonexistent objects. What happens if (as is entirely right and proper according to Chapter VIII) we reject this assumption? Suppose we briefly examine the first formulation from this point of view. The name 'God' was taken as short for the phrase 'the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater'. And the attempt was to deduce an absurdity from

(9) God does not exist in the actual world

(10) For any worlds W and W' and any object x, if x exists in W but not in W' then the greatness of x in W exceeds the greatness of x in W'

and

(11) It is possible that God exists.

Here (9) was taken to be a singular statement about a being that is at any rate possible; (10) was taken as quantifying over merely possible as well as actual objects, and (11) credited the being referred to in (9) with existence in some world or other. The argument then proceeded by plausibly confusing the property of having maximal greatness with that of having maximal greatness in some world or other.

Now if we are unwilling to concede that there are possible but unactual beings,

we shall have to read (9) not as the claim that a certain being lacks existence, but instead as the proposition that there is no being with maximal greatness —equivalently, that maximal greatness is not exemplified. (11) must then be construed not as the claim that the being mentioned in (9) *does* exist in some world, but instead as the proposition that there is a possible world in which maximal greatness is exemplified. But it is not quite so easy to reconstrue (10). If there are no possible objects, then an object that does not exist in a given world W does not have any greatness at all in W—at any rate there is no property of having such-and-such a degree of greatness that this object has in W. It then seems at the least peculiar and misleading to say that Leibniz, for example, has more greatness in α than he does in a world in which he does not exist; for there is no degree of greatness at all such that he would have had *that* degree of greatness if he had not existed. But presumably all the argument really requires is that Leibniz *fail* to have the *maximal* degree of greatness in a world where he does not exist; and if we recall the distinction between predicative and impredicative propositions (Chapter VIII, Section 1) we see that his failing to have the maximal degree of greatness in such worlds does not entail that there is some *other* degree of greatness he *does* have in those worlds. We may therefore regard (10) as the claim that any object failing to exist in a world W does not have maximal greatness there. So stated, of course, the claim is just about objects that do exist; but we may add that there could not have

been objects for which this claim is false. (10) therefore becomes

> (10′) Necessarily, for any object x and world W, if x does not exist in W,
>   then x does not have maximal greatness in W.

And this seems plainly true.

So we have

> (9′) There is no maximally great being

> (10′) Necessarily, for any object x and world W, if x does not exist in W,
>   then x does not have maximal greatness in W,

and

> (11′) There is a world in which there exists a maximally great being.

But we cannot plausibly proceed much further. There is a world W in which there exists a being that has maximal greatness there but does not exist here in α. So if W had been actual, there would have been a maximally great being with the properties of failing to exist in α and (by (10′)) failing to have maximal greatness in α. But here we do not have the appearance of contradiction to which the first version appealed. On the earlier formulation, the illusion of paradox arose in that the phrase 'the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater' was used confusingly; it was not initially clear whether it was supposed to denote a possible being that has maximal greatness *in fact*, or one that has that property *in some world or other*; and the argument proceeded to make capital of that confusion. But this illusion is dispelled when we state the argument without reference to possibles.

Here, perhaps, we have a way of so construing Kant's *dictum* —that existence is not a real predicate or property—that it becomes relevant to many versions of the Ontological Argument. In many formulations the argument begins with the claim that there is a certain being—the greatest possible being—that is at any rate *possible* even if it does not exist. This being is denoted by the phrase, 'the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater': and the hypothesis to be reduced to absurdity—that this being does not exist—is construed as a singular proposition predicating nonexistence of the being in question. The argument then goes on to claim that this very being is such that if it *did* exist, it would be greater than it *is*.

But if we reject possible but nonexistent objects, we see that the initial

hypothesis—that the greatest possible being does not exist—cannot coherently be construed as a singular proposition unless we already know that there is, that is, exists, such a being. And if, as the initial hypothesis rightly construed asserts, there is *no* such being, then there is nothing of which we can coherently claim that it would be greater if it did exist. Perhaps we may read Kant as suggesting this observation; or perhaps it is only that reading Kant suggests the observation.

6. The Hartshorne-Malcolm Version

But of course there are many other versions of the argument. (And I wish to remark parenthetically that the existence of many importantly different versions makes most of the 'refutations' one finds in textbooks look pretty silly.) Professors Charles Hartshorne[1] and Norman Malcolm,[2] for example, find two quite distinct versions of the argument in St. Anselm's writings. In the first of these St. Anselm holds that *existence* is a perfection; he holds some version of the view that a being is greater in a world in which it exists than it is in a world in which it does not. But in the second version, say Malcolm and Hartshorne, it is *necessary* existence that is said to be a perfection. What does *that* mean? Take a world like α and consider two things, A and B that exist in it, where A exists not only in α but in every other world as well while B exists in some but not all worlds. According to the doctrine under consideration, A is so far forth greater in α than B is. Of course B may have some other properties—properties that make for greatness—that A lacks. It may be that on balance it is B that is greater in α. For example, the number 7 exists necessarily and Socrates does not; but it would be peculiar indeed to conclude that the number seven is therefore greater, in α, than Socrates is. The point is only that necessary existence is a great-making quality—it is one of the qualities that must be considered in comparing a pair of beings with respect to greatness. But then it is plausible to suppose that the maximum degree of greatness includes necessary existence—that is to say, a possible being has the maximum degree of

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[1] *Man's Vision of God* (Harper & Row, Inc.), 1941.

[2] "Anselm's Ontological Arguments", *Philosophical Review*, 69 (1960).

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greatness in a given world only if it exists in that world and furthermore exists in every other world as well. The argument may accordingly be stated as follows:

(32) There is a world W in which there exists a being with maximal greatness,

and

(33) A being has maximal greatness in a world only if it exists in every world.

W, therefore, includes the existence of a being with maximal greatness who exists in every world. So there is an essence E, exemplified in W, that entails the property *exists in every world*. So it is impossible in W that E not be exemplified. But what is impossible does not vary from world to world (Chapter IV, Section 6). Hence E is exemplified, and necessarily exemplified, in *this* world. So there is a greatest possible being, and it exists necessarily.

What this argument shows is that if it is even *possible* that God, so conceived, exists, then it is true that he does, and, indeed, necessarily true that he does. As it is stated, however, there is one fairly impressive flaw: even if an essence entailing *is maximally great in W* is exemplified, it does not so far follow that this essence entails *is maximally great in α*. For all we have shown so far, this being might be at a maximum in some world W, but be pretty insignificant in α, our world. So the argument does not show that there is a being that enjoys maximal greatness in fact; it shows at most that there is a being that in some world or other has maximal greatness.

7. A Victorious Modal Version

Is there a way to remove this flaw? Perhaps. Why, after all, should we think that necessary existence is a perfection or great-making quality? Because the greatness of a being in a world W depends not merely upon the qualities it has in W; what it is like in other worlds is also relevant. In the course of an attempt to *disprove* God's existence J. N. Findlay puts this point as follows:

> Not only is it contrary to the demands and claims inherent in

> religious attitudes that their object should *exist* "accidentally"; it is also contrary to these demands that it should *possess its various excellences* in some merely adventitious manner. It would be quite unsatisfactory from the religious stand point, if an object merely *happened* to be wise, good, powerful, and so forth, even to a superlative degree. . . . And so we are led on irresistibly, by the demands inherent in religious reverence, to hold that an adequate object of our worship must possess its various excellence in some necessary manner.[1]

I think there is sense in what Findlay says. His point is that the greatness of a being in a world W does not depend merely upon its qualities and attributes in W; what it is like in other worlds is also to the point. Those who worship God do not think of him as a being that happens to be of surpassing excellence in *this* world but who in some other worlds is powerless or uninformed or of dubious moral character. We might make a distinction here between *greatness* and *excellence*; we might say that the *excellence* of a being in a given world W depends only upon its (non world-indexed) properties in W, while its greatness in W depends not merely upon its excellence in W, but also upon its excellence in other worlds. The limiting degree of greatness, therefore, would be enjoyed in a given world W only by a being who had maximal excellence in W and in every other possible world as well. And now perhaps we do not need the supposition that necessary existence is a perfection; for (as I argued in Chapter VIII) a being has no properties at all and *a fortiori* no excellent-making properties in a world in which it does not exist. So existence and necessary existence are not themselves perfections, but necessary conditions of perfection.

We may state this argument more fully as follows.

(34) The property *has maximal greatness* entails[2] the property *has maximal excellence in every possible world*.

(35) *Maximal excellence* entails *omniscience, omnipotence*, and *moral perfection*.

(36) *Maximal greatness* is possibly exemplified.

But for any property P, if P is possibly exemplified, then there

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[1] "Can God's Existence be Disproved?", *Mind*, 57 (1948), pp. 108-18.

[2] Where, we recall, a property P entails a property Q if there is no world in which there exists an object x that has P but lacks Q.

is a world W and an essence E such that E is exemplified in W, and E entails *has P in W*. So

(37) There is a world W^* and an essence E^* such that E^* is exemplified in W^* and E^* entails *has maximal greatness in W^**.

If W^* had been actual, therefore, E^* would have been exemplified by an object that had maximal greatness and hence (by (34)) had maximal excellence in every possible world. So if W^* had been actual, E^* would have been

exemplified by a being that for any world *W* had the property *has maximal excellence in W*. But every world-indexed property of an object is entailed by its essence (Chapter IV, Section 11). Hence if *W** had been actual, *E** would have entailed, for every world *W*, the property *has maximal excellence in W*; hence it would have entailed the property *has maximal excellence in every possible world*. That is, if *W** had been actual, the proposition

(38) For any object *x*, if *x* exemplifies *E**, then *x* exemplifies the property *has maximal excellence in every possible world*

would have been necessarily true. But what is necessarily true does not vary from world to world. Hence (38) is necessary in every world and is therefore necessary. So

(39) *E** entails the property *has maximal excellence in every possible world*.

Now (as we have learned from Chapter VIII) a being has a property in a world *W* only if it exists in that world. So *E** entails the property *exist in every possible world*. *E** is exemplified in *W**; hence if *W** had been actual, *E** would have been exemplified by something that existed and exemplified it in every possible world. Hence

(40) If *W** had been actual, it would have been impossible that *E** fail to be exemplified.

But again, what is impossible does not vary from world to world; hence it is *in fact* impossible that *E** fail to be exemplified; so *E** is exemplified; so

(41) There exists a being that has maximal excellence in every world.

That is, there actually exists a being that is omniscient,

omnipotent, and morally perfect; and that exists and has these properties in every possible world. This being is God.

A similar but simpler version of the argument could go as follows. Let us say that *unsurpassable greatness* is equivalent to *maximal excellence in every possible world*. Then

(42) There is a possible world in which unsurpassable greatness is exemplified.

(43) The proposition *a thing has unsurpassable greatness if and only if it has maximal excellence in every possible world* is necessarily true.

(44) The proposition *whatever has maximal excellence is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect* is necessarily true.

Now here we should notice the following interesting fact about properties. Some, like *is a human person*, are instantiated in some but not all worlds. On the other hand, however, there are such properties as *is a person in every world*. By the principle that what is necessary or impossible does not vary from world to world, this property cannot be instantiated in some worlds but not in others. Either it is instantiated in *every* world or it is not instantiated at all. Using the term 'universal property' in a way slightly different from the way we used it before, we might say that

D $_2$*P* is a universal property if and only if *P* is instantiated in *every* world or in *no* world.

But clearly the property *possesses unsurpassable greatness* is universal in this sense, for this property is equivalent to the property of having maximal excellence in every world; since the latter is universal, so is the former.

From (42) and (43), therefore, it follows that

(45) *Possesses unsurpassable greatness* is instantiated in every world.

But if so, it is instantiated in this world; hence there actually exists a being who is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect and who exists and has these

properties in every world.

What shall we say of these arguments? Clearly they are valid; and hence they show that if it is even possible that God, so thought of, exists, then it is true and necessarily true that he does. The only question of interest, it seems to me, is whether its main premiss—that indeed unsurpassable greatness is possibly exemplified, that there is an essence entailing unsurpassable

greatness—is *true*. I think this premiss is indeed true. Accordingly, I think this version of the Ontological Argument is sound.

8. Final Objections and Reflections

Now some philosophers do not take kindly to the Ontological Argument; the claim that it or some version of it is sound is often met with puzzled outrage or even baffled rage. One objection I have heard is that the formulation of the last section (call it Argument A) may be valid, but is clearly *circular* or *question-begging*. Sometimes this *caveat* has no more substance than the recognition that the argument is indeed valid and that its premiss could not be true unless its conclusion were—which, of course, does not come to much as an objection. But suppose we briefly look into the complaint. What is it for an argument to be circular? In the paradigm case, one argues for a proposition A_1 on the basis of A_2, for A_2 on the basis of A_3, . . . , for A_{n-1} on the basis of A_n, and for A_n on the basis of A_1. Whatever the merits of such a procedure, Argument A is clearly not an example of it; to conform to this pattern one who offered Argument A would be obliged to produce in turn an argument for its main premiss—an argument that involved as premiss the conclusion of A or some other proposition such that A's conclusion was proximately or ultimately offered as evidence for it.

So the argument is not obviously circular. Is it question-begging? Although surely some arguments *are* question-begging, it is by no means easy to say what this fault consists in or how it is related to circularity. But perhaps we can get at the objector's dissatisfaction by means of an example. Consider Argument B:

(46) Either $7+5 = 13$ or God exists.

(47) $7+5 \neq 13$.

Therefore

(48) God exists.

This argument is valid. Since I accept its conclusion and therefore its first premiss, I believe it to be sound as well. Still, I could scarcely claim much for it as a piece of Natural Theology. Probably it will never rank with Aquinas's Third Way, or even

his much less impressive Fourth Way. And the reason is that indeed this argument is in some way question begging, or at least dialectically deficient. For presumably a person would not come to believe (46) unless he already believed (48). Not that the alternative is *impossible*—it *could* happen, I suppose, that someone inexplicably find himself with the belief that (46) (and (47)) is true, and then go on to conclude that the same holds for (48). But that certainly would not be the general case. Most people who believe (46) do so only because they already believe (48) and infer the former from the latter. But how do these considerations apply to Argument A? It is by no means obvious that anyone who accepts its main premiss does so only because he infers it from the conclusion. If anyone *did* do that, then for him the argument is dialectically deficient in the way B is; but surely Argument A need not be thus dialectically deficient for one who accepts it.

A second objection: there are plenty of properties that are *non-compossible*

with maximal greatness; that is, their possibility is incompatible with that of the latter. Consider, for example, the property of *near-maximality*, enjoyed by a being if and only if it does not exist in every possible world but has a degree of greatness not exceeded by that of any being in any world. This property is possibly exemplified only if there is a world *W* in which there exists a being who does not exist in every world and whose greatness could not be exceeded. And clearly near-maximality is possibly exemplified only if maximal greatness is *not* possibly exemplified. Or more simply, consider the property of no-maximality, the property of being such that there is no maximally great being. If this property is possible, then maximal greatness is not. But, so claims the objector, these properties are every bit as plausibly possible as maximal greatness. So if Argument A is sound, so is Argument C:

(49) Near-maximality is possibly exemplified

(50) If near-maximality is possible, then maximal greatness is not

therefore

(51) Maximal greatness is impossible.

Since A and C cannot both be sound, he continues, we must conclude that neither is.

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But of course here there is confusion. Agreed: A and C cannot both be sound; but why conclude that *neither* is? Consider Argument D:

(52) No-maximality is possibly exemplified

(53) If no-maximality is possibly exemplified, then maximal greatness is impossible.

Therefore

(54) Maximal greatness is impossible.

Logic tells us that A and D cannot both be sound; but it also tells us they cannot both be *un*sound; one is sound and the other is not.

I have also heard the following rider to the last objection. There are vast numbers of properties not compossible with maximal greatness. There are near-maximality and no-maximality, as we have seen, but any numbers of others as well. For example, there is the intersection of no-maximality with such a property as *being Socrates*; this is a property exemplified by something only in the event that that thing is Socrates and there is no maximally great being. Clearly there are as many properties of this sort as you please; for each it seems fairly plausible, initially, at least, to claim that it is possibly exemplified; but each is non-compossible with maximal greatness. So in all probability the latter is impossible; granted, it does not initially *look* impossible, but its claims are outweighed by the claims of the indefinitely many non-compossible properties that look as possible as it.

This argument has little to recommend it. Indeed there are any number of fairly plausible properties that are not compossible with maximal greatness; but there are just as many (and just as plausible) whose possibility *entails* that of the latter: *being a maximally great creator of Socrates, being a maximally great creator of Plato, etc.* For any number *n* there is the property of being maximally great and creating just *n* persons; and the possibility of each of these properties will be precisely as plausible as that of maximal greatness itself.

It must be conceded, however, that Argument A is not a successful piece of natural theology. For the latter typically draws its premises from the stock of propositions accepted by

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nearly every sane man, or perhaps nearly every rational man. So, for example, each of St. Thomas's Five Ways begins by appealing to a premiss few would be willing to contest: such propositions as that some things are in motion; or that

things change; or that there are contingent beings. And (36), the central premiss of Argument A, is not of this sort; a sane and rational man who thought it through and understood it might none the less reject it, remaining agnostic or even accepting instead the possibility of no-maximality.

Well then, why accept this premiss? Is there not something improper, unreasonable, irrational about so doing? I cannot see why. Philosophers sometimes suggest that certain scientific theories—quantum mechanics, perhaps—require us to give up certain laws of logic—the Principle of Distribution,[1] for example. If we can accept the denial of the Distributive Law in the interests of simplifying physical theory, we should be able to accept (36) in order to do the same for Theology. More seriously, suppose we consider analogous situations. In Chapter VIII, I examined the question whether

> (55) There are or could be possible but unactual objects

is true. This proposition resembles (36) in that if it is *possible*, it is true and indeed necessarily true. The same goes for its denial. Furthermore, there are plenty of initially plausible propositions that are not compossible with (55); and plenty more that are not compossible with its denial. There seems to be no argument against this proposition that need compel a determined advocate; and, as Chapter VIII shows, there are none for it. Shall we conclude that it is improper or irrational or philosophically irresponsible to accept (55) or its negation? Surely not. Or consider Leibniz's Law:

> (56) For any objects *x* and *y* and property *P*, if *x* = *y*, then *x* has P if and only if *y* has *P*.

Some philosophers reject (56);[2] various counterexamples have been alleged; various restrictions have been proposed. None of these 'counterexamples' are genuine in my view; but there seems to be no compelling argument for (56) that does not at

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[1] See Hilary Putnam's "Is Logic Empirical?", in *Boston Studies in Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 5 (Dordrecht: D. Riedel, 1969), pp. 216-41.

[2] Geach and Grice, for example.

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some point invoke that very principle. Must we conclude that it is improper to accept it, or to employ it as a premiss? No indeed. The same goes for any number of philosophical claims and ideas. Indeed, philosophy contains little else. Were we to believe only what is uncontested or for which there are incontestable arguments from uncontested premisses, we should find ourselves with a pretty slim and pretty dull philosophy. Perhaps we should have *Modus Ponens*; certainly not much more. The policy of accepting only the incontestable promises security but little else.

So if we carefully ponder Leibniz's Law and the alleged objections, if we consider its connections with other propositions we accept or reject and still find it compelling, we are within our rights in accepting it—and this whether or not we can convince others. But then the same goes for (36). Hence our verdict on these reformulated versions of St. Anselm's argument must be as follows. They cannot, perhaps, be said to *prove* or *establish* their conclusion. But since it is rational to accept their central premiss, they do show that it is rational to *accept* that conclusion. And perhaps that is all that can be expected of any such argument.

Abstract: I begin by clarifying W.V. Quine's objection to quantified modal logic. I then consider responses from Jaako Hintikka and Arthur Smullyan. I demonstrate that both of them rely on distinguishing between proper and improper terms. Quine's reply to Hintikka and Smullyan is that their solution entails that quantified modal logic is committed to Aristotelian Essentialism. I conclude that Quine is right that quantified modal logic presupposes essentialism, but I also claim that this is not a reason to reject quantified modal