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Kirschner's Modal Ontological Argument

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ABSTRACT

Ontological Arguments for the existence of God, first discovered by St. Anselm (1033-1109), attempt to deduce the existence of God from the concept of God.   It is the aim of this thesis to champion a modal version of the Ontological Argument as philosophically sound by demonstrating it to be logically valid and by successfully defending the argument's premises as true. Kirschner's version of the Ontological Argument states:

P1 For every type of entity, instances of that type of entity either actually exist, merely possibly exist, or necessarily do not exist.
P2 If an entity can be conceived, then that entity either actually exists, or merely possibly exists.
P3 God can be conceived.
C1 Therefore, God either actually exists, or merely possibly exists.
P4 Something is necessary if and only if that entity is totally non-contingent, or if it is inconceivable.
P5 If something is necessary, then that entity either necessarily actually exists (if it is totally non-contingent), or is impossible and thus necessarily cannot exist (if it is inconceivable).
P6 God is totally non-contingent.
C2 Therefore, God is necessary.
C3 Therefore, God cannot merely possibly exist.
C4 Therefore, God necessarily actually exists.
C5 Therefore, God actually exists.

Anselm's approach was to deduce a contradiction by supposing that God only possibly existed. The approach of this version is to begin, not with the supposition that God only possibly exists, but with the metaphysical principle that there are three categories that encompass the spectrum of existence. This version is an extended disjunctive syllogism whose conclusions follow the given the truth of the premises. This Ontological argument is valid and it may be considered sound by some who carefully investigate and consider the nature of God. It demonstrates that God cannot belong to the "cannot exist" category. It gives strong support to the idea that God does not merely belong to the "possibly exists" category. It gives strong support to the idea that God as the GCB is a compossible notion. It lays out a case for demonstrating that the concept of God guarantees the existence of God.

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I. Introduction

One of the most fascinating and frustrating, enthralling and exasperating philosophical arguments ever conceived is the Ontological Argument. First discovered by St. Anselm (1033-1109), the Ontological Argument attempts to deduce the existence of God from the concept of God. In this regard, the Ontological Argument represents a unique piece of natural theology and philosophical argumentation as it is the only *a priori* argument for the existence of God. Many variations of the Ontological Argument exist, the most successful of which are those versions that focus on modal considerations. While many modal versions of the argument are defended by certain philosophers, the argument presented in this thesis is novel, yet also incorporates the important insights of Alvin Plantinga, Norman Malcolm, and Charles Hartshorne and others. They, and other important thinkers like Renee Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, and Kurt Godel have defended the Ontological Argument, but many philosophers have rejected it. The most vociferous objectors include David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Caterus, and Douglas Gasking. It is the aim of this thesis to champion a modal version of the Ontological Argument as philosophically sound by demonstrating it to be logically valid and by successfully defending the argument's premises as true.

Kirschner's version of the Ontological Argument:

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C2 Therefore, God is necessary.
C3 Therefore, God cannot merely possibly exist.

C4 Therefore, God necessarily actually exists.
C5 Therefore, God actually exists.

The form of this version of the Ontological Argument is an extended disjunctive syllogism. Three options present themselves: (1) God actually exists, (2) God merely possibly exists, or (3) God cannot exist. The goal of the argument is to establish (1). Since (1) and (2) are incompatible with (3), but not with each other—(1) guarantees (2), but (2) does not guarantee (1)—to establish either (1) or (2), (3) must be eliminated. Merely eliminating (3) only establishes that the God is possible (2)—i.e. that he exists in some possible world, not that he actually exists in this world (1). For the argument to be successful, (2) must be eliminated also. If there are only three options and two of those options are eliminated, then only the remaining option is the case. This Ontological Argument seeks to establish that God actually exists (1), by eliminating the option that God merely possibly exists (2) and by eliminating the impossibility of God existing (3). The argument also distinguishes between two types of actual existence: contingent and necessary. This modal version seeks to prove not just the contingent actual existence of God, but the necessary actual existence of God.

Ontological Arguments are *a priori* in nature. That is, they attempt to demonstrate the existence of God from knowledge of the concept of God, with no appeal to empirical experience. The idea is that if one rightly understands the concept of God, then one will come to understand that God actually exists. Of course, there are empirical arguments that marshal evidence for God's existence (Cosmological arguments, particularly the Kalam version; arguments from religious experience; teleological arguments, etc.), but appealing to such evidence is to move from *a priori* considerations to *a posteriori* considerations. This type of move is beyond the intended scope of Ontological Arguments, but provides a strong compliment to Ontological Arguments when building a cumulative case for God's existence.

II. Anselm's Argument

This modal version of the Ontological Argument remains true to St. Anselm's description

of God from chapter 2 of the *Proslogion* as that "than which nothing greater can be thought,"[1]

and makes use of Anselm's modal notion from chapter 3 of the *Proslogion* that God "cannot

even be thought not to exist."[2] The argument as presented above is valid—the conclusions

follow from the disjunctive and the conditional premises. To determine if the argument is sound,

the premises must be shown to be true and that the argument avoids the objections typically

raised against Ontological Arguments. While Anselm's Ontological argument is a *reductio ad*

absurdum, trying to deduce a contradiction by assuming that God merely possibly exists, this

argument seeks to make use of an accepted metaphysical principle and the concept of God to

determine that God actually exists. This argument captures Anselm's analytic concept of God

and his insistence that God is indeed conceivable. Let us allow Anselm's words to lay the

groundwork for a consideration of this argument.

> Therefore, O Lord, you who give understanding to faith, grant me to
> understand—to the degree You know to be advantageous—that You exist, as we
> believe, and that You are what we believe [You to be]. 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. For example, when a painter envisions what he is about to
> paint: he indeed has in his understanding that which he has not yet made, but he
> does not yet understand that it exists. But after he has painted [it]: he has in his
> understanding that which he has made, and he understands that it 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

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[1] Anselm, *Prologion* in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford World's Classics).
    Brian Davies, ed. P 87.
[2] Ibid, P 89.

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 the understanding and in reality.[3]

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 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], O Lord our God. Therefore, O Lord my God, 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![4]

Let us now turn to an evaluation of the argument. If this argument can be shown to be

sound, then God's necessary existence will have been demonstrated from the concept of God.

III. Kirschner's Modal Ontological Argument Evaluated

Consider P1: For every type of entity, instances of that type of entity either actually exist, merely possibly exist, or necessarily do not exist.

This premise contends that every type of entity—object, substance, property, idea, or

anything whatsoever—fits into one of these metaphysical categories: (1) that which actually

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[3] Ibid, *Proslogion*, chapter 2.
[4] Ibid, chapter 3.

exists, (2) that which merely possibly exists, or (3) that which cannot exist. Things that actually exist include cats, trees, thoughts of Superman, etc. Everything in this category is (a) in principle conceivable, (b) is free from logical inconsistency, and (c) is exemplified. The first condition, (a), stipulates that all actually existing things must be able to be conceived. In this sense, everything that actually exists is able to be conceptualized somehow. Mere conceptualization is not enough to confer actual existence, however; logical consistency must accompany any mentally perceived thing. Such a requirement prevents someone from thinking that she is conceptualizing a logical contradiction by thinking of two contradictory concepts simultaneously, for they would be separate entities, not existing as one object. This means that for some entity to actually exist, that entity must be able to exist, and thus be free of logical inconsistency. But (a) and (b) together only confer possible existence, not actual existence. For some entity to actually exist, there must be an example of that sort of thing in this world. That type of entity must be exemplified. Someone can have an idea of a palm tree, but a palm tree is only said to actually exist, as opposed to merely possibly existing, if we can find an example of a palm tree, i.e. something that exemplifies the properties of the concept of a palm tree. In this way (a) and (b) establish the essence of a thing, while (c) provides the final component necessary for an entity to actually exist. Of course, actual existence does not depend on known existence, but without some sort of exemplification, an entity epistemically will remain merely possible and not be understood as actually existing. A notion of 'existence' begins to emerge from these considerations: something exists if that entity exemplifies properties. Such a notion rules out the possibility that existence is a property that an entity can possess or fail to possess. It follows from this understanding that an entity actually exists as palm tree only if that thing exemplifies the properties of a palm tree.

Things that possibly exist are Hobbits, three dollar bills, lions, Superman, thoughts of

Superman, etc. Everything is this category can (a) be conceived of, (b) is free from logical

inconsistency, but unlike things that actually exist, things that possibly exist do not require the

exemplification of the entity's conceptual properties in this world. Entities that possibly exist

have an essence and may or may not actually exist in this world, depending if the essential

properties of that entity are instantiated as a substance in this world. Everything that actually

exists also possibly exists, but not everything that possibly exists actually exists in this world.

This means that some entity may possibly exist and actually exist, while other entities merely

possibly exist in this world and do not actually exist in this world, though they do exist in some

possible world. Much more on possible worlds as a modal vehicle will be addressed below.

The only test for possible existence is conceivability/logical consistency. If any entity

can truly, or deeply, be conceived, then that entity must be free from logical inconsistencies.

This means that a sharp distinction must be drawn when considering the notion of conceivability.

That distinction will center on *deep* conceivability and *prima facie* conceivability.[5] First, let us

address what is meant by logical. When considering logical inconsistences, 'logical' is to be

understood in the broad sense. For example, can we conceive of a man swimming across the

Atlantic Ocean? Someone might say, "No, that is impossible." But it is only impossible given

the width of the ocean, and what we know about human physiology. In that sense it seems

impossible given our understanding of this world, but in another sense it is not impossible.

Concerning a man swimming the Atlantic, Plantinga notes that regular humans simply lack the

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[5] Quite an extensive literature exists concerning different notions of conceivability. What is
    commonplace is the variety of distinctions that exist when considering conceivability.
    Prima facie versus *deep* conceivability represents a typically made distinction. Chalmers
    makes three distinctions: Prima facie vs. Ideal; Positive vs. Negative; and Primary vs.
    Secondary.

"physical equipment for this kind of feat. Unlike Superman, furthermore, the rest of us are incapable of leaping tall buildings in a single bound or (without auxiliary power of some kind) travelling faster than a speeding bullet. These things are impossible for us; but [are] not [impossible] in the broadly logical sense."[6]

Superman could easily swim the Atlantic. It is surely conceivable that a man swim the Atlantic, even if no actual men could do so. There is no contradiction in a man swimming the Atlantic. But there is contradiction in conceiving certain things, like metal paper towels. Someone might think that metal paper towels can be conceived. After all, we can understand the words being used, but metal and paper are not able to be the same thing. Other examples of truly conceivable things include mile tall books, shrink rays, dogs, three-headed dogs, the sun, etc. Some of the things on this list actually exist and others are merely possible. Dogs and the sun are possible and actual in virtue of truly being conceivable/logically consistent and in virtue of there being a substance that exemplifies the properties essential of 'dog' and 'the sun.' Mile tall books, shrink rays, and three-headed dogs are merely possible in virtue of truly being conceived, but are not actual because nothing exemplifies the properties of 'mile tall book,' 'shrink ray,' or 'three-headed dog.'

Entities which cannot exist are things that are incapable of being conceived. It is something of a misnomer to say that there are things that cannot exist. After all, about what are we speaking if such things cannot be? The ability to string certain words together, each with their own content produces this bizarre idea. The phrase 'metal paper towels' prompts thoughts of paper towels and metal or perhaps of a paper towel-like thing comprised of metal, but not of paper comprised of metal. Linguistic oddities notwithstanding, the tripartite metaphysical

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[6] Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity*. Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1974. P 2.

distinction seems uncontroversial: every entity either actually exists, merely possibly exists, or necessarily cannot exist. Everything in the last category fails to actually exist or possibly exist in virtue of being a logical contradiction. Logical inconsistency here is to be understood in the broad sense, and connotes the logically absurd.

Certain things have not been conceived yet, but this does not mean that those things cannot be conceived at some later date. Any yet to be conceived entity possibly exists, provided it is free from logical inconsistency, but would only actually exist in this world if the essential properties of that entity were instantiated in some substance. Logical inconceivability is a strong claim, and means that no one can now, nor can ever, conceive of the logically impossible. For instance, no one can conceive of a square triangle. No matter how hard someone tries, she will never successfully think of a three-sided, four-angled thing, nor a four-sided, three-angled thing. The reason is simple: the definitions of 'square' and 'triangle' rule out their compossibility. Necessarily, triangularity requires three sidedness, and vice versa. In this way, the concept of certain things restricts cleavage to certain other concepts of things. A person can think of a square next to a triangle, a square inside of a triangle, a triangle inside of a square, but never a square triangle.

This understanding of conceivability must be explained further as it is not the only way to understand the term 'conceivable'. The big distinction concerning conceivability is between *deep* conceivability and *prima facie* conceivability. *Prima facie* conceivability is the "at first glance" sort of conceivability. Surely all will grant that triangularity and rectangularity are not compossible, but couldn't someone claim that we *can* conceive of a four-sided triangle? Couldn't one know the necessary and sufficient conditions for such an entity, but after some consideration and investigation, determine that it turns out that such an entity is impossible? An

example like this helps flesh out the distinction clearly. Someone might claim that she can conceive of square triangle, but is such a conception really possible? Only if the type of conception invoked is *prima facie* conceivability. This sort of conceivability claims that an entity can be mentally perceived in at least some vague, nondescript manner. This sort of perception does not need to be anything like a pictorial image or even a fully fleshed out analysis of the essential properties of such an entity. In fact, the more ambiguous the perception, the more tightly one can cling to *prima facie* conceivability. *Deep* conceivability, on the other hand, seeks to provide a more robust perception of the entity. In this way, *deep* conceivability serves as a sort of check and balance to *prima facie* conceivability. If someone claims to conceive of any type of entity, that manner of conception is not defined. It is fair to assume that the person so conceiving is at least employing the *prima facie* sort of conceivability. But if the person is pressed a bit, in an effort to see if the entity conceived is possible rather than impossible, *prima facie* conceivability gives way either to a *deep* conceivability, or to inconceivability, and thus impossibility. If someone were to claim that a square triangle is conceivable, it is precisely the consideration and investigation that helped to show that such an entity is really impossible that helps to determine that the more accurate locus of 'conceivability' is *deep* conceivability. Suppose this scenario really played out. Sarah claims she can conceive of a square triangle. This claim is pressed and Sarah notes the essential properties of a square—a figure comprised of four right angles and four sides of equal length—and the essential properties of a triangle—a figure comprised of three angles totaling 180 degrees and of three sides. After some reflection, Sarah then concedes that such an entity as a square triangle is not really possible. Does this mean that Sarah really conceived of an impossible entity, or does it mean that Sarah thought at first glance that she conceived of such an entity, but upon further consideration and investigation

realized that she did not actually conceive of the entity in any meaningful sense?   If Sarah, knowing what she now knows was asked to conceive of a square triangle again, could she? It seems not. *Prima facie* conceivability goes away in some cases, and is overridden by *deep* conceivability in all cases. Someone able to *deeply* conceive a concept is still able to *prima facie* conceive that concept, but, on the other hand, if one cannot *deeply* conceive a concept because of logical inconsistency inherent to the concept, and such logical inconsistency is accepted by the person conceiving the concept, then *prima facie* conceivability dissolves for that person. *Deep* conceivability trumps *prima facie* conceivability. This being the case, it is more appropriate to invoke *deep* conceivability when considering the term 'conceivable'.

At the heart of the distinction between *prima facie* and *deep* conceivability is the question *Is conceivability a reliable guide to possibility?* It must be conceded that *prima facie* conceivability is not. Perhaps someone thinks that a square triangle is conceivable, but this sort of conceivability has very little bearing on the actual state of affairs. All someone has to do to demonstrate the unreliability of *prima facie* conceivability as a guide to possibility is find one example of something that is logically impossible that can be *prima facie* conceived. In fact, it is just this technique that is employed by those who seek to demonstrate that various forms of conceivability serve as poor guides to possibility.

Peter van Inwagen holds that many forms of conceivability have very little to do with possibility. When considering if it is conceivable that the moon is made of green cheese, van Inwagen notes that "any *serious* attempt to imagine the moon being made of green cheese…must, like the unimaginable object itself, soon collapse under its own weight."[7] Van Inwagen reasons that the person able to conceive of the moon being made of green cheese must

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[7] Van Inwagen, Peter. "Review of Swinburne's *the Coherence of Theism*," *The Philosophical Review*, 1979, p.672.

"have a very sluggish imagination".[8] To rightly conceive of this state of affairs would require conception of everything entailed by that state of affairs—a pasture of billions of cows, a way to preserve cheese in broiling heat and freezing cold for millions of years, a way to protect the cheese from the pulls of gravity, etc. To conceive of everything entailed by a particular state of affairs is truly daunting, and so van Inwagen concludes that it is not actually possible to conceive of the moon being made of green cheese. This means that whatever form of conceivability that produced such a state of affairs is not reliable as a guide to possibility. Something to note concerning this issue is that van Inwagen and I both allow a deeper form of conceivability to trump that initial conceivability. Rather than accept that *prima facie* conceivability is a poor guide to possibility, van Inwagen and I contend that one cannot *really* conceive of certain states of affairs because the natural intent of conceivability is a *deep* conceivability.

George Seddon, likewise, wonders if carnivorous rabbits are possible. Some people have surely conceived of such creatures at least on a *prima facie* level. But is that conception able to be held *deeply*? Seddon writes, "No, this is a theoretical absurdity…Rabbits have the dentition of a herbivore—they could not *eat* meat as they have no canines to tear it with. They have a herbivorous digestive system, and could not digest meat."[9] Again, either conceivability is a poor guide to possibility, or carnivorous rabbits are not conceivable. Seddon makes a good case that such creatures are not (*deeply*) conceivable, which means that *prima facie* conceivability is a poor guide to possibility. The difference between Seddon's and van Inwagen's account is explained nicely by Heimir Geirsson.

> The point of Seddon's argument is that sometimes we conclude too hastily that
> what is impossible is possible, and that we sometimes realize that what we
> thought to be possible when considered out of outside of a proper context turns

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[8] Ibid, 671.
[9] Seddon, George. "Logical Possibility," *Mind* (Octber 1972) p. 191.

out to be impossible when considered in the proper context. What we sometimes hastily conclude is possible turns out to involve a language shift when considered more carefully; i.e., in the scenario above we are no longer talking about rabbits, but rather some different kind of animal altogether. In this case Seddon concluded that carnivorous rabbits are not rabbits on the basis of a rather cursory examination of what it takes for an animal to be a meat eater, and how it would differ from a rabbit....van Inwagen is requiring significantly more than that. He is requiring that one be able to imagine all the relevant details when imagining a possible world in which, e.g, [the moon is made of green cheese].[10]

It seems clear that some things that can be conceived are not possible, but that the sort of conceivability that allows such scenarios is *prima facie* conceivability. If something is *prima facie* conceivable, but not *deeply* conceivable, then that thing is not really conceivable in a meaningful way. This shows that, indeed, *prima facie* conceivability is a poor guide to possibility.

Deep conceivability will fare much better as a guide to possibility than *prima facie* conceivability because *deep* conceivability places limits on what can rightly be said to be conceived. If *prima facie* conceivability allows for someone to really conceive of an entity that is logically impossible—one that cannot exist in any possible world—then all the worse for *prima facie* conceivability as a useful philosophical tool at all. *Prima facie* conceivability disappears if a line of inquiry lodged against the supposedly conceived entity demonstrates the logical inconsistency of the entity under consideration. Questions such as *Is such an entity really conceivable in light of the logical impossibilities inherent to the entity?* or *What if we think a bit deeper and seek to discover if the attributes necessary for such an entity are compossible?* or *Are you sure?* do the job nicely. If an entity is *deeply* conceivable, then it retains its *prima facie* conceivability. The commonsense understanding of 'conceivable', the, seems to be a *deep* conceivability.

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[10] Geirsson, Heimir. "Conceivability and Defeasible Modal Justification," *Philosophical Studies*. Vol.122 No. 3 (February 2005), p. 286.

But what constitutes '*deep*'? It cannot be an "all things considered" conceivability, for it is far too difficult to consider all things epistemic and metaphysical, yet it is more than an "at first glance" conceivability. *Deep* conceivability falls somewhere on the spectrum between these two extremes. The intuition that considering absolutely everything is too high a standard seems just as correct as the intuition that *prima facie* conceivability is too low a standard. Has anyone *prima facie* conceived a square triangle? Perhaps. But does such a conception have any weight to it at all? If a square triangle is necessarily impossible, has anyone *deeply* conceived of such an entity? Certainly not. This means that *deep* conceivability is a more reliable guide to possibility than *prima facie* conceivability. But is *deep* conceivability actually reliable as a guide to possibility in any meaningful way? I think so. If something is in principle conceivable, conceived by a rational agent, and free of logical inconsistency, then such an entity must exemplified on some possible world, even if it is not exemplified on this world. This means that if something is so conceived, then such an entity is possible. In this way, *deep* conceivability is a reliable guide to possibility. The *deep* sense of conceivability is the sort of conceivability assumed in this argument.

P1 assumes an understanding of existence that demands the exemplification of properties. Something actually exists, if that thing's essential properties are exemplified in some substance. The power of this metaphysical premise is that it seems to encompass totality. What else is there besides that which actually exists (either necessarily or contingently), that which merely possibly exists, and that which cannot exist? It seems that no additional category is required to account for any type of entity and so P1 seems to stand, given the *deep* understanding of 'conceivable'.

Consider P2: If an entity can be conceived, then that entity either actually exists, or merely possibly exists.

P2 is an explicit statement of that which was explained above. *Deep* conceivability serves a test of possibility. Possibility is a requisite of actuality. Take Pegasus, for example. The winged-horse of mythology is certainly conceivable. Stories, films, cartoons, etc. have all depicted Pegasus. The notion of a horse with wings is not illogical. There is no contradiction or absurdity that arises from combining the concept of horse with the concept of wings. If no logical contradiction emerges as a result of the combining of these concepts, and if a new concept emerges—'winged horse'—then Pegasus at least possibly exists. To determine if Pegasus actually exists, we would need to determine if there is anything that exemplifies the property of being a winged-horse. The concept alone will not confer actual existence to Pegasus. The conception of Pegasus is not Pegasus, it is a thought whose content is Pegasus. The thought is a thing that actually exists as long as something exemplifies the property 'thought of Pegasus.' All those reading this argument have derived thoughts of Pegasus, which means that the thought of Pegasus actually exists, but despite our best efforts to find the creature, Pegasus himself merely possibly exists.

This brings up the interesting notion of possible, but non-actual objects. The distinction between possible, actual entities and possible, non-actual entities is entirely dependent on an entity's exemplification. To be possible at all, an entity must be (a) in principle conceivable and be (b) free from logical inconsistency, as noted in the discussion of P1. The parameters (a) and (b) are consistent with *deep* conceivability. So if any entity can be *deeply* conceived, then that entity possibly exists. 'Possible' here means that any conceived entity exists on some possible world. A possible world is simply a state of affairs that comprises a total state of affairs. 'World' is not to be read as in any way restrictive to the planet Earth, but means the entirety of

reality. The actual world is a possible world. Anyway that things could be constitutes a possible world. So Pegasus, as a *deeply* conceived entity, possibly exists. This is to say that Pegasus is at least a possible, but non-actual entity in every possible world. Surely, there are worlds that restrict Pegasus' exemplification. Is this world such a world? No. Pegasus could exist in this world, but does not. Thus, Pegasus merely possibly exists in this world. Every entity that actually exists in this world also possibly exists in this world, but any entity that possibly exists in this world but fails to actually exist in this world, is an entity that merely possibly exists in this world. Such entities are possible, but non-real.

The purpose of P2 is set the stage for the elimination of the 'necessarily cannot exist' category as applying to God. Since this modal version of the Ontological Argument is a disjunctive syllogism, and since the aim of the argument is to establish the actual existence of God from the concept of God, all categories except 'actually exists' must be disproved. Within the 'actually exists' category something can either necessarily actually exist or contingently actually exist. This distinction will be discussed in detail when considering P3 and P5. Ontological Arguments contend that God necessarily actually exists, and for God to necessarily actually exist, God must be conceivable.

Consider P3: God can be conceived.

This may be the most controversial premise of the argument. It is certainly the premise that traditionally receives the most consideration when evaluating Ontological Arguments. Anselm, however, seems to think that this premise is completely obvious. In chapter 2 of *Proslogion*, Anselm writes about God

> 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.[11]

Anselm defines God as something than which nothing greater can be thought. The Anselmian understanding of this phrase includes omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, eternity, and necessity. After some evaluation, this will indeed be shown to be the proper understanding of Anselm's definition. But is it even possible to conceive of something than which nothing greater can be thought? Before addressing this question, let us back up just a bit. Is it even possible to conceive of God at all?

Certainly it is. Even before specifying the definition of God and before unpacking that definition, most people think of some concept or other upon hearing the word 'God.' Even the atheist understands that she has a concept of 'God' when she claims that God does not exist. But Anselm's definition is so powerful precisely because it does specify the fundamental nature of God—something than which nothing greater can be thought. If someone has a particular conception upon hearing the word 'God' and it turns out that something greater than the content of that conception can be thought, then that first conception is not really a concept of God, but a conception of something less. For instance, if someone hears the word 'God' and thinks of Zeus, she is not thinking about God, but about something less than God—about Zeus, the King of the gods of Mount Olympus. For surely something greater than Zeus can be thought. Zeus is a created being, Zeus is limited in power, and Zeus is limited in knowledge. Anselm's definition of God eliminates all sorts of demiurges and gods from being God. The test is simple: if

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[11] Anselm, P 87.

something greater than the initial conception that comes to mind upon hearing the world 'God' can be thought, then that initial conception is not of 'God,' but of something less.

Is it actually possible for someone to conceive of something than which nothing greater can be thought? Is it really possible to think of the best thing possible? I think so. In order to do so, however; it is necessary to establish the properties that make something great. Such great-making properties will enable Anselm's definition to be unpacked. Even a person with no religious conviction at all can think of what makes something great. The process can be initiated as a binary comparison as follows: who is greater, Superman or Lex Luthor? Whichever answer is given a reason must support it. Some will say that Superman is greater because he is stronger. Some will say that Lex Luthor is greater because he is smarter (which is actually false), but even if we cannot agree on who is smarter, it has still been established that power and knowledge are great-making properties. If Superman is greater because he is more powerful, would a being more powerful than Superman be greater than Superman? As it pertains to power, yes. Is it conceivable that something is more powerful than Superman? Yes, but is it conceivable that something is more powerful than the being more powerful than Superman? Yes. It seems we could go on like this *ad infinitum* except for the fact that nothing can be more powerful than something that is all-powerful. Being all-powerful is the most powerful than anything could be. If power is a great-making property, then the concept of something than which nothing greater can be thought must include the property of being all-powerful, i.e. omnipotent. In the same way, that concept must include the properties of omniscience and omnibenevolence.

The binary comparison may again serve as a starting point. Who is smarter, Alvin Plantinga or Jimmy Fallon? Plantinga, obviously, though not as funny perhaps. If Plantinga is greater than Fallon because he is more knowledgeable, is it possible to conceive of a being that is

smarter than Plantinga? Yes, but is conceivable that something is more knowledgeable than the being more knowledgeable than Plantinga? Yes, but once again the maximum peak intrinsic cap of knowledge is being all-knowing. Nothing can be more knowing than all-knowing, so the greatest conceivable being, must be omniscient.

Omnibenevolence follows the very same pattern, except that some people claim that being good is not a great making property. Suppose someone claims that it is only a religious conviction that leads one to posit that God is loving. Perhaps an omnipotent, omniscient, and evil being is just a great an omnipotent, omniscient, and good being. This line of thought fails when one considers the nature of good and evil. Evil is a privation of good. For anything to be deemed evil, a conception of good must already exist, against which evil is judged to be evil. So good is logically prior to evil, which means that an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent being is greater than one equal to it in power and knowledge, but who is evil.

The greatest conceivable being must also be eternal, for if it were not then that being would have come into being. But everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence, and is therefore causally dependent on something else for its existence, which is not as great as a being that has always been and is not causally dependent on anything—eternal.

Another great-making property in Anselm's understanding of God is necessary existence. The Greatest Conceivable Being will then be one that is omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, eternal, and necessary. This final property will be explained more fully when considering P6. For now, it is enough to ask if something that is omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and eternal can be *deeply* conceived. It seems that such a being can be so conceived. There is nothing in these properties that prevents their compossibility. This claim is

denied, however, by Eric Funkhouser.[12] Funkhouser contends that various "well-known

problems arise on the assumption that God is a perfect being. One of these problems concerns an

apparent conflict between two properties that theists commonly attribute to God—

[omnibenevolence] and omnipotence."[13] Funkhouser claims that God's omnibenevolence

prevents his omnipotence on the grounds that omnibenevolence restricts what God can do, but he

further claims that omnipotence means that God can do anything that can be done in some

restricted sense (even God cannot do the logically impossible). But if God, in virtue of his

omnibenevolence, cannot stab an innocent child, but another being can, then there are things that

other beings can do that God cannot. How can God be said to be omnipotent in light of this?

An assumption that Funkhouser makes when considering the perfections of the Greatest

Conceivable Being is that "there are at least two components to being a perfection. First, a

perfection is an intrinsically desirable or valuable type of property. Second, a perfection is the

maximum possible value (perhaps infinite value) of that property."[14] With this assumption I

agree, but also add a third component—that a perfection is a property essential to the Greatest

Conceivable Being. Funkhouser uses the conceivability test in an attempt to demonstrate the

contradictory nature of omnibenevolence and omnipotence. He thinks that "there is a possible

being with the power to bring about all the states of affairs that God can bring about *and then*

some (e.g. morally bad states of affairs)."[15] But is such a being really conceivable? Only in the

prima facie sense. It turns out that such a being is not *deeply* possible. The Greatest

Conceivable Being, the being with all the great-making properties, is by definition, the most

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[12] Funkhouser, Eric. "On Privileging God's Moral Goodness" *Faith and Philosophy*. Vol 23.
        2006.
[13] Ibid, 410.
[14] Ibid, 411.
[15] Ibid.

powerful being at every possible world, which means that there are no worlds at which there is a being with power to bring about all the states of affairs that it can, and then some. So there is no such being and Funkhouser's conception is faulty. Tom Senor, in his reply to Funkhouser, "God's Goodness Needs No Privilege", states that "it might be that we can *conceive* of a being that can do everything God can plus various immoral acts, but this is just an instance of conceivability being a poor guide to possibility."[16] At first blush, or *prima facie*, someone might think it possible to conceive of a being that can do everything that God can do, and then some, but after careful and *deep* consideration, it turns out this this not the case. Why? It is a matter of the analytic concept of the *Greatest Conceivable Being*. Just as a triangle essentially has three sides, the GCB essentially has omnipotence, or power to the "maximum possible value." So it cannot be that the GCB exist at some possible world, *and* another being possess the maximum possible value of power and have more power to boot. The GCB possesses the maximum possible value of power. If another being had *more* power, then the GCB is not really the GCB (which it seems Funkhouser would conclude if God is thought to be the GCB—God, it turns out, is not the GCB), but the other being is actually the GCB.[17] Think about it in terms of another being, call it F, existing. F can do everything that God can do and more. In this case, F, not God, possesses true omnipotence, preventing God from being the GCB.

Could someone employ the same strategy Funkhouser does and say that 'there is a possible being with the power to bring about all the states of affairs that F can bring about and then some'? Someone can surely say this, but it does not make it possible. It seems it could be at least as *prima facie* conceivable as a square triangle, but is it *deeply* conceivable? Track the

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[16] Senor, Tom. "God's Goodness Needs No Privilege: A Reply To Funkhouser" *Faith and Philosophy*. Vol 23. P 425.

[17] Funkhouser seems to think that there is just one great-making property—goodness. Having power, then, is only great if it is the power to do good.

progression: God was thought to be omnipotent. F, it turns out, can bring about more states of affairs than God in virtue of being able to do all that God can do, plus immoral acts. It is now thought that F is omnipotent. But someone might say that she can (*prima facie*) conceive of a being, K, that can do all that F can do, and then some. But is K really even *deeply* conceivable? It certainly seems the K is at least *prima facie* conceivable, but it was earlier established that *prima facie* conceivability is a poor guide to possibility. What other states of affairs are there besides all the states of affairs that God can bring about and the additional states of affairs that F can bring about? The problem is this: Either F has true omnipotence and there are no other states of affairs for K to bring about that F cannot, so F's claim to omnipotence is safe, or K *is* able to bring about more states of affairs than F merely because some proponent of K claims that this is conceivable. Saying that one conceives of K being able to bring about more states of affairs than F is either not actually *deeply* conceivable or it is just an instance of *prima facie* conceivability being a poor guide to possibility. The defender of F will surely say that K bringing about more states of affairs is not really *deeply* conceivable. The reason is because F supposedly accounts for the totality of possible states of affairs. F has omnipotence, which is the possession of power to the maximum possible value. There is nothing left for K to bring about that F cannot. So it turns out that K bringing about more states of affairs than F is not really conceivable after all, preserving *deep* conceivability's being a reliable guide to possibility, and rendering K, as described, inconceivable.

The reason that F is not really *deeply* conceivable is the same reason that K is not really *deeply* conceivable. God has omnipotence, which is the possession of power to the maximum possible value. There is nothing left for F to bring that God cannot. This just brings us back to Funkhouser's point—aren't there acts that God cannot do (namely immoral acts) that F can do?

Funkhouser invites us to consider the act of stabbing an innocent child for no reason. Anyone

who accepts God's omnibenevolence will agree that God would not do such a thing and even

more, that God cannot do such a thing. Senor points out that

> Funkhouser wants to go from "God cannot do X but others can" to "God is not
> omnipotent." Now I grant that such an inference is tempting; it is not for nothing
> that accounts of omnipotence are often formulated in terms of the ability to
> perform actions. Yet I think such accounts are wrong and such an inference is to
> be resisted. We can learn something about the nature of power and its relation to
> intentional action by seeing why power limitations don't follow from ability
> limitations.[18]

> Senor continues, "Accounts of omnipotence in particular, and of power in general, in

terms of what *states of affairs a being can bring about* are misleading in at least one important

way." Suppose that a person can perform the act of lifting a stone weighing 100 pounds. This

means that there is a world at which this person is much as she is now where she performs the act

of lifting a stone weighing 100 pounds. In order for this to be the case, this person must have the

capacity to lift the stone and she must have the all-things-considered will to lift it. Senor

suggests that we suppose further that this person had a terrible experience with hot-pink objects

as a child that left her with an uncontrollable aversion to hot-pink things. She simply cannot

make herself knowingly touch them. She regularly lifts grey stones weighing 100 pounds. Can

she lift a hot-pink stone weighing 100 pounds? Senor notes that it

> seems true to say that you can't lift an object that you can't touch, and if [she]
> literally can't knowingly touch any hot-pink object, then [she] can't knowingly
> touch the stone in question, and so [she] can't perform the act of lifting it.
> Although we might be tempted to think there is a paradox here ([she] both can
> and cannot lift hot-pink stones), this conflict is resolvable using the distinctions
> above.[19]

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[18] Ibid, 427.
[19] Ibid, 429.

A person can lift a stone only if there is a world in which she is fundamentally like she is now in which she lifts the stone. But given her traumatic aversion to hot-pink things, there is no world in which she is fundamentally like she is in the actual world and she lifts the hot-pink stone. So she cannot lift it. She can only lift a stone if she has the capacity to lift stones of that weight and the will to lift that particular stone. So her inability to lift the stone does not entail that she lacks the capacity for lifting stones of that size or even for lifting *that* stone since it is of a weight that she normally lifts. This person' inability to lift the hot-pink stone is a failure of will, not capacity.

In the same way, God's inability to stab the innocent child for no reason is not a lacking of the capacity, but a lacking of the will to perform that act. Senor explains that "'God cannot do *X*' fails to entail that 'God lacks the power to do *X*.' Hence we should fail to conclude that there is a conflict between omnipotence and [omnibenevolence]."[20]

This means that God actually does have omnipotence, which is the possession of power to the maximum possible value. While it is the case that F can perform a range of actions larger than the range of actions that God can perform, the range of actions that some entity can perform is not the same thing as the power that this entity has. Omnipotence concerns the (unlimited) power an entity possesses. Under Funkhouser's scenario, God has all the power that F has, but because God also has omnibenevolence, he cannot will to perform certain acts that F can will to perform. God has the power to bring about all possible states of affairs; he just lacks the will to bring about certain states of affairs while other beings have the will and power to bring them about. So it turns out that it is not really *deeply* conceivable that there is possible being with the power to bring about all the states of affairs that God can bring about *and then some*, since God

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[20] Ibid, 430.

already has the power to bring every state of affair about, even if he lacks the will to bring them about, which is a perfection in itself.

Since, after some thorough consideration and investigation, the great-making properties of omniscience and omnibenevolence turn out to be compossible, it seems we are well on our way to a *deep* conception of God in line with the Anselmian definition. God, in the Anselmian tradition is in principle conceivable, but is this understanding of God free from logical contradiction? But just because omnipotence and omnibenevolence are compossible, does that mean the other attributes are logically consistent as well? Are they all compossible? Omniscience does not seem to be a particularly difficult fit with omnipotence and omnibenevolence. Perhaps one could argue that knowing all facts is inconsistent with being all powerful. How can God know what it is like to stab an innocent child for no reason if he lacks the will to do so? This is just another example of the logical restraints of some attribute. Even though God is omnipotent, even he cannot create a square triangle or cease to be God. God cannot know everything, but he can know everything that can be known. Certainly God cannot know what it is like to bring about certain states of affairs, nor can he know what it is like not to exist, but these things are unknowable given his other attributes, in just the same way that God can possess the power to bring about certain states yet lacks the will perform them.

Eternity is an even easier fit. If God were not eternal, then he would have come into being and everything that begins to exist has a cause. If God is caused by something, then the entity that brought God into being is greater than God himself. Even though space will not allow for a thorough treatment of the interaction of every Anselmian attribute, it seems that a *deep* conception of God can be had and held in a logically consistent fashion. The most difficult attribute to assess is necessary existence. It will be covered in detail below. The worry that the

specification of the Anselmian attributes hurts God's conceivability is not warranted. God is certainly *prima facie* conceivable, and it is the claim of this argument that God is also *deeply* conceivable. A major objection to the compossibility of God's attributes has been addressed, demonstrating that God can be *deeply* conceived. Those objecting to this can attempt to draw out the logical inconsistency of other combinations of God's attributes in efforts to deny that God can really be *deeply* conceived, but if those efforts are turned back, then the *deep* conception of God is strengthened all the more.

Consider C1: Therefore, God either actually exists, or merely possibly exists.

This first conclusion follows validly given the truth of P1-P3. P1 established the three categories to which anything could belong. Since the goal of the argument is to show that God belongs to the 'actually exists' category, the other categories must be eliminated as options for which God to belong. P2 claims that if something is (*deeply*) conceivable, then that entity cannot belong to the 'necessarily cannot exist' category, and hence must belong to either the 'actually exists' category or the 'merely possibly exists' category. P3 claims that God can be (*deeply*) conceived and so using *modus ponens*, C1 follows from P2 and P3.

C1 demonstrates that it is not the case that God cannot exist. While someone might utter the words "God cannot exist" she means this only in the epistemic sense. She does not mean that God cannot exist; she means that given what she knows, it is not rational to believe that God actually exists. While this hyperbole is common, it is not philosophically precise. Of course, God can at least possibly exist, so long as God can be *deeply* conceived and so long as *deep* conceivability confers at least possible existence. At this point of the argument it might be the case that God in fact does not exist, but it is not the case that God cannot exist.

Consider P4: Something is necessary if and only if it is totally non-contingent, or if it is inconceivable.

P4 introduces a series of new terms into the argument and equates necessity with either of two options. P4 is a biconditional statement, meaning that it can be understood as two conditional statements:

If something is necessary, then it is totally non-contingent or it is inconceivable.

If something is totally non-contingent or it is inconceivable, then it is necessary.

While the implications of necessity will be explained when considering P5, P4 importantly links the concept of necessity with the concept of being totally non-contingent, or with the concept of being inconceivable. Something is totally non-contingent, and thus necessarily exists, (a) if that entity relies on nothing for its existence and (b) if that entity cannot fail to exist. Nearly every conceivable entity is contingent. Humans contingently rely upon air, water, food, shelter, the existence of our parents, etc. for our existence. If those conditions were not in place, then we would not exist. There would be nothing that exemplifies the essential properties inherent to me if my parents did not exist. My existence would not be possible without air, water, food, and shelter. But more is needed to make an entity necessary than merely not relying on any other thing to exist. To be necessary an entity also needs to be such that it actually exists in every possible world. Numbers seem to be necessary in this totally non-contingent way. Numbers do not rely on any other thing for their existence and numbers seem to actually exist in all possible worlds. More on this the discussion of P5.

Something is inconceivable, and thus necessarily cannot exist, if that thing simply cannot be thought about because it is logically contradictory, and hence absurd. All things that are logically contradictory are *deeply* inconceivable. The notion of necessity is an 'all the way' notion. Anything that necessarily exists is all the way in the 'actually exists' category. Anything

that necessarily cannot exist is all the way in the 'necessarily cannot exist' category. This means that any necessary thing cannot be merely possible. If it is impossible, it necessarily cannot exist; if it is totally non-contingent, then it necessarily actually exists.

Consider P5: If something is necessary, then that entity either necessarily actually exists (if it is totally non-contingent), or is impossible and thus necessarily cannot exist (if it is inconceivable).

P5 is a crucial premise because it importantly restricts the concept of necessity to the categories 'actually exists' and 'cannot exist.' This move eliminates the category 'merely possibly exists' as an option for any entity that is necessary. More than that, P5 also specifies to which category a necessary entity belongs, depending on which way that entity derives its necessity. Remember that there are two ways for an entity to be necessary—it must be totally-non-contingent or it must be *deeply* inconceivable. If something is totally non-contingent, then that entity necessarily belongs to the category 'actually exists.' If something is inconceivable, then that entity necessarily belongs to the category 'cannot exist.'

Inconceivability restricts even the possibility of existing. Again, it is important to tie inconceivability to ontology and not to epistemology. Inconceivability does not obtain when something is not thought of, but inconceivability obtains only if that entity cannot be thought of because of logical inconsistency. Some things never yet conceived may be conceived later. Just because a thing has not been conceived yet does not mean that it never will be conceived. If something is not even possibly *deeply* conceivable, then that thing cannot exist. Being totally non-contingent is entirely different from being inconceivable. Total non-contingency is the property of being completely unrestricted. Whereas the inconceivable cannot be thought of in any world, the totally non-contingent cannot be ruled out by any world. This is an important

stipulation. Something is totally non-contingent, and thus necessarily existent if it actually exists in all possible worlds. Some entity that relies on no other thing for its existence may just happen to exist in some worlds and not in others. Something of this sort is non-contingent, but is not totally non-contingent. This is because its existence is contingent upon the consideration of the world in which it happens to reside.

What is meant by the idea of actually existing in all possible worlds? For some entity to actually exist in all possible worlds the following requirements must be met: (i) that entity's existence cannot be ruled out by any possible world's conditions and (ii) it is impossible that that entity not exist in a given world. The first condition, (i), highlights the unique aspects of necessary things and (ii), along with the metaphysical principle that whatever is impossible is invariant across possible worlds, is enough to demonstrate that a thing actually exists in all possible worlds. Numbers are not physical, so they can exist in both physical worlds and worlds that preclude physical objects, such as world with infinite density or totally incorporeal worlds. Numbers rely on no other thing for their existence and it is impossible that numbers fail to exist in the actual world. Their non-existence is logically impossible in the actual world, for numbers are tied to multiplicity and even to a singularity, and whatever is logically impossible is invariant across possible worlds. Therefore, numbers necessarily exist.

Superman, unlike numbers, while nearly invulnerable cannot exist in a world of nothing but Kryponite. An island cannot exist in a world of infinite density. The greatest possible lion, because physical, cannot exist in an exclusively immaterial world. These examples are given to highlight the difference between being non-contingent and being totally non-contingent. A non-contingent entity is one that relies on nothing for its existence, but a totally non-contingent entity is one that relies on nothing for its existence and that cannot fail to exist. It is possible to

conceive of the greatest possible lion, even one that is uncaused and thus relies on nothing for its existence, but the concept of 'lion' requires the possibility of being physical, but nothing can possibly be physical in an exclusively immaterial world. Hence, the greatest possible lion, while able to exist in many possible worlds, is not able to exist in every possible world. The properties of some possible worlds restrict even the greatest lion from actually existing in that world, even if it is non-contingent in the worlds in which it happens to exist. This lands the greatest possible lion firmly in the 'merely possibly exists' category since it can *deeply* be conceived, is non-contingent, but does not exist in every possible world. For something to be totally non-contingent that thing must be able to exist in all possible worlds, and it must actually exist in all possible worlds. Clearly, if something cannot exist in all possible worlds it is not a candidate for being totally non-contingent, and therefore cannot be necessarily existent.

Now someone might argue that just because something is not restricted by some possible world, it does not follow that that thing actually exists in every possible world. "After all," she might argue, "isn't it possible for me to conceive of a possible world without God or without numbers?" Is it possible to conceive of a world without God or without numbers? It certainly seems like it if employing *prima facie* conceivability. An atheist can think of a world, maybe even think it is the actual world, in which God does not exist. But after consideration and investigation, it becomes clear that such a world in which God just happens not to exist is not a world in which God is restricted from existing. There is no reason that God does not exist in that world, other than the fact that this has been stipulated by the one conceiving it.

Why should a person have to give account for why God does not exist in the world of their conception? The reason is that this argument claims that God is a necessary being. Positing a world in which God just happens not to exist, is to assume that God is not necessary.

If God is not necessary is it because God is *deeply* inconceivable or is it because God is less than totally non-contingent, and while not dependent on anything for his existence in the worlds in which he does exist, the world now being conceived is one such world in which he does not exist? If it is because God is *deeply* inconceivable, then God is impossible on the grounds of internal logical inconsistency. If this is the case, some explanation is needed to demonstrate that God can only be *prima facie* conceived. If God is not necessary, not because he cannot be *deeply* conceived, but because he does not exist in some possible worlds, then an explanation is needed to demonstrate why the world now being conceived is a world in which God does not exist. There must be some factor that prevents God from existing in that world, or else it is just an assumption that God is not necessary. But that assumption is dashed when it is shown that God is able to be *deeply* conceived, and thus that God is possible, and furthermore, that God exists in some possible world, and since God is non-contingent, he must exist in the worlds in which happens to exist, and thus God's non-existence is (logically) impossible in that world, and lastly, that whatever is (logically) impossible is invariant across possible worlds, then it is the case that God's non-existence is impossible in every world, so God (as necessary) exists even in the world now being conceived in which it was posited that God just happens not to exist. Such a world in which God just happens not to exist is not *deeply* conceivable after all. That is, unless, of course, the person conceiving of that world can give an account for why God cannot exist there. This means that mere stipulation will not do to restrict God from existing in some world, but there must be some sufficient reason for a potentially necessary entity's non-existence.

This seems to fly in the face of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, which states that there must be an explanation for every positive fact—why something exists. It is often taken as

obvious that negative facts do not need to be explained. It would seem rather odd to have to give

an account for why there is no pink elephant in the room. One would have to spend all her time

enumerating the reasons why all manner of entity is not present. It is obvious that most negative

facts do not need to be explained, but some apparently negative facts must be explained. One

such case would be if someone were attempting to conceive of a world that did not contain some

entity. If one's goal is to conceive of a world without some entity, then the description of that

world must include a rationale for why the entity in question does not exist in that world. Far

from being a traditional negative fact, this rationale is actually a positive fact. If one conceives

of a world without some entity, then an important aspect of the world so conceived is why the

world does not contain that entity.

Deep consideration of any entity's non-existence requires sufficient explanation.

Consider my non-existence. It is not enough to ask that someone consider a world in which I

just happen not to exist. There is a positive reason or fact that explains why I do not exist in that

world. Perhaps the world conceived is entirely immaterial. Perhaps the world conceived is of

infinite density. Perhaps the world conceived fails to contain my parents. As it pertains to this

argument, since God is claimed to be a necessary being, and someone is attempting disprove that

claim, she can contend that God is impossible because of logical inconsistency, or she can claim

that God fails to exist at some world. She begins to conceive of a world in which God just

happens not to exist. But since this Ontological argument claims that God is necessary, and

since the point of her thought experiment is designed to demonstrate that God is not necessary, a

positive reason for his non-existence *is* required.

To argue that someone can think of a world in which God just happens not to exist, is to

assume that God is not necessary. This argument does not assume that he is necessary; it seeks

to demonstrate that God is necessary. To argue that someone can think of a world in which God just happens not to exist is to confuse epistemological considerations for ontological considerations. In that world, it may be the case that God is thought not to exist, but God actually does exist. The person who thinks she is thinking of a world in which God does not exist has not thought of a world that ontologically restricts God at all. Even though she may claim that she has thought of a godless world, she has only conjured a *prima facie* conception, much like the initial *prima facie* conception of a square triangle. Has she really conceived of a world that fails to contain God? Any amount of consideration and investigation will reveal that she has only thought of a world in which God is not known to exist. The only way that such epistemological thoughts become ontological certainties, is if God is not able to exist in that world. This means that the concept of God would have to be logically inconsistent or that the nature of God would somehow be restricted by the properties of that world. So what are the positive properties of that world that prevent God from existing in it? The concept of God is not inconsistent and it is possible to conceive of God necessarily existing in all worlds in which he actually exists. But then in those worlds, his non-existence is impossible and whatever is impossible is invariant across possible worlds, so no world can be conceived that restricts God from existing in that world.

Can the same line of reasoning be employed by someone attempting to disprove God's necessary existence? No. Consider the following argument. Someone says that she can conceive of a world in which God just happens not to exist. In that world, then, God is not necessary on the grounds that he does not exist in all possible worlds. He possibly exists in other worlds, but he is not necessary in the world now being conceived. Whatever is impossible is invariant across possible worlds, so God is not necessary in any world, even though he is non-

contingent in the worlds in which he does exist. This is not the ultimate conclusion to this counter-argument. The ultimate conclusion is that since God is not necessary, the claim of my Ontological argument contending God to be necessary is wrong. In order for this line of reasoning to succeed, there must be an explanation for the positive fact that some property prevents God from existing in the world now being conceived. One does not need to explain why God just happens not to exist in some world if the purpose for considering that world is other than to conceive of a world in which God does not exist. When someone is specifically attempting to conceive of a world in which God does not exist, however; and the entire purpose of the conception is to deny the necessary existence of God, sufficient reason must be given to explain why God does not exist in that world.

What would such a world look like? If that world were entirely immaterial God could still exist in it since God is immaterial. If that world were comprised of infinite density God could still exist in it since God is immaterial and omnipotent. No physical property can restrict God. No immaterial property can restrict God.

The best that someone denying God's necessary existence can do is posit a world, not that restricts God from existing there, but one in which God just happens not to exist. Under such a scenario, God would exist in some worlds but not in others. This means that God would necessarily exist in no worlds, for to necessarily exist, God would have to exist in all possible worlds. But positing a world in which God just happens not to exist, is still not to conceive of a world that restricts God's existence. It is only to conceive of a world that is thought not to contain God.

Consider numbers once more. Numbers, like God, are claimed to be necessary entities. Is it possible to conceive of a world without numbers? Some might think so. But even if

someone posits a world in which numbers fail to exist, this world can only be *prima facie* conceived. In fact, the world would have to be a null world, which is not really a world at all. For if this world contained anything at all, then numbers would exist there. Even a world comprised of only two giant iron spheres is a world with numbers—'one' and 'two' are exemplified. 'One' and 'two' could be added together and therefore 'three' and other immaterial numbers do in fact exist in such a world. Even a world comprised of a singularity contains numbers—'all is one'. Numbers are so basic to reality that to attempt to conceive of a world without numbers is to conceive of a world that necessarily contains numbers. Only a null world is free of numbers. Is it possible to *deeply* conceive of a null world? No, for a null world is not a world at all. It is a lack of instantiation. If no properties are instantiated and this null world is 'nothingness', then in what way is this a world at all? To conceive of it is actually not to conceive of anything, so what exactly is being conceived? Not a world, at least.

God, likewise, can be thought not to exist in some conceivable world, but merely positing his non-existence is not to posit his membership in the category 'cannot exist' in that world or any other possible world. To say that all that is needed to deny my argument is that God does not exist in some world, not that he cannot exist there is to assume that God is not necessary. Such an assumption must include a positive fact for the world's property that prevents a supposedly necessary entity form existing in it. Mere stipulation is not sufficient to restrict God's existence from any possible world because it only operates on a *prima facie* level. Suppose someone thinks that she has conceived of a world that does not contain God. Such a world can be just like the actual world, or like any other possible world, but any such world will not restrict God from existing there. God may very well exist in that world in a manner not yet known by any inhabitants of that world or by the one conceiving of that world. Is this claim,

conversely, mere stipulation on behalf of God? No, because there must be a reason why God, or any other entity fails to exist in that world. Again, God's supposed non-existence in such a world is an epistemological, not an ontological issue. The only way that God could fail to exist in some world is if God is inconceivable, which is clearly not the case since she is conceiving of God and attempting to conceive of his absence. If God is contingent, then God could exist in some worlds and not in others. But it is the contention of this argument that God is non-contingent, and totally so—necessary.

What if someone pursues the argument that God does not exist in a world in which nothing at all exists, a null world again? This suggestion cannot succeed, for a world in which nothing at all exists is not even a world or state of affairs. The concept of a null world can only be *prima facie* conceived. It cannot be *deeply* conceived. Could there be a world in which nothing exists? If nothing exists at all, then not even the world itself exists, for the world is a state of affairs, but if there are no states of affairs, then one is not conceiving of anything. Existence is the exemplification of properties. If no properties are exemplified, then nothing exists. If one can conceive of a state of affairs—a world—that exemplifies no properties whatever, then one is conceiving nothing, not a state of affairs. A state of affairs is how something is. A 'null world' is state of affairs that has the property of containing no properties. But of course, 'containing no properties' is not property at all because it adds nothing to the concept in question. Since the concept in question is null—nothing, the addition of properties destroys the concept 'null'. Null is basic, it is nothingness. It is a logical absurdity to maintain the concept 'null' when combined with the concept 'world'—a state of affairs. So a null world is not a world at all, it is nothingness. It is inconceivable to *deeply* think of a world in which

nothing at all exists. One would be thinking of nothing, not a world. So it will not do to posit a null world as a world in which God does not exist.

Something that is totally non-contingent is something that is not restricted by any possible world and that exists in every possible world. Remember, that restricted here means that something prevents the entity's properties from being exemplified. This claim has been shown to be rather uncontroversial, but some controversy arises by claiming that if something possibly exists at every world, then that entity necessarily exists at every world. Such a claim is needed for this version of the Ontological Argument to succeed. At first it seems that some sort of word play or trickery must be invoked to establish such a claim, which is a common critique of Ontological Arguments in general. After deeper consideration, however, it seems obvious that this must be so. After all, if something exists at every possible world, then that entity is restricted by no world. If something is restricted by no world, then that entity is non-contingent. If that entity is non-contingent and actually exists in some world, then that entity cannot fail to exist in that world. If something cannot fail to exist in that world, then that entity's non-existence is logically impossible in that world. If that entity's non-existence is logically impossible in that world, then, because what is logically impossible is invariant across possible worlds, that entity must exist at all possible worlds. If something must exist at all possible worlds, then that entity is totally non-contingent. If something is totally non-contingent, then that entity is necessary. But if something is necessary, then that entity either necessarily cannot exist or necessarily actually exists. If something possibly exists at every world, then that entity is not impossible, so it must necessarily actually exists.

For the first time in the argument (though not for the first time in the explanation of the argument) a premise makes use of the modal operator 'necessarily.' Modal versions of the

Ontological Argument often make use of modal operators like 'necessary,' 'must,' 'possible,' 'impossible,' 'cannot,' etc., and hence are open to analysis from modal logic. Such analysis may strengthen or critique the argument, but such analysis is importantly non-theological. P5 relies on an axiom of modal logic known as '5 Necessitation'. If the axiom is true, then this vital premise is likely true as well.

Modal logic narrowly construed is the study of principles of reasoning involving necessity and possibility. The language of modal logic is obtained by adding the operators '□' and '◊' for necessity and possibility to the language of predicate logic. Necessity and possibility can be expressed by the other operator through the proper use of negation: $\Box A \leftrightarrow \neg \Diamond \neg A$ (read, "necessarily, A if and only if it is not the case that possibly it is not the case that A") and $\Diamond A \leftrightarrow \neg \Box \neg A$ (read, "possibly A if and only if it is not the case that necessarily it is not the case that A"). The concepts of necessity and possibility are not equivalent, of course, but can be expressed in virtue of these new operators other along with the appropriate negations.

Modal logic more broadly is a set of formulas expressed in this language that contains these two biconditionals and also contains all the theorems of predicate logic, that is closed under modus ponens (i.e. if it contains A and A→B, it also contains B), and that is closed under substitution (i.e., if it contains A then it also contains any substitution instance of A). But does modal logic adequately capture the metaphysical meaning of necessity and possibility? Not unless it also encompasses these additional axioms:

K: $\Box (A \rightarrow B) \rightarrow (\Box A \rightarrow \Box B)$

T: $\Box A \rightarrow A$

5: • $\Diamond A \rightarrow \Box \Diamond A$

5 Necessitation: $A / \Box A$ (If A is a theorem of any system invoking 5 N, then $\Box A$ is also a theorem)

Not all modal logical systems include of these axioms, but by adding all of these axioms and the above □ and ◊ biconditionals to standard predicate logic, the most important modal logical system, S5 modal logic, emerges. Of all the modal systems, S5 gets closest to both ordinary and philosophical uses of modal expressions and is thus is in the best position to analyze the Ontological Argument.

The ability to capture both philosophical and ordinary uses of modal expressions allows S5 easily to accommodate the language of possible worlds. When considering models of possible worlds, each model specifies a set of possible worlds and assigns truth values to propositions relative to these worlds. Truth values of given propositions at a world, say world *W,* depend in the usual way on the truth values of their modal operators. □A is true at *W* if A is true at all worlds of the model; ◊A is true at *W* if A is true at some world within the model. S5 comprises the formulas true in all such models.

The most important philosophical question about S5 is whether it captures the inferences and truths it was intended to capture. This depends on the kind of necessity that □ is supposed to represent—*de re* necessity or *de dicto* necessity. An assertion of *de dicto* modal necessity predicates the modal property of necessary truth of another dictum, or proposition. For example, the following *de dicto* modal assertion "Necessarily, nine is composite" predicates the modal property of necessary truth of the dictum "Nine is composite". *De dicto* necessity refers to necessity in the way we speak of things.

An assertion of *de re* modal necessity predicates of an object the necessary possession of a property. For example, a triangle has the property of being three-sided essentially. All triangles necessarily and essentially possess the property of being three-sided. Under no circumstances can a triangle lack the property in question because the property is necessary of

the object, hence *de re* necessity.   Necessity in the *de re* sense is broadly logical, or concerns

metaphysical necessity, and includes those inferences true in virtue of logical form (the logical

truths), those true in virtue of meaning (the analytic truths), and those true in virtue of the basic

nature of things. *De re* necessity contains truths of mathematics, the proposition that water is

H2O, the proposition that Albert Einstein came from the egg and sperm that he did in fact come

from. Such *de re* necessities are represented in the following expressions: "□ 1+1=2"; "□ water

is H2O"; "□ Einstein came from the egg and sperm that he did in fact come from". In each of

these instances, the necessity involved is attached to the objects (1, water, Einstein), not the

phrase. *De dicto* necessity is attached to the phrase, not the objects of the phrase.

All of this is of crucial importance to the Ontological argument. The claim of the

argument is that God necessarily exists. This claim is a *de re* claim, for the object in question,

God, is said to have necessary existence as an essential property—i.e. one that God could not do

without. In this way, the property of necessary existence is as basic to God as the property of

being three-sided is to a triangle. An objection to many versions of the Ontological argument

shifts the *de re* necessity of God to a *de dicto* claim by assigning necessity to the phrase "God

exists" which is altogether different from claiming that God necessarily exists essentially. This

argument makes good use of another famous critique of Ontological arguments—that existence

is not a predicate—and puts God as the subject of a conditional phrase 'If God exists, then God

is necessary' where the necessity is *de dicto* in nature. This critique will be addressed later.

For now, let us return to the consideration of metaphysical necessity. Plantinga observes

that most philosophers have a concept of impossibility readily at hand, but concerning a

definition or description of necessity, Plantinga notes that "we must give example and hope for

the best."[21] Metaphysical necessity is the same as broad logical necessity. "This sense of

necessity is wider than that captured in first order logic. On the other hand, it is narrower than

that of *causal* or *natural* necessity."[22] As it pertains to this version of the Ontological argument,

metaphysical necessity refers to what must be or what must not be. If something is (*de re*)

necessary, then that thing (*de re*) necessarily exists if it is totally non-contingent or that thing (*de*

re) necessarily cannot exist if it is impossible.

Consider P6: God is totally non-contingent.

       This premise claims that God is an appropriate antecedent for the second conditional

statement that arises after splitting the biconditional

> P4: Something is necessary if and only if that entity is totally non-contingent, or if it is
>   inconceivable.

> into (1) If something is necessary, then it is totally non-contingent or it is inconceivable.

> and (2) If something is totally non-contingent or it is inconceivable, then it is necessary.

       Given the truth of P4, P6 simply posits that God is, in fact, totally non-contingent and

thus necessarily exists. Since the antecedent clause of (2) is a disjunction, satisfying just one of

the two disjuncts is enough to bring about the consequent. The two disjucts both bring about the

consequent "then it is necessary" but the necessity rendered is quite different depending on

which of the two disjucts is satisfied, as P5 explicitly states. On the one hand, if something is

inconceivable, then that entity necessarily cannot exist. On the other hand, if that entity is totally

non-contingent, then that entity necessarily actually exists. The nature of necessity on either

account is *de re* necessity, but inconceivability predicates of that thing that its non-existence is

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[21] Plantinga, *Nature of Necessity*, P 1.
[22] Ibid, 2.

essential. That thing can never be—it can never even be conceived. Of course, P3 claims that God *is* conceivable, eliminating God's possible membership in the cannot exist category.

The claim of P6 is that God is totally non-contingent. This means that God relies upon nothing for his existence, that God is not self-caused, that God is not caused at all, and that God must exist in every possible world. The truly profound question (profound at least for the person first forming the query) *Who made God?* turns out to be a category error. Such a question does not apply to God. God, or the Greatest Conceivable Being, is by definition, the uncaused, unmade, cause and maker of everything else. The question is very important, and relies upon an empirical observation: everything that has a beginning has a cause. This observation is astute and universal. All human people have causes, even the most powerful. So when God is given credit for causing something, it is natural, but incorrect, to ask *Who made God?* It is incorrect because the question misapplies the notion of causation to God. The misapplication has to do with the sort of category into which we place God. God is uncaused in virtue of his nature. God is necessary and necessary things are not caused. Similarly, someone can commit a category error by misapplying color to a fragrance. It is a category mistake to ask "*What color is the smell of the morning dew?* Smells do not have colors. It seems just as basic to note that God is necessary as it is to note that scents have odors and duration, not colors.

It is not obviously just as basic to everyone, however. To some people God is not clearly necessary. Most of the time, such pronouncements come not from a true conception of God, but from a faulty conception of God and his supposed attributes. God may be presented in a very poor light to many people due to a recognition of the suffering that exists, or because of a dysfunctional religious experience, or by incorrectly equating the term "God" with something less than the Greatest Conceivable Being. If we remove the religiously charged word "God"

from the consideration, and instead focus on what truly constitutes the Greatest Conceivable Being, it becomes evident that the GCB must be totally non-contingent. Just run the thought exercise between a contingent entity and a non-contingent entity: is a being that depends on something for its existence greater than one that relies upon nothing? Certainly not. Such a being may be great, but a greater is surely conceivable. Superman is great, but dependent upon his parents and other physical elements. Superman's greatness could be conceived in a being that, likewise, possessed all the greatness of Superman *and* was not dependent upon such factors. Conceive of a being that possessed all of Superman's vast arrays of powers but that also could exist in a world comprised exclusively of Kryptonite, or a world in which nothing physical existed at all, but only nonphysical substances were exemplified. Such a being is greater indeed.

So, if the GCB were contingent or caused, then what was thought to be the GCB is not actually the GCB at all, for it is possible to conceive of a being just like that which was considered the GCB, but that is also uncaused. To be the greatest being, one would have to be omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, eternal, and necessary. Some may still think that God is not totally non-contingent. Upon what does he rely? If God is causally or logically dependent upon anything, then he is not the GCB. But suppose that God is not caused by anything, even himself, but that God is still not necessary. This would mean that God exists in some worlds, but not in all worlds. Even if God cannot fail to exist in all of the worlds in which he actually exists, that does not make God totally non-contingent or necessary; it just shifts God's necessary existence from the *de re* to the *de dicto* variety. If God necessarily exists in the *de re* sense, then God must exist in every possible world. If God necessarily exists in the *de dicto* sense, then God must exist in every world in which he happens to exist. If God necessarily exists in this *de dicto* sense, then God's existence becomes a conditional statement, not a straight forward proposition.

Under the assumption that God is not necessary in the *de re* sense, his necessity might be described as follows: "If God exists in some world, then he [*de dicto*] necessarily exists in that world." This conditional dictum prevents God from being *de re* necessary since the conditional dictum is consistent with there being no God at all. This line of reasoning is made explicit in the Caterus objection, which will be discussed below.

If God at least possibly exists, which is certainly the case since God is conceivable, then God exists in some possible world. Even under a *de dicto* understanding, then God's existence is necessary in that world, which means his non-existence is logically impossible in that world. But whatever is impossible is invariant across possible worlds. This means that God's non-existence is impossible in every world, which is to say that his existence is *de re* necessary in every world.

The truth of P6 comes down to the analytic concept of God. If someone conceives of God as somehow other than the GCB, then that person will not accept P6. If someone's conception of God includes the great making properties omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolent, eternality, but lacks (*de re*) necessary existence, then that person will only apply *de dicto* necessity to God, rendering God's necessary existence a concept without existential import. Under this concept, God will only necessarily exist, *if* he happens to exist. The question then becomes: *Is a God that might not exist really God at all?* Anselm certainly thought not. Even if God cannot fail to exist in the worlds in which he happens to exist, this still leaves open the possibility that God does not exist in all worlds. But is this notion even conceivable? Can someone even conceive of a world in which God happens not to exist? Why does God exist in some worlds, but not in other worlds? What possible condition could restrict God from inhabiting some world? Senor posits that there is no such condition, but that God's

existence might be a brute fact, and calls this notion "brute theism"—the claim that the universe was freely created by a contingent God.[23]

Senor's explanation of brute theism comes in the context of critiquing Timothy O'Connor's book *Theism and Ultimate Explanation*, in which O'Connor defends an Anselmian necessary being theology. Senor quotes O'Connor discussing the merits of necessary being theology: "the concept of God implicit in certain claims at the heart of the Biblical revelation themselves *require* articulation in the metaphysical terms of necessary being" and "…any minimally acceptable understanding of God's sovereign control over what happens in the world implicitly requires the concept of necessary being."[24] Senor balks at this, noting

> According to brute theism, God exists contingently. We must be careful, though, to make clear the type of contingency at issue. To call a being "contingent" in the relevant sense is to say that there are possible worlds at which it does not exist. But it does not follow from this variety of contingency that the being's existence is contingent on the causal activity of other beings. Surely, this latter kind of contingency in inconsistent with standard theism: God is not ontologically beholden to anyone or anything. Still, brute theism gets its name from its claim that the existence of God is the ultimate (and only) brute fact—there is no explanation for God's existence and God's nonexistence is possible.[25]

So Senor's conception of a contingent God is very precise and excludes the possibility of God's being created or dependent on anything. God is the only brute fact. Nothing explains God's existence and more importantly, Senor is explicit that God's nonexistence is possible. As with any fact that is claimed to be brute, there is no explanatory mechanism. The Ontological argument offers an explanation—that God *is* necessary, and in this sense, God must exist. Senor does not think that God must exist, but

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[23] Senor, Tom. "On the Tenability of Brute Naturalism and the Implications of Brute Theism" *Philosphia Christi*. Vol 12 No. 2. 2010. It is not clear that Senor actually endorses brute theism.

[24] Ibid, 278.

[25] Ibid, 278.

Even so, the brute theist will maintain both that God's going out of existence is not a possibility and that the exercise of all other contingent entities is (fundamentally) explained by the causal activity of God. But even more: God is the only possible source of being and power. That is, necessarily, God is the only source of being—every object that *could be* is causally and ontologically dependent on God (except God himself, of course). This implies that there is but a single world at which God does not exist since with the exception of God himself, no contingent being exists unless it was created by God.[26]

Even for the brute theist, God is "the only source of being." What is interesting is the conclusion that Senor draws from this. Senor thinks that because God is the exclusive source upon which anything that exists and everything that could exist causally and ontologically depend, this implies that God will exist in every world except one. Senor seems to define the parameters of possible worlds in terms of contingent beings. Senor is right that there is only one possible world in which no contingent beings exist, but what resides in that world? It seems the answer must be necessary things. Does Senor allow for necessary objects? If so, then those necessary things exist in all worlds and there would only be one world that contains no contingent things at all. The multiplicities of worlds are differentiated in virtue of the varied combinations of contingent things. Since all necessary things are instantiated in every possible world, if only necessary things existed, then there would be no multiplicities at all. If no necessary things exist, then, contra Senor, there is no world in which God happens not to exist. Since no contingent thing exists unless it was created by God, and everything else that is or could be is dependent on God, a world without God would be no world at all. It would be 'null world' that instantiates no properties at all, and thus is not really a world. So there is only one world in which no contingent things exist. So it must be the case that Senor allows for necessary things. Why exactly prevents God from existing in all worlds? Senor says it is because God is a brute fact, with no explanation at all for why he happens to exist and no explanation for why he would

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[26] Ibid.

happen not to exist. God just fails to exist in that one world. Nothing in that world prevents God

from existing there; his failing to exist there is simply a brute fact.

O'Connor highlights some problems with the notion of a contingent God, most of which

Senor adequately handles via his brute theism. One, however, is stickier. Senor writes:

> The only one of O'Connor's objections that might cause a problem for brute
> theism is this: "[If brute theism were true], it seems, [God] could sensibly feel
> *fortunate* that He happens to exist, even though He owes His existence to no
> existing thing. And that appears to be inadequate, clearly at odds with how
> ordinary theists implicitly regard God's ontological status." (From O'Connor,
> 140).
>   Reply: Should the God of brute theism feel fortunate for existing? Maybe.
> But there is no one to whom God should feel gratitude for his good fortune and
> his continued existence is not something for which he is fortunate. The idea that
> God should *feel* fortunate also seems to invite a crude kind of anthropomorphism
> that is not otherwise a part of brute theism.
>   Finally, I take issue with the claim that the implication that God would
> feel fortunate to exist is "clearly at odds with how ordinary theists implicitly
> regard God's ontological status." O'Connor must attend a very philosophically
> sophisticated church. I am pretty sure that I have never been a member of a
> congregation in which most of the members implicitly reject brute theism and
> embrace full-on Anselmian theism. It is not that they reject Anselmianism but
> rather that (as best I can tell) their philosophical theology does not distinguish
> between the views. They are committed to a God who is creator of heaven and
> earth, for whom all things are possible, and whose ways are not our ways. Brute
> theism can see all of this and raise it the necessary dependence of all existing (and
> possible) things upon God and God's essential omnipotence, omniscience, and
> omnibenevolence. Ordinary theists will be just fine with this.[27]

Would God feel fortunate that he exists (anthropomorphism aside)? Senor is agnostic on

this is matter. I think that God, in virtue of his omniscience, *would* feel fortunate that he exists.

He must know that he is not self-caused, nor causally dependent on anything else. He must

know that his existence is a brute fact, one for which he would feel fortunate. O'Connor rightly

notes that God's fortunate contingency is "at odds with how ordinary theists implicitly regard

God's ontological status." What is the basis for claim? It is more than a plank in an argument

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[27] Ibid, 279-280.

for God's existence; it is more than the enormous corpus of the church fathers; it is based on the worldview that most theists endorse. This worldview places God at the center of existence where God is the greatest possible being. Brute theism also places God at the center of the (contingent) existence where God is the greatest possible (contingent) being.

What is the basis for Senor's claim that ordinary theists do not endorse perfect being theology? It must be the philosophical acumen of the churches in which he has placed membership. The early church, however, was a "very philosophically sophisticated church." Paul and Apollos interacted with the best philosophers of the first century. The church fathers lead very philosophically sophisticated churches, as the ecumenical councils demonstrate. The medieval church, likewise, with minds like Anselm and Aquinas, was very philosophically sophisticated. The Renaissance brought about a resurgence of ecclesiastical philosophical sophistication.

I am pretty sure that most theists will implicitly reject brute theism and embrace full-on Anselmian theism once the differences between the two are explicated. Most theists are committed to a God who is creator of heaven and earth, for whom all things are possible, and whose ways are not our ways, and other notions as well. Senor claims that "brute theism can see all of this and raise it the necessary dependence of all existing (and possible) things upon God and God's essential omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence,"[28] but perfect being theism does the exact same thing with the notable advantage of sparing the ordinary theist from having to believe that God is contingent. Ordinary theists will not be "just fine" with a contingent God. God is the greatest possible being. It seems that the God of brute theism is not the GCB, since an identical being is possible, but who's existence is necessary, not a brute fact.

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[28] Ibid, 280.

The God of perfect being theology is greater because he exists in all possible worlds in virtue of his essential necessity. Brute theism is no more empirical than perfect being theism. Both notions are analytic concepts. Why is brute theism to be endorsed? Just because it gives the theist almost everything that traditional theism already offers? Even the fool of Psalm 14 that Anselm references can understand the analytic concept "than which nothing greater can be thought—i.e. the Greatest Conceivable Being." When most anyone hears this phrase, something comes to mind. Should God be anything less than the GCB? Most theists implicitly believe God to be the GCB. Even if most theists did not so believe, however; brute theism becomes not a reason to discount the Ontological argument, but rather an alternative analytic concept of the term "God."

Senor importantly highlights the similarities inherent between brute theism's concept of God and the traditional concept of God.

> Brute theism insists on the following schema of modalized claims regarding the standard divine attributes: "Necessarily, God is *P*" and "God is necessarily *P*." That is, brute theism asserts that for omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, and the rest, it is both true that nothing can be God and lack one of those properties and the being who is God has the properties essentially.[29]

In this way, God has these properties in both the *de re* and the *de dicto* senses. The difference between the two views is that on brute theism's account, God is contingent and therefore possesses the property of necessity only in the *de dicto* sense; whereas on perfect being theology's account, God is necessary in the *de re* sense of necessity. This *de re* necessity means that God is totally non-contingent. Even if other possibilities arise, if P6 is assumed true, this Ontological argument can be shown to be valid. I think that P6 has been shown to true, or at least more likely true than its alternatives.

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[29] Ibid, 279.

Consider C2: Therefore, God is necessary.

This second conclusion is the logical implication that arises if P4-P6 is true. P4 established the two conditions, either of which is sufficient to warrant necessity. C1 eliminated the possibility of God's necessity coming in virtue of his being inconceivable. So for God to be necessary, he must be totally non-contingent. P5 establishes the sort of necessity that a necessary entity has. A thing necessarily cannot exist if inconceivable, or a thing necessarily actually exists if totally non-contingent. P6 established that God is totally non-contingent. Given the truth of P4-P6, and the logical force of modus ponens, God is necessary in virtue of being totally non-contingent.

Consider C3: Therefore, God cannot merely possibly exist.

This conclusion is the implication of C2 and C1. C1 established that God either actually exists or possibly exists. C2 eliminates God's potential membership in the 'merely possibly exists' category. A necessary being cannot merely possibly exist, it must exist, hence, C3.

Consider C4: Therefore, God necessarily actually exists.

C4 makes explicit the other side of the C3 coin. If, as C1 shows, that God either actually exists, or merely possibly exists, and if as C2 shows, that God is necessary, and if as C3 shows, that God cannot merely possibly exist, and if P5 is true and if something is necessary, then that entity necessarily exists, so C4 is also true. C4 is true in virtue of C1, P5, C2, and C3.

Consider C5: Therefore, God actually exists.

C5 serves to clean up the linguistic aspect of the previous conclusions and tie the conclusions to the language of P1—every entity either actually exists, merely possibly exists, or

necessarily cannot exist. Since the whole argument is an extended disjunctive syllogism, all but one category must be eliminated. God either actually exists, or possibly exists, or cannot exist. C1 eliminated God's potential membership from the "necessarily cannot exist" category. C3 eliminated God's potential membership from the "merely possibly exists" category. C4 established that must exist, and so C5 establishes God's membership in the "actually exists" category.

Is this version of the Ontological argument valid? Yes. If the premises are true, then the conclusions are appropriate inferences. The real question is if this version of the argument is sound. It seems as the argument is sound. The premises are true, or at least more likely true then their alternatives. But can the supposed truth of the premises stand against some of the most forceful arguments raised against Ontological arguments. In the next section, I will consider two such arguments: Kant's "existence is not a predicate" objection and the Caterus objection.

IV. Existence is Not a Real Predicate Objection

The Ontological argument has compelled philosophers to debate its merit for centuries. While most agree that the argument can be shown to be valid, its soundness is another matter entirely. Each version of the Ontological argument faces particular objections, but two objections are typically lobbed at every manifestation of the argument. While the particular objections to my version of the argument have not yet come, it is important to demonstrate the failure of these two objections as reasons to discount this Ontological argument.

First, consider the "Existence is not a predicate" objection made famous by Immanuel Kant. The main idea of this objection is that claiming that something exists in no way affects the content of the concept under consideration. The dictum "Existence is not a predicate" is often judged a deadly refutation of the Ontological argument. Some, including Plantinga and Ebersole

challenge this notion. Of course, *exists* often is a grammatical predicate, but at the heart of

Kant's dictum is the contention that existence is not a logical predicate. Logical predicates

encompass properties, attributes, and relations. Each of these characterize, define, describe, or

give information about things or their connections with other things. This objection claims that

exists does not function that way. Ebersole explains the reasoning by noting that *exist* "is held to

play a radically different role. The distinction is often expressed in this way: to say what a thing

is is completely different from saying that a thing is."[30]

Neither Anselm's argument, nor this argument, however, claims that existence is a

predicate. Both Anselm's version, and this version of the Ontological argument claim that

necessary existence is a real property that God truly possesses. The distinction is sharp.

Necessary existence *is* a property; existence is the possession of properties. 'Existence' can only

function as a logical predicate in a very limited circumstance. Typically, *exists* does not add

anything to one's concept. *Necessary existence* adds something very specific to any concept to

which it is attached. It adds the property *actually exists in every possible world*. Existence can

apply to contingent things. Necessary existence can only apply to non-contingent things. The

reason for this is simple. If something is contingent, it might not have existed. In fact,

contingent things do fail to exist in some possible worlds. Necessary existence removes the

possibility of a thing failing to exist in some world. *De re* necessary existence, that is. *De re*

necessary existence applies to the things essence. *De dicto* necessary existence means that a

thing cannot fail to exist, but only in the world in which the dictum is true. So, if brute theism is

correct, then God necessarily exists in the *de dicto* sense in some world, because God cannot fail

to exist in that world, but it might have been the case that God not exist. In that case, nothing

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[30] Ebersole, 509.

else could exist (in that world), for God is the source of all being. The intuitive understanding of

necessary existence involves *de re* necessity, since it is the idea that something must exist in all

possible worlds.

God may be a necessarily existence being, but it also seems that numbers are necessary.

The test for determining if something has necessary existence is to determine if there is a

possible world that restricts that thing from existing. If there is such a world, then that thing is

not a candidate for necessary existence. If no such restrictions are possible, then that thing may

be necessary, but that thing must also possibly (plausibly) exist in some world. This means that

the thing must either be demonstrable and be instantiated in some substance, or that thing must

be thought to contain *necessary existence* as a part of its concept. Even if there is some debate

about whether or not the concept *God* includes the property *necessary existence*, the GCB

definitely includes *necessary existence*, and most people conceptually equate God with the

"Supreme being" or the "best possible thing," which is another referent to the GCB. If the GCB

failed to exist in some possible world, then it would be possible to conceive of another being,

equal in every way, but that is necessary. This necessary being would be greater.

The claim of this argument is that God is the GCB. Often it is better to refer to the

Ontological argument seeking to establish the existence of the GCB from the very nature of the

GCB rather than seeking to establish the existence of God from the very nature of God because

"God" is such a religiously charged word. There is no doubt that the concept of the GCB

includes *necessary existence* as a distinct property. It is not that the GCB possesses the property

exists, for that does not eliminate the possibility of his existing as a contingent being. The GCB

possesses the property of *necessary existence*, which is to say that the GCB exists in every

possible world. If God is identical to the GCB, then God possesses this property also. I have argued at length that such an identity relation does obtain (see the consideration of P3 above).

The "Existence is not predicate" objection fails to show this argument, or Anselm's Ontological argument is unsound. Existence can be a predicate under the right circumstances, and God fits nicely into those circumstances precisely because those considering the argument without an answer to whether or not God exists, and those considering it who have already decided that God either does or does not exist, are still trying to show that the Ontological argument either proves or fails to prove the existence of God. More importantly, however, is the fact that the objection only applies to existence, not to *necessary existence*. Necessary existence does add something to a concept. Necessary existence is a real predicate. Both this argument, and Anselm's Ontological argument seeks to demonstrate that God is necessarily existent, not just that he exists.

<center>V. Caterus Objection</center>

J. William Forgie argues that another objection to Ontological arguments is particularly effective. This critique can be called the Caterus objection.[31] It works by boiling down the Ontological argument to two basic premises, and then evaluating those premises, demonstrating that the conclusion rendered by them lacks any existential import. Forgie thinks the following skeletal argument serves as a representative Ontological argument and highlights the problem with such arguments:

1 God has ø.
2 Necessarily, anything having ø exists.
C Therefore, God exists.

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[31] Forgie, William. "The Caterus Objection" *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*. Vol. 28. No. 2. 1990. Named after Caterus, who offered a version of this objection in response to Descartes' Ontological argument. Kant, Shaffer, and even Aquinas seem to argue against the Ontological argument on these grounds.

These two premises are taken to be at the heart of most Ontological arguments. The first

premise is a conceptual truth expressing that the concept of God is a concept of something that

has ø, or that *having ø* is included in the concept of God. Forgie contends that

> Accordingly, that premise is really a disguised conditional statement. It can be
> translated roughly as follows: 'if anything is God, it has ø.' But then our original
> argument, while perhaps perfectly sound, yields a conclusion lacking existential
> import. For its conclusion, 'God exists,' will follow from the two premises only if
> it too is a disguised conditional statement, translatable as 'if anything is God, it
> exists.' And since this conclusion is compatible with the atheist's claim, 'nothing is
> God' or 'there is no God,' it is too weak to prove what we intended.[32]

The supposed power of this objection is that, if cogent, it will not matter what property is

substituted for ø—*than which nothing greater can be thought, a being who has omniscience,*

omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and eternity in all possible worlds, necessary existence, etc.

Forgie concludes

> So long as one can read our conclusion as a conditional statement it will lack
> existential import and will be something the atheist could accept. Even if our
> conclusion read, 'God necessarily exists,' or 'God exists in all possible worlds,' if it
> is translatable as a conditional - viz., as 'if anything is God it necessarily exists (or
> exists in all possible worlds)' - it will be compatible with the claim that nothing is
> God.[33]

The conclusion is said to lack existential import because it is only a conditional statement

and can be easily evaded simply by claiming that nothing is God. But is the conclusion merely a

hidden conditional? At first, it seems that the conclusion to Forgie's representative argument

must be a disguised conditional since the first premise is a disguised conditional as well.

Forgie's confidence in the Caterus objections is misplaced, however. First of all, grammatically,

the first premise *can* be read as a disguised conditional; but the right philosophical considerations

actually prevent this. Those considerations involve the property translated as ø. If ø is the

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[32] Ibid, 81.
[33] Ibid, 82.

property of *being the Greatest Conceivable Being* and the GCB includes omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, eternity, and necessary existence, then premise two actually collapses into premise one. Premise one explains that God has the property of being the GCB and premise two explains that, among other things, necessarily, necessarily existent things exist. The inclusion of *necessary existence* in the concept of GCB renders premise two unnecessarily repetitive. The modified argument then transforms from

> 1 God has the property of being the GCB (i.e. has omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, eternity, and necessary existence).
> 2 Necessarily, anything with omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, eternity, and necessary existence exists.
> C Therefore, God exists.

into

> 1 God has the property of being the GCB (i.e. has omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, eternity, and necessary existence).
> C Therefore, God exists.

A problem now beplagues this argument—it begs the question by assuming the desired conclusion into the premise. It is exactly the inclusion of necessary existence that eliminates the need for a second premise, and which forces this fallacy. Is this modified premise really a disguised conditional? It can be. The modified premise can be read as "If anything is God it has the property of being the GCB (i.e. has omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, eternity, and necessary existence)." It therefore seems that the conclusion also can become the conditional "If anything is God, it exists." And, thus the Caterus objection seems unscathed because the atheist can accept all of this and consistently deny that anything is God. This is not the case, however. To be consistent with the modified premise, the conclusion cannot be a conditional. The reason for this is the necessary existence component of the content of God.

Reading the premise as a conditional grants that God can be conceived. By applying the reasoning attached to my version of the Ontological argument, God must, therefore, be at least a

possible being. But possible beings cannot belong to the 'cannot exist' category. Forgie would say that the Caterus objection stands. God is possible, but his possibility is consistent with his non-existence. But this is not so. If God possibly exists, then God necessarily exists. Peter King explains that "an axiom of [S5] modal logic tells us that if something is possibly necessary then it's necessary; therefore [G]od necessarily exists…of the various systems of modal logic, S5 probably gets closest to both ordinary and philosophical uses of modal expressions."[34] This is what was explained in the consideration of P5 above. The reason that this axiom holds is that God, as GCB, is a possible necessary being and as such either must exist if he can exist, or cannot exist if he is impossible—logically inconsistent. But the Caterus objection grants that it is not the case the God cannot exist, for he is clearly conceivable as the premise indicates, so God must exist. This prevents the conclusion from being a disguised conditional. But, I suppose that Forgie could still maintain that the Caterus objection stands grammatically. If the premise is a disguised conditional, then the conclusion may be read as one also, but the content of the premise philosophically prevents the conclusion from appropriately being taken that way. To claim "if anything is God, then it has the property of being the GCB (i.e. has omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, eternity, and necessary existence)" is to grant that *something* is God. For if God can be conceived, then God must at least possibly exist, and if God at least possibly exists, then God exists at least in some possible world, and if God at exists at least in some possible world, then God (*de dicto*) necessarily exists in that world, and if God necessarily exists in that world, then God (*de* re) necessarily exists in that and every world, for whatever is logically impossible in some world is logically impossible in every world. So the premise "If anything is God, then it has the property of being the GCB (i.e. has omniscience, omnipotence,

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[34] King, Peter. "Plantinga and World Indexed Properties"
users.ox.ac.uk/~shil0124/papers/plantinga.pdf.

omnibenevolence, eternity, and necessary existence)" cannot consistently lead to the conditional conclusion "If anything is God, it exists"; it can only lead to the conclusion "God exists." Now Forgie might abandon the Caterus objection at this point and claim that this modified argument begs the question, and he would be right. But the Ontological argument does not need to beg the question. To avoid such a fallacy, the starting point must be a metaphysical principle like my P1 (Every entity either actually exists, merely possibly exists, or necessarily cannot exist) that does not assume the content of the conclusion.

The conclusion of the initial skeletal argument is said to lack existential import only because it is a conditional statement. If the content of the ø property prevents the conclusion from being so understood, then the conclusion would maintain its existential import. Another way out of the Caterus objection is to attempt to assert a subject to which the ø property can be about. Perhaps, just after asserting the conceptual claim that God has ø, it could be shown that there is a subject to which this ø property can be ascribed. If this could be done, then the conclusion would be a demonstration about that subject that actually exists. Forgie anticipates this move and explains the upshot of such a move against the Caterus objection.

> Our conclusion would then be seen, not as a conditional statement, but rather as a categorical statement about the subject we had established. For this strategy to work two things are required. First, we must regard having ø as not only a logically necessary, but also a logically sufficient, condition for something's being God; otherwise our conclusion that a being with ø exists will not be the conclusion that God exists. To be as explicit as possible on this score, let us simply understand our original first premise, 'God has ø,' as the bi-conditional claim, 'something is God if and only if it has ø.' Second, to avoid assuming what our conclusion attempts to prove, the subject we "establish" must be what I shall call a "nonreal being," i.e., something to which we can ascribe properties - of which we can say that it has ø, or is God - without assuming or presupposing that it actually exists.[35]

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[35] Forgie, 82.

The modification of Forgie's first premise certainly provides a logically necessary and a logically sufficient condition for something's being God. The second requirement is designed to prevent begging the question, but Forgies use of "nonreal being" begs the question the other way, however. It stacks the deck against God from having any existential import since he is already being classified as a "nonreal being" which presuppose that he does not exist. Rather than classify God as nonreal, it is best to categorize him as an actual or as a possible being. Forgie might claim that so classifying him presupposes his actual existence, but "possible" is surely preferable to "nonreal" when it comes to the categories of existence. Is it more natural to claim that every entity is either actual, nonreal, or impossible, or to claim that everything is actual, possible, or impossible? Not just God, but Santa, Superman, my next child, and Pegasus are all nonreal on this account. So in five years my nonreal child might actually exist. It is more neutral to maintain the modal idioms when evaluating the Ontological argument and its objections. God is possible, not nonreal, but he has not been shown to be actual unless the argument can be successful.

We can certainly ascribe properties to a possible being, saying that it has this property or that. The problem is when we seek to ascribe ø to a possible being. Because of the content of ø, any possible being that has it, actually exists. Rather than indicating that this somehow proves the Caterus objection, this simply shows that the concept of God is such that, if properly understood, God must actually exist. This also shows that one cannot ascribe ø to just any possible or nonreal being. The property ø includes a presupposition of its existence. But this does not assume that God exists prior to considering my argument. Instead, it demonstrates that necessary things must exist. My argument seeks to prove that when considering God, God includes this necessity. This leaves the defender of the Caterus objection with no more moves.

If one rightly understands ø, one will see that ø must be instantiated. Perhaps the frustration with

the Ontological argument is that it seems unfair. God is such a special case and certain

considerations seem only to apply to him and not to other beings. The Caterus objection is an

interesting exercise in logic, but not one that undermines the Ontological argument.

VI. Conclusion

The version of the Ontological argument presented in this thesis is valid; the conclusions

follow from the given premises. The argument is also sound; the premises are, I think, true, and

I have provided good reasons to accept them. The validity of the argument rests upon certain

metaphysical and logical principles as well as certain intuitions regarding particular concepts.

The concept of God is that of the Greatest Conceivable Being, which includes the essential

properties of omniscience, omnipotence, omnibenevolence, eternity, and necessary existence.

God is conceivable, and no possible world can restrict God's existence. The concept of necessity

requires something to be either inconceivable or totally non-contingent. The axioms of S5 modal

logic, which best captures the ordinary and the philosophical use of modal phrases dictate that if

an entity is possibly necessary, then that entity is necessary.

Ontological arguments seek to demonstrate the existence of God from the concept of

God. Anselm first discovered this insight while expressing his praise and adoration of God.

Since that discovery, philosophers have wrestled with the concept of God and if denying his

existence while understanding the concept *God* is contradictory. Can one conceive of God and

consistently deny that he exists? Anselm thought not. Anselm was right. If one properly

understands that God is the GCB and that the GCB possesses necessary existence, then God must

exist and to deny his existence is indeed contradictory because every entity either actually exists,

merely possibly exists, or necessarily cannot exist. It cannot be that God cannot exist since he can be conceived. But because his conception includes total non-contingency, God cannot merely possibly exist. This means that God must actually exist. Anselm's approach was to deduce a contradiction by supposing that God only possibly existed. The approach of this version is to begin, not with the supposition that God only possibly exists, but with the metaphysical principle that there are three categories that encompass the spectrum of existence. This version is an extended disjunctive syllogism whose conclusions follow the given the truth of the premises.

What does this version of the Ontological argument prove? Does this argument prove that God exists? I think so. Does it prove that anyone who says in her heart that there is no God is a fool? I think so, as long as it is foolish to endorse logical absurdity. How can one who *deeply* conceives of God as necessary declare in her heart that God does not exist? How wise is it to merely *prima facie* conceive of God and then declare that he does not exist? If God exists, the implications are profound. It is certainly foolish not to deeply investigate whether some entity with such profound implications does or does not exist. But does this argument produce faith in God? Not necessarily. Norman Malcolm sums up his defense of Ontological arguments this way

> I can imagine an atheist going through the argument, becoming convinced of its validity, acutely defending it against objections, yet remaining an atheist. The only effect it could have on the fool of the Psalm would be that he stopped saying in his heart "There is no God," because he would now realize that this is something he cannot meaningfully say or think. It is hardly to be expected that a demonstrative argument should, in addition, produce in him a living faith. Surely there is a level at which one can view the argument as a piece of logic, following the deductive moves but not being touched religiously? I think so. But even at this level the argument may not be without religious value, for it may help to remove some philosophical scruples that stand in the way of faith. At a deeper level, I suspect that the argument can be thoroughly understood only by one who has a view of that human "form of life" that gives rise to the idea of an infinitely

great being, who views it from the *inside* not just from the outside and who has, therefore, at least some inclination to *partake* in that religious form of life. This inclination, in Kierkegaard's words, is "from the emotions." This inclination can hardly be an *effect* of Anselm's argument, but is rather presupposed in the fullest understanding of it. It would be unreasonable to require that the recognition of Anselm's demonstration as valid must produce a conversion.[36]

This Ontological argument is valid and it may be considered sound by some who carefully investigate and consider the nature of God. It demonstrates that God cannot belong to the "cannot exist" category. It gives strong support to the idea that God does not merely belong to the "possibly exists" category. It gives strong support to the idea that God as the GCB is a compossible notion. It lays out a case for demonstrating that the concept of God guarantees the existence of God. That case may be judged wanting by some, but it will not do to discount this philosophically weighty argument as a mere play on words or a quaint exercise. If it is judged unsound, then some explanation must be given for how a totally non-contingent (necessary) being that can be conceived might *not* exist at some world. This is no easy task. Nor is it a particularly easy task to prove that God actually exists to those convinced he does not. This argument helps form a very persuasive cumulative case for that fact, however. Ontological arguments are the only pieces of natural theology that are *a priori*. When added to the *a posteriori* arguments, God's actual existence becomes more and more likely. The power of the *a posteriori* arguments can bolster this version of the Ontological argument by giving attending evidence in support of the explanations laid out for the premises of this argument. Finally, this argument can encourage the theist by providing a philosophically sophisticated reason to support her belief that God actually exists.

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[36] Malcolm, Norman. "Anselm's Ontological Arguments" *The Philosophical Review"* Vol. 69. No. 1. 1960. P 61-62.

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