Non-Gods and Gods: A Cosmontological Treatise

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For my mother

CONTENT

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At a rather late point during my postgraduate studies, the cosmontological argument – the primary subject matter of this book – seemed to be all but a waste of time. I considered writing something else instead, say, the history of the cosmological argument from contingency, just to get my dissertation over with. As one would have expected, Catharina Stenqvist, my main supervisor, did not approve. For this and many other examples of good judgement, and for ceaseless support, I wish to express my sincerest gratitude.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Conceding that '[t]he concept of a highest being is a very useful idea in many respects', Immanuel Kant immediately adds that this concept, precisely because it is merely an idea, 'is entirely incapable all by itself of extending our cognition in regard to what exists'.[1] Following Kant, of course, the philosophical verdict is all but unanimous: whatever its conceptual utility might be, the ontological argument for the existence of God fails to establish the existence of *anything*, let alone a highest being. By contrast, as regards the cosmological argument, the jury is still out. But even if it is granted for argument's sake that the cosmological argument (in some of its many versions) successfully establishes the existence of *something*, say, an unmoved mover, a first cause, or a necessary being, it is far from clear that this metaphysically basic entity is that which 'all men speak of as God',[2] at least if by 'God' is meant a highest being, or that than which nothing greater can be thought. As Alexander R. Pruss says, there is thus a 'gap problem' associated with the cosmological argument,[3] namely, the problem of how to locate that particular something, whose existence has been established, within the conceptual bounds of divine perfection.

In this book I try to bridge this gap. Incorporating the conceptual resources of the ontological argument into the cosmological line of reasoning, I make a 'cosmontological' amalgamation: an a posteriori argument for the existence of that which, in virtue of being 'whatever it is better to be than not to be',[4] is 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'.[5] To my knowledge, this objective has not previously been pursued. Apart from in an early draft of my own,[6] in fact, it appears to have been hinted at only once.[7]

Reduced to its bare essentials, the cosmontological argument runs as follows. Let a GOD be whatever it is better to be than not to be. ('GOD'

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1 Kant ([1781/1787, A601/B629] 1998, p. 568).
2 Aquinas ([1274, §1.2.3] 2007, p. 13).
3 Pruss (2009, pp. 90–98). Elsewhere, this gap problem is referred to as the 'identification stage' (O'Connor 2008, pp. 86–110) or simply the 'second part' of the cosmological argument (Rowe 1998, pp. 222–48).
4 Anselm ([1078, §5] 1995, p. 102).
5 *Ibid.* ([§2] p. 100).
6 See Lembke (2012), more on which in §1.2 below.
7 See Leftow (1988), more on which in §1.2 below.

will be capitalized so as to avoid associations with lesser deities.) If there is an explanation for why the class of non-GODs is non-empty (or why the property of non-GOD-hood is exemplified), there is at least one GOD who causes the class of non-GODs not to be empty. (As we shall shortly see, this accords with the underlying rationale of all cosmological arguments.) Well, there *is* such an explanation – or at least there appears to be a fairly strong epistemic reason to think so. Therefore, in the final analysis, there appears to be a fairly strong epistemic reason to affirm the existence of at least one GOD – hence, of God.[8] Not that the cosmontological conclusion is this vague: it states clearly that there is at least one GOD. But we are dealing with philosophy here, metaphysics even, where logically valid but unsound arguments are commonplace and pitfalls are plentiful; and precisely because we are dealing with philosophy, we must take good care to evaluate, as impartially and clear-headedly as possible, the premises and perhaps implicit assumptions on which our arguments rely. Lord knows, this is difficult, and this is why a philosophical conclusion, particularly one that is metaphysically quite substantial, needs to be treated with a proper amount of caution.

Hence let it be admitted at once (though it will come as a surprise to no-one): the cosmontological argument does not finally imply a knock-down destruction of atheism. I cannot even claim to prove that its conclusion is more believable, all things considered, than its denial, for the simple reason that 'all things considered' requires access to a comprehensive, non-question-begging world-view. Again, what I do claim, no more and no less, is that the cosmontological argument offers a fairly strong epistemic reason to affirm the existence of at least one GOD. If this claim is substantiated during the course of this book, I shall at least have made a positive contribution to a debate that is of ancient origin and is bound to continue for some time yet.

In short, we shall structure our discussions as follows. The remainder of this chapter is all about setting the stage: providing some background by placing the cosmontological argument in context, indicating my own philosophical orientation, adding a methodological note, making a terminological clarification, and reviewing some earlier research. In chapter two the cosmontological argument is properly introduced, substantiated, and defended against a number of possible objections. In chapter three some difficult issues pertaining to the notion of 'GOD' are dealt with. In particular, chapter three contains a non-relative analysis of 'whatever it is

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[8] The inference from 'GOD' to God will be discussed in §3.1.

better to be than not to be', a vindication of the notion of omniscience, and a novel account of the notion of omnipotence. Chapter four, finally, is merely a summary in Swedish.

1.1 Setting the stage

As noted in passing, the cosmological argument for the existence of God comes in many varieties, such as the Aristotelian argument for a prime mover and the *kalam* argument for a beginningless creator of the universe.[9] Common to these different versions are their a posteriori (empirical or synthetic) outlook, their extreme generality,[10] and, crucially, their attempts to explain the exemplification of some property *F* in terms of an ultimate entity that does not possess *F*.[11] Thus, for example, the Aristotelian argument, trying to explain the observable fact that there are things in motion, concludes to an unmoved mover. Similarly, the *kalam* argument, trying to explain the observable fact that there are things that begin to exist, concludes to a beginningless creator of the universe.

By comparison, the ontological argument, another multi-version argument for the existence of God, does not try to explain anything. Relying on no observational knowledge at all, this a priori kind of argument claims to prove the existence of a highest being, be it 'that than which

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[9] For a meticulous historical-philosophical survey of many cosmological arguments, see Craig (1980, p. 282). In a final chapter, Craig proposes a tripartite typology that has become somewhat established. He distinguishes between '(1) those [cosmological arguments] that maintain the impossibility of an infinite temporal regress, (2) those that maintain the impossibility of an infinite essentially ordered regress, and (3) those that have no reference to an infinite regress at all'. The cosmontological argument belongs typologically to group (3). For a different typology, see Oppy (2009), where cosmological arguments are classified in terms of 'first', 'chain', and 'totality'. As far as I can see, these three latter types conveniently correspond to Craig's (1), (2), and (3); hence the cosmontological argument belongs to Oppy's 'totality'.

[10] As confirmed by William L. Rowe (1998, pp. 3–4), '[t]he [cosmological] arguments are *a posteriori* in that they begin by reasoning about facts concerning our world that we know by means of experience … [viz.] some simple fact such as that there are things that are being changed by other things, or that there are things that owe their existence to other things'.

[11] Peter van Inwagen (2001, p. 59) states a typical cosmological premise: 'If a property *F* has, as a matter of contingent fact, a non-empty extension, then any explanation of this fact must somehow involve beings (concrete things) that do *not* have *F*.'

nothing greater can be thought',[12] someone who is 'supremely perfect',[13] or one without boundaries in whom 'perfection is absolutely infinite',[14] simply by having us ruminating on the *notion* of such a being.[15] Indeed, Anselm of Canterbury, its chief architect, tries to demonstrate that only a literal fool can maintain that there is no God (cf. Psalms 14:1; 53:1):

> So even the fool must admit that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists at least in his understanding, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood exists in the understanding. And surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot exist only in the understanding. For if it exists only in the understanding, it can be thought to exist in reality as well, which is greater. So if that than which a greater cannot be thought exists only in the understanding, then that than which a greater *cannot* be thought is that than which a greater *can* be thought. But that is clearly impossible. Therefore, there is no doubt that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.[16]

But what exactly is Anselm arguing here? Let x be that than which nothing greater can be thought. Apparently, Anselm is saying that x exists in the mind insofar as it is understood. But that which exists in the mind is merely an idea (as Kant already has reminded us). So, how is this idea of x – or x as an idea in someone's mind – related to x in reality (supposing that x does exist in reality)? Are we looking at two different exemplifica-

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12 Anselm ([1078, §2] 1995, p. 100).

13 Descartes ([1640, §3] 1968, p. 124).

14 Leibniz ([1714, §41] 1998b, p. 273).

15 Like Oppy (1995, p. 1), I therefore think 'it would be most appropriate to call these arguments "*a priori* arguments for the existence of God"'. Following Kant, however, 'it has been established practice to call these kinds of arguments "ontological arguments", and I see no urgent need to depart from this tradition' (*ibid.*). In his comprehensive book, Oppy surveys just about every known ontological argument. He identifies six major kinds thereof: (1) definitional arguments; (2) conceptual arguments; (3) modal arguments; (4) Meinongian arguments; (5) experiential arguments; and (6) Hegelian arguments. In his (2011b) entry he adds these two: mereological arguments and higher-order arguments. For the standard anthology of texts from the 11th century up until the 1960's, see Plantinga (1965).

16 Anselm ([1078, §2] 1995, p. 100). Some scholars claim that this passage is not crucial to Anselm's argument. Notably, Norman Malcolm (1960) argues that the version of the argument which Anselm gives already in the next section is superior. In any case, according to Yujin Nagasawa (2010, p. 73), '[t]here is a consensus among Anselm scholars that Anselm's presentation of the ontological argument in the relevant texts, viz., chs 2–5 and 15 of his *Proslogion* and the response to Gaunilo, are [sic] ambiguous'.

tions of a divine property, *X*-ness? Well, certainly not on Anselm's view, according to which God does not have any properties at all, let alone the property of being that than which nothing greater can be thought.[17] And in any case, this suggestion would seem to imply that there are two gods, one in the mind and another in reality, each of which is that than which a greater cannot be thought. Perhaps as a better suggestion, then, maybe *x* as an idea in the mind and *x* in reality are supposed to be numerically identical? But then what if, by analogy, the fool hears and understands the phrase 'the founder of Plato's Academy'? This new suggestion would appear to mean that Plato, *in person*, not merely a mental representation thereof, is in the fool's mind; and this seems odd.[18] But be this as it may; Anselm himself might have been able to come up with a third option. It is sufficient for present purposes to recall J. N. Findlay's estimation that '[t]he proofs [of God's existence] based on the necessities of thought are universally regarded as fallacious'.[19] As J. L. Mackie claims, and I tend to agree, 'the crucial weakness of any ontological proof … [is] the impossibility of establishing some concrete reality on the basis of a mere definition or concept'.[20] And yet, to reiterate Kant's assessment, the concept of a highest being is very useful in that it 'satisfies all questions *a priori* that can be posed about the inner determinations of a thing, and it is therefore an ideal without equal'.[21] Again, the main purpose of this book is to argue that these ideal resources of the ontological argument can be used to boost the cosmological ditto, resulting in a cosmontological case for

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[17] The paradoxical idea that God *is* that than which nothing greater can be thought without having the *property* of being that than which nothing greater can be thought is a consequence of the doctrine of divine simplicity: a doctrine which Anselm accepted but which is radically at odds with the cosmontological idea. We shall have reason to return to this doctrine on a couple of occasions in §§3.1–2.

[18] On this note, Nicholas Everitt (2004, p. 36) gives a nice illustration: 'I understand the phrase "tenth planet of the Sun", so that to use Anselm's terminology, we could say that the tenth planet of the Sun "exists in my mind". But that is compatible with saying that the tenth planet of the sun does not exist *at all* – or more idiomatically, that there is no tenth planet. The situation is not, as it were, that astronomers have located the tenth planet in my mind, and then have the further task of locating it in the solar system. What is "in my mind" is better described as a bit of linguistic competence, not a shadowy planet.'

[19] Findlay (1948, p. 176). This may no longer be universally the case. Writing some thirty years later, Joel I. Friedman (1980, p. 301) notes that the ontological argument 'continues to find adherents even in the present day, though admittedly very few'.

[20] Mackie (1982, p. 52).

[21] Kant ([1781/1787, A611/B639] 1998, p. 573).

the existence of an all-perfect GOD: a being who is whatever it is better – intrinsically, absolutely, simpliciter – to be than not to be.

To this end I will use the tools of contemporary analytic philosophy, at least those that are regularly being used in the English-writing context with which I am familiar. These include, of course, the axioms and rules of classical logic, inductions, inferences to the best explanations, assumptions for *reductio*, assessments of hypothetical scenarios, appeals to intuitions, et cetera. Like analytic philosophers at large, I am more interested in the validity of ideas and cogency of arguments than in their historical origin and subsequent reception. This interest is reflected in the bibliography, a large part of which consists of references to recent publications in analytic philosophy journals of international recognition. The recentness is important as a sound argument obviously cannot rely on assumptions that have already been refuted, and the journal format is suitable, if not important, too, as it encourages writings that are to the point.

Finally, I should add a terminological clarification. As far as possible, I try to avoid personal pronouns when referring to GODs or God. Sometimes, however, on pain of stylistic awkwardness, considering that plural pronouns are simply not acceptable when discussing the primary matter of monotheism, I choose to adopt the all but omnipresent English usage of masculine pronouns in this regard. Not because a GOD (if such there is) is more male than female, but rather because it would be confusing to use the feminine pronouns while quoting authors who use the masculine ones.

1.2 Previous research

As said, the cosmontological argument is an endeavour to bridge the 'gap problem' usually associated with traditional cosmological arguments. But of course proponents of the traditional arguments try to build bridges themselves. Notably, Aristotle argues that the prime mover is a 'supreme and eternal living being', one whose 'supreme pleasure' is a 'fit object of wonder' and thus one who is properly called 'God'.[22] Usually, however, these bridges rely on quite a number of supporting constructions, each of which is responsible for the addition of yet another divine attribute.[23]

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[22] Aristotle ([350 BC, §7.1072b] 1998, p. 374).

[23] As Kant ([1781/1787, A606/B634] 1998, p. 570) puts it: 'In this cosmological argument so many sophistical principles come together that speculative

Thus Samuel Clarke needs only twenty pages to prove (or so he thinks) the existence of an unchangeable, independent, necessary, and eternal being, but about sixty-five additional pages to prove that this being is, in turn, intelligent, free, omnipresent, omnipotent, and infinite in wisdom and 'all other moral perfections'.[24] By contrast, in his book-long analysis of Clarke's argument, William L. Rowe devotes no less than eight times more space to assessing the arguments of the first twenty pages than those of the latter sixty-five, pronouncing that the latter are not of 'equal merit' to the former.[25] What is distinct about the cosmontological architecture is that it does not rely on additional philosophical scaffoldings so as to reach into the conceptual realms of the divine. Or to be more specific, while the traditional cosmological arguments typically try to predicate of its inferred ultimate entity x one divine attribute after another, so as to eventually justify the identification of x as God, the cosmontological argument predicates of x all of the divine attributes at once. Recall, its central idea is simply that, in order to be able to explain why the class of non-GODs is non-empty, we need to invoke the causal efficacy of at least one GOD, that is, an all-perfect being who is whatever it is better to be than not to be.

Again, to my knowledge, this idea has not been pursued elsewhere. It has, however, been hinted at. In a novel but overlooked paper, 'A modal cosmological argument', Brian Leftow proceeds from the premise – call it p – that 'there exist just the changeable things that do exist', via a few additional premises, to the conclusion that, roughly, there exists something unchangeable which at least partially explains p.[26] As Leftow says, while '[t]his abstract affirmation is a far cry from the claim that God exists',[27] it still provides *some* confirmation of theism 'in that the existence of a … [p]-explainer is one consequence one would expect if God exists'.[28] But here we need not go into details. What is important for our purposes is that Leftow, towards the closing stages of his paper, addresses the 'problem of identification', namely, the question of how to identify the immutable p-explainer with God.[29] Having given different sugges-

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reason seems to have summoned up all its dialectical art so as to produce the greatest possible transcendental illusion'.

[24] Clarke ([1704, §12] 1998, p. 83), emphasis removed.
[25] Rowe (1998, p. xx).
[26] Leftow (1988, p. 163).
[27] *Ibid.* (p. 159).
[28] *Ibid.* (p. 185).
[29] *Ibid.* (p. 183).

tions, he finally proposes that one may 'try to develop other cosmological arguments patterned after the first' – notably, one that concludes 'to the existence of a perfect being'.[30] Thus, by parallel reasoning, one may proceed from the premise *q* that 'there exist all and only the imperfect beings there actually are', via a few additional premises, to the conclusion that, roughly, there is something perfect which at least partially explains *q*.[31] Importantly, Leftow's premises *p* and *q* are meant to be understood as claims about certain properties being exemplified, thus conforming to the usual rationale of cosmological arguments. But then *q* may just as well be reformulated in our own terms, resulting in the cosmontological claim that the class of non-GODs is non-empty. However, Leftow's proposal remains only a sketch. Carrying it out, he says, 'would require far more space than I now have',[32] and he postpones prospective work 'for another day'.[33]

Next, we need to consider a recent article by N. M. L Nathan, 'Exclusion and sufficient reason', which shaped the formation of my own cosmontological idea. In this short paper Nathan offers a cosmological argument for the existence of a 'superhuman' being: 'a single conscious, non-material, eternal, omnipotent, uncaused cause'.[34] What is important to note here is that Nathan formulates an elegant principle, 'Exclusion', a modification of which will be at the centre of our own argument. In Nathan's words, it says that 'for any class, if there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of that class then there is at least one non-member of that class which causes it not to be empty'.[35] While this is merely one way of stating the underlying principle of all cosmological arguments, its employment of non-empty classes rather than of exemplified properties is highly informative in that it brings out exactly what the cosmological rationale is logically all about, commending itself to methodical assessment. This alone turns Nathan's article into an original and noteworthy contribution.

Also, we should mention a paper which from a cosmontological perspective has an attention-grabbing title: 'From facts to God: An onto-cosmological argument'.[36] Here William F. Vallicella comes up with an

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[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] *Ibid.* (p. 184).
[33] *Ibid.* (p. 185). As confirmed by e-mail (2011-04-27), Leftow has since not taken it further.
[34] Nathan (2010, p. 392).
[35] *Ibid.* (p. 391).
[36] Vallicella (2000).

argument that 'is neither ontological nor cosmological'.[37] Reduced to a minimum, it goes like this: 'It is possible that facts exist; if it is possible that facts exist, then God exists; therefore, God exists'.[38] However, this argument does not argue (nor does it purport to argue) for the existence of an all-perfect being. After having established that 'an absolutely necessary being' exists, namely, a 'unifier', a metaphysical ground for the 'possibility of facts', Vallicella adopts a usual cosmological 'bottom-up' approach, treating the concept of God not as 'something given' but rather as 'something to be worked out'.[39] By a battery of additional arguments, he then reaches the conclusion that the unifier in question is a 'necessarily existent mind', indeed, a 'proto-God'.[40] By then, however, one wonders about the title of the paper and the opening statement of the argument, both of which have turned out to be rather misleading. Nonetheless, Vallicella is right in describing his argument as neither ontological nor cosmological. In my view it is a pro(to)-theistic contribution deserving of attention – even though it does not really conclude that God (let alone a GOD) exists.

Last and least, I ought to mention a piece of my own: 'The cosmontological argument for the existence of God'. In this text, the outcome of a conference presentation at the University of Kent at Canterbury in 2009, I make my first attempt at transforming 'our cosmological skeleton from contingency into a full-blooded cosmontological argument for the existence of an entity than which nothing greater can be thought'.[41] What makes this version of the argument obsolete is, especially, its failure to identify, analyse, and draw the correct consequences of the underlying rationale of cosmological arguments (as captured by Exclusion).

For present purposes of orientation, this, I hope, will do. Suffice it to reiterate that, apart from Leftow's first and only draft, I know of no-one else's writing that exemplifies something like the cosmontological idea.

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37 *Ibid.* (p. 157).
38 *Ibid.*
39 *Ibid.* (p. 173).
40 *Ibid.* (p. 178).
41 Lembke (2012, p. 438).

2 THE EXISTENCE OF AT LEAST ONE GOD

The cosmontological argument revels in complementary classes. Classes, in this context, should be understood 'logically' rather than 'mathematically', namely, as extensions of properties rather than as combinatorially determined sets.[1] But the extension of a property *F* encompasses all and only those objects which possess *F*. Thus, for example, the property of being a book – of bookhood – is had, obviously, by all and only books. Likewise, the property of not being a book – of non-bookhood – is had by all and only non-books. Indeed, by the law of bivalence, every entity either is, or is not, a book.[2] If it is, it belongs to (or is a member of, or is an element in) the class of books. If it is not, it belongs to (or is a member of, or is an element in) the class of non-books. And these two classes – of books and of non-books – are complementary; together they cover the entire realm of reality. In fact, all properties are like this: they draw a clear metaphysical line of demarcation. Or, to use another metaphor, all properties separate the world into 'two heaps' depending on whether or

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[1] As Penelope Maddy (1983, pp. 118–9) explains, the modern notion of sets as iterative, hierarchically organized entities was developed by Zermelo, but '[t]he contrasting idea of classes as extensions of properties, or better, of concepts, formed the groundwork of Frege's theory'. By drawing this distinction, I do not attempt to avoid the threat of Russellian and Cantorian paradoxes (to be addressed in §3.3.3 below). Still, it seems to alleviate a worry raised by Rowe in his (1998) book: a worry seemingly shared by Leftow (1988, p. 165). Rowe tells us that 'I have for some years regretted my use of *sets* in trying to explain why the proponents of the Cosmological Argument believed that if every being is dependent we are left with a question that could have no answer at all … And, of course, this was bound to be confusing to the reader since a set by definition cannot have different members than it has. It would have been better to put the point I was making in terms of properties, rather than sets' (Rowe 1998, p. xix). That is to say, it would have been better if Rowe had put the point in terms of *classes*.

[2] There is some ambiguity surrounding the exact formulation of the law of bivalence, but I take it to be the conjunction of the law of non-contradiction, $(\forall p)\ \sim(p\ \&\ \sim p)$, and the law of excluded middle, $(\forall p)\ (p \vee \sim p)$. So, on this interpretation, the law of bivalence is the claim that every proposition is exclusively either true or false.

not things possess them.[3] This goes, too, for the property of GOD-hood, of being whatever it is better to be than not to be: every existent either is, or is not, a GOD.

In fact, it is its preoccupation with GOD-hood that gives the cosmontological argument its distinctively 'ontological' flavour. Like its 'cosmological' cousins, however, it purports to explain something, namely, why the class of non-GODs is non-empty. But in order to explain this general a posteriori fact, it is necessary to invoke the efficacy of at least one GOD – or so, at any rate, the argument goes. Partly inspired by N. M. L. Nathan, the principle – 'Exclusion' – underlying this and other cosmological arguments can be conveniently formulated as follows:

> Exclusion: For any class *C*, if *C* is non-empty, there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of *C* iff (if and only if) there is at least one non-member of *C* which causes *C* to be non-empty.[4]

By now, however, the cosmontological argument almost presents itself.

2.1 The cosmontological argument

If there is an explanation for the all but self-evident fact that the class of non-GODs is non-empty, it follows by Exclusion that there is at least one GOD. This implication is at the heart of the cosmontological argument, which can be formulated thus:

(1) The class of non-GODs is non-empty.
(2) Exclusion: For any class *C*, if *C* is non-empty, there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of *C* iff there is at least one non-member of *C* which causes *C* to be non-empty.
(3) There is an explanation for the non-emptiness of the class of non-GODs.

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[3] Maddy (1983, pp. 118–9). Like classical logic, then, these complementary classifications presuppose the law of bivalence.

[4] In Nathan's words, recall, Exclusion claims that 'for any class, if there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of that class then there is at least one non-member of that class which causes it not to be empty' (Nathan 2010, p. 391). I choose to borrow Nathan's term, 'Exclusion', partly as recognition of his novel formulation, partly because I am convinced that all who accept Nathan's version will accept mine as well.

(4) Hence, there is at least one GOD who causes the class of non-GODs to be non-empty.

Though it is not 'immediately self-evident' in the analytical sense that its truth is apparent as soon as one grasps its meaning, premise (1) is almost incontrovertible.[5] Only Anselmian pantheists (if such there be) might be inclined to reject it; but then they believe in a GOD anyway. Rather, the cosmontological challenge is to validate premises (2) and (3); and it is to this twofold task we must now turn.

2.2 In support of premise (2)

To begin, then, reconsider Exclusion:

(2) For any class *C*, if *C* is non-empty, there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of *C* iff there is at least one non-member of *C* which causes *C* to be non-empty.

As for the notion of classes, we have already said enough: a class is meant to be understood as the extension of a property rather than as a combinatorially determined set. As far as I can see, this does not commit us to Platonic realism about classes: the view that classes exist as independent *abstracta*. To say that a certain class *C* is non-empty is logically equivalent to saying that there exists at least one entity which exemplifies the defining feature of *C* – not necessarily to saying that there exists a property *C* which is exemplified by at least one entity.[6] As for the notions of explanation and causation, however, nothing has so far been said; so here we must at least make some clarifications.

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[5] Audi (1999, p. 214).

[6] In other words, one might be a nominalist and still interpret the cosmontological premises in a meaningful way. By comparison, 'the claim that *the class of sedans is a subclass of the class of cars* can be reworded simply by saying that *all sedans are cars*' (Klement 2010a, p. 24). Indeed, as Joseph Melia (2005, p. 70) suggests, '[o]ur sensible nominalist rejects any *metaphysical* analyses of "*a* is *F*" in terms of the predicates that *F* falls under, or the sets that *a* is a member of'. That is, while obviously accepting that certain things have certain properties, *so to speak*, nominalists reject the idea that these properties exist in their own right. Instead, as Neil Tennant (1997, p. 316) opines, nominalists believe that a locution such as 'there are *n Fs*' is to be understood as involving the modifier '*n*' adjectivally, not substantivally; hence 'it is a locution available to the nominalist who confines herself to the unextended language of ordinary predication and quantification'. (See Jubien (1997, pp. 31–32) for a not overly technical analysis of this 'somewhat unusual' adjectival function.)

Intuitively, if a fact or event (or perhaps some other relatum) *x* causes another fact or event *y*, then *x* explains *y*. This is sometimes called one of the 'platitudes' of causation.[7] Even if *x* explains *y*, however, *y* might lack a cause. In mathematics, less fundamental assumptions (theorems) may be explained by reference to more fundamental dittos (axioms), but this does not mean that the latter are causing the former.[8] Apparently, then, it cannot just be taken for granted that a candidate explanation for the non-emptiness of a non-empty class is causal in character. This, I think, is one reason why Exclusion is not a trivial principle. If at least one non-member of *C* causes *C* to be non-empty, it is perfectly clear that there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of *C*. But the reverse conditional might be a matter of some controversy. In other words, it might be disputed whether an explanation for the non-emptiness of *C* really entails that at least one non-member of *C* causes *C* to be non-empty. Accordingly, the ensuing substantiation of premise (2) will focus exclusively on this latter entailment.

Yet as to how explanation and causation are to be properly analysed, I shall have to pass. For present purposes, however, this much is clear as regards causation: to cause *C* to be non-empty is to create, or assemble, or somehow come up with, or turn something into, at least one member of *C* – assuming that *C* would have been empty, had this work or action not been done.

2.2.1 *Exclusion by exclusion*

Let us now turn to the actual claim under consideration. In what follows next, I shall argue that it can be shown precisely by exclusion (of an inductive character) that Exclusion is a very plausible principle. Indeed, if the non-emptiness of *C* is not to be explained in terms of the causal effi-

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[7] Psillos (2002, p. 6).

[8] The fact that axioms can explain theorems without therefore causing them might suggest that Exclusion has been falsified. This, however, is not the case. If an axiom A explains a theorem T, this means that A explains the *propositional content* of T – not the *existence* of T (supposing that T does exist: a claim which nominalists are likely to deny). But Exclusion is all about existence: to say that the class of theorems is non-empty is to say that there exists at least one entity which exemplifies the property of theorem-hood, and this non-emptiness has an explanation if and only if at least one non-theorem causes the class of theorems to be non-empty. Therefore, as regards the non-emptiness of the class of theorems, axioms are neither its cause nor its explanation.

cacy of at least one non-member of *C*, how then to explain it? Surveying the options, we shall explore thirteen ways in which it may be envisioned that the non-emptiness of *C* can be explained even if in fact there is no non-member of *C* which causes *C* to be non-empty. If it is protested that we do not know what to look for in this quest, given that we have not seen an independent analysis of explanation, I answer that we shall have to look for anything that is even vaguely reminiscent of whatever philosophical and linguistic intuitions we may have in this regard. Now, to this end, and to save space, let '*C*m' be shorthand for 'member of *C*', and let *p* be the fact that *C* is non-empty. Hence *p* is the *explanandum*, that which is to be explained.

As promised, then, here follow a dozen and one rival proposals – disguised as questions – how to explain *p*.

Proposal 1: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that at least one *C*m has been made thus by another *C*m? No. By referring to another *C*m (which perhaps has been made a *C*m by yet another *C*m, *ad infinitum*), this purported explanation presupposes, and thus does not explain, precisely that which is meant to be explained, namely, *p*.

Proposal 2: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that at least one *C*m has made itself a *C*m? Well, yes, but this is just one way to exemplify Exclusion! Suppose that some being *b* indeed has made itself a *C*m. As Exclusion requires, then, there is some non-*C*m which causes *C* to be non-empty because clearly *b* must have been a non-*C*m prior to the changeover.

Proposal 3: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that at least one *C*m has been made thus by at least one entity which is both a *C*m and not a *C*m? No. Even if it should be granted that dialetheism is true (and, accordingly, that the law of non-contradiction is false), this suggested explanation fails, although it aptly pinpoints the ancient problem of vagueness (and its associated sorites paradox). For, by referring to an entity which is supposed to be both a *C*m and not a *C*m (or perhaps, given a fuzzy set theoretic account, a *C*m only to some degree), it too presupposes, and hence does not explain, *p*.

Proposal 4: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that at least one *C*m has been made thus by at least one entity which is neither a *C*m nor a non-*C*m? No, at least not if we confine ourselves to the bivalent framework of classical logic. For, if a being *b* is neither a *C*m nor a non-*C*m (supposing for the sake of argument that this is possible) then *b* is both a non-*C*m

and not a non-*C*m, which by double-negation elimination (the rule that $\sim\sim p$ entails p) is to say that *b* is both a non-*C*m and a *C*m, which effectively reduces this suggestion to #3. Also, of course, by the law of excluded middle there is no existent which is neither a *C*m nor a non-*C*m to begin with.[9] Hence, since the present proposal is at odds with two classical principles of logic, it cannot be used as a refutation of Exclusion. In particular, even if excluded middle is challenged by the problem of vagueness, double-negation elimination, whose 'intuitive' credibility is 'easily shown',[10] enjoys a strong linguistic support. For suppose again that *b* is not a non-*C*m (which is the case, I gather, if indeed *b* is neither a *C*m nor a non-*C*m). What does this mean if not that *b* is in fact a *C*m? By comparison, if it is not the case that *b* is not, say, an adult, surely *b* is an adult? Or if *b* is not insignificant, surely *b* is significant? As a result, the present suggestion how to explain p is opposed not only to two principles of classical logic but to quite ordinary linguistic usage as well.[11]

Proposal 5: Can p be explained by suggesting that at least one *C*m is eternal? No. Even if at least one *C*m is eternal, this does not offer an explanation for p. It merely informs us that at least one *C*m is not only a present but a perpetual *C*m. To propose this as an explanation for p is

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[9] According to E. J. Lowe (2002, p. 83), it is 'relatively uncontroversial' to take the law of excluded middle, as exemplified by 'any proposition of the form *either p or not-p*, such as the proposition that either grass is green or it is not the case that grass is green', as a 'necessary truth'.

[10] Tomassi (1999, p. 78).

[11] As an aside, it might be noted that even if one accepts a non-bivalent logical framework (like supervaluationism or some many-valued logic) to accommodate the phenomenon of vagueness, one merely postpones the problem in hand. To see this, suppose again that *b* is neither a *C*m nor a non-*C*m. Presumably, then, *b* belongs to the grey zone class of borderline cases or penumbrae: entities which are (supposed to be) neither members nor non-members of *C*. To illustrate, let *A* be the class of adults, let $\sim A$ be the class of non-adults, and let A^* be the borderline class of beings who are members neither of *A* nor of $\sim A$. So, *b* belongs to A^*. But if one was prompted by the mind-twisting perplexities of vagueness to suggest the existence of A^* in the first place, one will in effect have doubled one's headache by this postulate because the boundaries between *A* and A^* and between A^* and $\sim A$ are no sharper than the original boundary between *A* and $\sim A$. Needless to say, it is futile to deal with this second-order difficulty by postulating two additional borderline classes: one between *A* and A^* and one between A^* and $\sim A$. On this strategy, at least for all I can see, it rather has to be assumed that there is a continuous hierarchy of higher-order borderline classes, thereby in effect abandoning the possibility of any kind of categorical, or even individual, distinctness.

just as illuminating as to explain God's alleged all-goodness by pointing out that God has always been all-good.

Proposal 6: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that there has always been at least one *C*m, even if no particular *C*m is eternal? No. To say that there has always been at least one *C*m is merely to repeat *p*, if only with a needless twist, namely, that *p*, which remains to be explained, has always been a fact.

Proposal 7: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that at least one present *C*m has been made thus by at least one former *C*m? No. That which is to be explained (*p*) is the non-emptiness, *simpliciter*, of *C*, not the *present* non-emptiness of *C*. That is to say, *p* is meant to be interpreted as a tenseless fact. Should anyone so prefer, however, *p* can just as well be interpreted in temporal terms. Just let *C* signify the union of the class of present *C*ms and the class of former *C*ms. Clearly, then, on pain of yet again presupposing that which is to be explained, *p* cannot be explained by reference to the causal efficacy of any former *C*m.

In particular, this explains why Cleanthes's famous contention that, 'in tracing an eternal succession of objects, it seems absurd to inquire for a general cause',[12] is no threat to Exclusion. Indeed, commenting on this quote, Jordan Howard Sobel finds it 'remarkable' that Hume left the impression that Demea had 'no comeback to Cleanthes's contention'.[13] And Rowe similarly remarks:

> If I ask why *M* [the class of men] has the members it does rather than none, it is no answer to say that *M* always had members … To make this clear, we may rephrase our question as follows: 'Why is it that *M* has now and always had members rather than never having had any members at all?' Surely we have not learned the answer to this question when we have learned that there always have been members of *M*…[14]

Proposal 8: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that by chance (or absolute metaphysical happenstance) there is at least one *C*m? No. Rephrased in the terminology of possible worlds, this purported explanation merely suggests that *p*, which is a fact in the actual world, is not a fact in all possible worlds: a suggestion which clearly does not explain why *p* is a fact in the actual world.

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[12] Hume ([1779, §9] 1993, p. 92).
[13] Sobel (2004, p. 216).
[14] Rowe (1998, p. 155).

Proposal 9: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that its instantiation (or obtaining) is more probable than its non-instantiation? No. This is only to say that the number of possible worlds in which at least one *C*m obtains is greater than the number of possible worlds in which no *C*m obtains. But obviously this does nothing to explain why at least one *C*m obtains in the actual world.

Proposal 10: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that at least one *C*m is a necessary entity which is essentially a *C*m? No. To propose an explanation for *p* along these lines is merely to suggest that at least one *C*m is a *C*m in all possible worlds. This amounts to saying about some actual being *b* that *b* is a *C*m not only in the actual world but in all other possible worlds as well.[15] But this explains neither why *b* is a *C*m, nor why *p* obtains, in the actual world.

Proposal 11: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that *C*, despite not containing a necessary entity which is essentially a *C*m, nevertheless has to contain 'something or other'?[16] No. To suggest that *C* must contain at least one entity is merely to repeat *p*, again with a needless twist, namely, that *p* is a fact not only in the actual world but in all possible worlds. This is like answering the question 'Why am I mortal?' by pointing out that everyone is mortal.

Proposal 12: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that the essence of at least one *C*m implies, or even is, existence? No. If indeed there is an essence *e* of some *C*m which somehow involves existence then by the law of bivalence *e* exclusively either is or is not a *C*m. If it is, again we have a suggestion which presupposes, and thus does not explain, *p*. If it is not, we have a suggestion (like #2) which merely states one possible way in which Exclusion might be exemplified. Either way, then, the present proposal does not threaten Exclusion.[17]

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[15] I owe this point to Lars Bergström (2004, p. 192). In an essay about the incomprehensibility of existence, he points out the epistemic vacuity of invoking God's alleged necessity as a means of explaining God's existence.

[16] Rundle (2004, p. viii). In the opinion of D. M. Armstrong (2006, p. 282) this kind of 'distributed necessity for contingent beings' is not 'very appealing'. Indeed, commenting on this particular issue, Erik J. Olsson (2005) predicts in *Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews* that 'most readers will find Rundle's position puzzling and paradoxical'.

[17] I might add that I find the idea of existence-entailing essences, or of things existing 'by an absolute necessity originally in the nature of the thing itself' (Clarke [1704, §3] 1998, p. 128), an idea taken up by Rowe (1998, esp. pp. 198–202; 260–3) and Kretzmann (1997, esp. p. 107), murky to begin with. A

Proposal 13: Can *p* be explained by suggesting that at least one *C*m self-exists (in the sense that it explains its own existence)? No. However the notion of explanation should be analysed, 'an explanation is meant to confer understanding'.[18] Indeed, as David-Hillel Ruben says, 'there is an epistemic requirement in explanation; facts explain facts only when the features and the individuals the facts are about, are appropriately conceptualized or named'.[19] But the present proposal, which cannot be interpreted in terms of #2, #10, or #12, is epistemically vacuous since it does not tell us by virtue of what at least one *C*m is supposed to self-exist. Simply being told that a certain *C*m self-exists does not amount to an explanation for why this *C*m exists, let alone why *C* is non-empty.

But this is it; I shall not try to concoct any more rival candidate explanations for *p*. For all I can see, the above thirteen attempts are, if not exhaustive, at least as good as any other. And yet none of them passes the examination. Indeed, except for #2 (alongside, on one interpretation, #12), which turned out to be just one possible way to satisfy the demands of Exclusion, their candidacy is altogether ruled out. As a result, I think it ought to be concluded that *p* has an explanation only if at least one non-*C*m causes *C* to be non-empty. Hence, since the reverse conditional – that at least one non-*C*m causes *C* to be non-empty only if *p* has an explanation – is uncontested, I believe it ought to be concluded that Exclusion – here reworded as the claim that *p* has an explanation if and only if at least one non-*C*m causes *C* to be non-empty – is true.

2.2.2 *Five corollaries*

Now, before proceeding to premise (3), we should try to acquaint ourselves better with Exclusion. To this end, let us highlight five of its notable metaphysical corollaries, listed below from A to E. By so doing, we shall be better prepared later to appreciate the rationale also of premise (3).

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good discussion of this issue is provided by Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, pp. 89–96) who conclude that 'the notion that God's existence can be explained by his essence does *not* appear to be viable' (p. 93). Likewise, Leftow (2003, p. 284) searches but cannot find any 'way to make sense of the claim that "the necessity of its nature" really explains something's existence'.

[18] Lowe (2002, p. 171).

[19] Ruben (1990, p. 180).

Corollary A: For any class *C*, if *C* is empty then there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of non-*C*. To take an obvious example, consider the necessarily empty class *Q* of cubic spheres. Precisely because it is empty, there is no *Q*m (member of *Q*) which might cause non-*Q* (the class of entities which are not cubic spheres) not to be empty. Hence, by Exclusion, it follows that the non-emptiness of non-*Q* necessarily lacks an explanation. Likewise, albeit perhaps not necessarily, it follows that the emptiness of the class of 1000000-legged animals (or of the class of 1000001-legged animals, or of the class of 1000002-legged animals...) implies the absence of an explanation for the non-emptiness of the complementary class in question. What this all means, of course, is that there are infinitely many classes whose respective non-emptiness simply cannot be accounted for. Far from saying that each case of metaphysical non-emptiness has an explanation, then, Exclusion entails an infinite number of brute facts.

This result might be held *against* Exclusion since it implies that the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), at least in its unrestricted, Leibnizian, or 'strong' version,[20] according to which every fact has an explanation, is false. As Dean L. Overman exemplifies, it might even be held that to argue against the PSR is to 'question the existence of reason itself'.[21] Moreover, somewhat ironically, insofar as some other cosmological arguments *require* the PSR,[22] it follows that our own cosmontological argument is incompatible with these fellow arguments for the existence of God.

As objections against Exclusion, however, these remarks do not carry much force. After all, the PSR is widely disputed anyway.[23] '[L]ike it or not', as Hud Hudson opines, '[t]he principle of sufficient reason is forever forfeit and … we have to live with bruteness somewhere',[24] a judge-

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[20] Cf. Gale and Pruss (1999, p. 463). Borrowing from one of G. W. Leibniz's different formulations, the PSR claims that 'nothing happens without its being possible for someone who understands things well enough to provide a reason sufficient to determine why it is as it is and not otherwise' (Leibniz [1714, §7] 1998a, p. 262) – although this reason 'will usually not be knowable by us' (Leibniz [1714, §32] 1998b, p. 272).

[21] Overman (2009, p. 25).

[22] On Rowe's (1998, pp. 7–8) characterization, indeed, cosmological arguments 'generally start from some relatively simple fact about the world and, by appealing to the Principle of Sufficient Reason or some principle governing causality, endeavor to establish the existence of a being that has the properties of the theistic God'.

[23] But see Pruss (2006) for a book-long attempt at rehabilitation.

[24] Hudson (2005, p. 13).

ment which is shared by many philosophers and natural scientists alike. Especially, it is often claimed that the PSR is not only implausible but 'demonstrably unsound' given the unpredictable but stochastically well-distributed phenomena of the sub-atomic world.[25] Adolf Grünbaum, for one, argues that '[t]he case of quantum theory shows that an empirically well-grounded theory can warrantedly discredit the tenacious demand for the satisfaction of a previously held ideal of explanation, such as Leibniz's Principle of Sufficient Reason'.[26]

In addition, there is another common objection against the PSR, indeed, one that many consider as 'a knock-down argument',[27] an 'influential and elegant reductio ad absurdum of the PSR'.[28] It is usually credited to Peter van Inwagen but similar versions were earlier proposed by James F. Ross and Rowe.[29] It goes something like this. Let *p* be the conjunction of all contingently true propositions, and suppose that the PSR is true (an assumption for reductio). So there is a proposition *q* that explains *p*. Now either *q* is contingently true or necessarily true. But it cannot be either. If *q* is contingently true then it is a conjunct of *p* and thus *p* ends up explaining itself, which is impossible. On the other hand, if *q* is necessarily true, it follows that *p*, too, is necessarily true (since a necessary truth cannot entail but necessary truths) – but obviously *p* is *not* necessarily true. Hence, by reductio, the PSR is false.[30] I agree with Timothy

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[25] Grünbaum (2004, p. 566). As Roland Omnès (1999, p. 150) points out, '[t]hings are very different in quantum mechanics, for in it events really occur at random. No cause is at work to make an excited atom decay at some specific moment. There are, of course, laws governing the whole process, but they only express the probability of the event taking place at one time rather than another.'

[26] Grünbaum (2004, pp. 566–67).

[27] Alexander (2008, p. 541).

[28] Pruss (2006, p. 97).

[29] van Inwagen (1983, pp. 202–4). Cf. Rowe (1998, pp. 99–114), where Ross's version, too, is addressed.

[30] This argument presupposes that if *q* explains *p*, then *q* entails *p*. As Richard Swinburne (2004, p. 79) says, 'a full explanation … is such that the *explanandum* (that is, the phenomenon requiring explanation) is deducible from it'. A lengthy attempt at undermining this assumption is made by Pruss (2006, pp. 97–125). In my view, however, van Inwagen's (1983, p. 203) analysis is perfectly sound: 'if *x* is a sufficient reason for *y*, then *x* must entail *y*. That is, it must be impossible for *x* to obtain without *y*'s obtaining. For if it were *possible* for *x* to obtain and *y* to fail to obtain, how could the obtaining of *x* be a *sufficient* reason for the obtaining of *y*?' Now this analysis in turn presupposes that, if *x* explains *y*, then *x* is a sufficient reason for *y*. Even if this too for some reason should be denied, one may simply agree with Oppy (2009, p. 39) in concluding

O'Connor in finding this rebuttal of the PSR 'unanswerable',[31] and so I conclude with Sobel that the PSR is a 'nice' but ultimately 'bad' idea.[32] That it is incompatible with Exclusion is yet another reason, and a very strong one at that, to conclude that it is false.

Corollary B: For any two complementary classes, even if neither class is empty, there will be at least one class whose non-emptiness lacks an explanation. So, for example, since at least one non-member of the class of books causes this class not to be empty, it follows, on pain of explanatory circularity, that the non-emptiness of the class of non-books lacks an explanation. Indeed, if the non-emptiness of the class of books is due to the causal efficacy of at least one non-book, it cannot also be the case that the non-emptiness of the class of non-books is due to the causal efficacy of at least one book, and thus by Exclusion there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of the class of non-books. In general terms, then, if at least one non-*C*m causes *C* not to be empty then it cannot also be the case that at least one *C*m causes non-*C* not to be empty. Accordingly, if the non-emptiness of *C* *has* an explanation, it follows by Exclusion, not only that non-*C*, too, is non-empty, but that the latter case of non-emptiness *lacks* an explanation – precisely because 'genuine explanations cannot be circular'.[33]

Corollary C: There is at least one non-empty positive (i.e. positively defined) class whose non-emptiness lacks an explanation. To see this, consider the following domain of sixteen items, each of which belongs to one of four positive classes:

*F*m *G*m *I*m *H*m
*F*m *F*m *F*m *G*m
*F*m *F*m *F*m *G*m
*G*m *I*m *F*m *H*m

In all: eight members of *F*, four members of *G*, two members of *H*, and two members of *I*. Now, as an assumption for reductio, suppose that there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of each positive class. By Exclusion, then, this implies that some non-*F*m (i.e. a *G*m, *H*m, or *I*m) causes *F* to be non-empty, that some non-*G*m (i.e. a *F*m, *H*m, or *I*m)

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that, at the very least, 'it is plausible that the explanation that is required will involve entailment'.

[31] O'Connor (2008, p. 80).
[32] Sobel (2004, p. 222).
[33] Lowe (2002, p. 344).

causes *G* to be non-empty, that some non-*H*m (i.e. a *F*m, *G*m, or *I*m) causes *H* to be non-empty, and that some non-*I*m (i.e. a *F*m, *G*m, or *H*m) causes *I* to be non-empty. This means, absurdly, that *F*-ness is metaphysically subsequent to non-*F*-ness, that *G*-ness is metaphysically subsequent to non-*G*-ness, that *H*-ness is metaphysically subsequent to non-*H*-ness, and that *I*-ness is metaphysically subsequent to non-*I*-ness – in short: that each positive property is exemplified subsequent to all the others. Hence, contrary to what was assumed, it cannot be the case that the non-emptiness of every non-empty positive class is due to the causal efficacy of at least one non-member of that class. *QED*, by Exclusion it follows that there is at least one non-empty positive class whose non-emptiness lacks an explanation.

Importantly, this corollary takes care of a potential worry. As one starts to unravel the implications of Exclusion, one might be baffled by the apparent ubiquity of positive classes whose non-emptiness *has* an explanation. Consider, for example, natural kind classes of such things as atoms, molecules, tigers, cats, mammals, vertebrates, planets, and galaxies. For each class it is clear enough that there is at least one non-member thereof which causes it to be non-empty. Hence the non-emptiness of the class of atoms is due to the causal efficacy of non-atoms, the non-emptiness of the class of molecules is due to the causal efficacy of non-molecules, and so on. As corollary C shows, however, this apparent ubiquity must not lead us to suspect that *all* instances of positive non-emptiness have an explanation. Again, by Exclusion there is at least one such instance which goes unexplained.

Corollary D: There can be at most one existent *x* which is metaphysically primary in that it causes the class of non-*x*s (entities that are not numerically identical to *x*) not to be empty. This is related to corollary B above. Thus, to illustrate, if a particular Higgs boson b_1 causes the class of non-b_1s not to be empty, it cannot also be the case that another Higgs boson b_2 (which of course is not numerically identical to b_1) causes the class of non-b_2s not to be empty – unless metaphysical bootstrapping is possible. Likewise, as a more colourful example, if Zeus causes the class of entities that are not numerically identical to Zeus not to be empty, it cannot also be the case that Dionysus causes the class of entities that are not numerically identical to Dionysus not to be empty.

Unlike the previous corollaries (A–C), however, corollary D might be slightly controversial. This is, presumably, because it might require that

there is such a thing as a particular entity's 'thisness', or *haecceity*, that is, 'a non-qualitative property responsible for individuation'.[34] Yet it is unclear if corollary D does require such a thing. Perhaps as a metaphysical fact there is, and indeed can be, no two qualitatively identical entities; hence any particular thisness is analysable in terms of qualitative properties. However, even if for argument's sake it is granted that two distinct entities can be qualitatively identical, it might still be the case that their numerical distinctiveness is analysable in terms of relational properties, such as spatial or temporal ones. And even if this, too, is disputed, there must be *something* which distinguishes b_1 from b_2 if indeed b_1 and b_2 are numerically non-identical entities. Thus it may be suggested, for want of an analysis, that that which distinguishes b_1 from b_2 is precisely their respective *haecceity*, a non-analysable metaphysical property of individuation. Anyway, what corollary D requires is only that numerical identity be treatable as *some* kind of property, and this requirement would appear to be more believable than its denial. For, if b_1's being numerically non-identical to b_2 is *not* a matter of b_1 lacking a property which b_2 has, it is hard to see on what grounds they are supposed to be two distinct things.

Corollary E: For any non-empty class *C*, if at least one *C*m causes non-*C* to be non-empty then *C* contains at least one simple (i.e. non-composite) element. To take a parodical example, suppose that at least one unicorn causes the complementary class of non-unicorns to be non-empty. Impossibly, this means that the parts of which unicorns are composed (such as, presumably, atoms, legs, bones, long straight horns, et cetera) ultimately owe their existence precisely to those things of which they are parts. This is impossible, of course, since in the absence of their parts, there are no unicorns which may cause these parts to exist. Contrary to what was assumed, then, it cannot be the case that the non-emptiness of the class of non-unicorns is effectuated by at least one unicorn.

Happily, corollary E takes care of a pack of potential cosmontological parodies. Consider, indeed, this exactly parallel argument, designed after the cosmontological original:

(1a) The class of non-unicorns is non-empty.
(2) Exclusion.
(3a) There is an explanation for the non-emptiness of the class of non-unicorns.
(4a) Hence, there is at least one unicorn which causes the class of non-unicorns to be non-empty.

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[34] Cross (2010).

(1a) is of course as undeniable as (1); and (2) is Exclusion left unmodified. As a result, in order to avoid (4a), (3a) must be false – and by corollary E (3a) *is* false because the class of unicorns, if non-empty, does not have at least one simple member. In parallel manners, corollary E shows why the cosmontological construction cannot be hijacked by parodical arguments for the existence of lost islands,[35] orbiting teapots,[36] flying spaghetti monsters,[37] and so on. Of course, this is not to say that the cosmontological construction is naturally protected against ridicule, but only that it cannot be used in farcical support of the existence of metaphysically primary and yet composite entities.

2.3 In support of premise (3)

Having thus substantiated Exclusion and highlighted some of its metaphysically significant consequences, let us instead direct our attention towards premise (3):

(3) There is an explanation for the non-emptiness of the class of non-GODs.

The obvious difficulty of validating this claim is that, as implied by corollary A, there are infinitely many non-empty classes whose non-emptiness *lacks* an explanation. Why, then, should we believe that the particular non-emptiness of the class of non-GODs *has* an explanation? It is the burden of the remainder of this chapter to try to answer this question – or at least to provide an argument in support of (3). To this end I shall argue, first, that there is a unique entity *x* that causes the class of non-*x*s not to be empty, and, secondly, that this metaphysically primary existent is ideally identified as a GOD.

2.3.1 *The primary existent*

Reconsider, to begin with, our example domain of sixteen items, each of which belongs to one of four positive classes:

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35 See Gaunilo ([1089] 1995, p. 124).
36 See Russell (1952).
37 See e.g. Boxer (2005).

*F*m *G*m *I*m *H*m
*F*m *F*m *F*m *G*m
*F*m *F*m *F*m *G*m
*G*m *I*m *F*m *H*m

By corollary C, recall, there is at least one non-empty positive class whose non-emptiness lacks an explanation. Suppose, then, that whatever else is the matter, there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of *F*. Now it is either the case, or it is not the case, that at least one *F*m causes non-*F* to be non-empty. If so, if indeed the non-emptiness of non-*F* is effectuated by at least one *F*m, it follows (i) that *all* non-*F*ms (i.e. all *G*ms, *H*ms, and *I*ms) are caused to exist, and (ii) that at least one non-*F*m is caused to exist by at least one *F*m. The second of these points is obvious, but the first may be less so. Still, to confirm it, we merely need to reiterate the counterfactual requirement involved in effectuating instances of metaphysical non-emptiness. As we noted already at an early stage, to cause a class *C* to be non-empty is for a non-*C*m to somehow bring about at least one *C*m: a creative action the absence of which implies the emptiness of *C*. So, if indeed at least one *F*m causes non-*F* to be non-empty, this presupposes that non-*F* would have been empty had it not been for this action. Yet this cannot be the case if non-*F* has an uncaused member, because such a member is, of course, causally independent (in respect of its existence) of whatever action at least one *F*m undertakes. So, indeed, if at least one *F*m causes non-*F* to be non-empty, all non-*F*ms are caused to exist. This, however, does not necessarily mean that all non-*F*ms are caused to exist by at least one *F*m, but only that at least one of them is thus caused to exist – as pointed out by (ii). What is ruled out is that some non-*F*m is ultimately independent of the creative action of at least one *F*m.

Interestingly, then, on the assumption that at least one *F*m causes non-*F* to be non-empty, it follows that non-*F* is devoid of any uncaused element – including, a fortiori, all uncausable or even absolutely necessary ditto. Hence, on this proviso, any uncaused existent belongs to *F*. But then suppose instead that it is *not* the case that at least one *F*m causes non-*F* to be non-empty. Hence, by Exclusion, there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of non-*F* either. But then corollary C can be reapplied to non-*F*, implying that at least one of *G*, *H*, and *I* is such that its non-emptiness lacks an explanation. On this latter scenario, then, suppose that, whatever else is the matter, there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of *G*. Now, by parallel reasoning, it is either the case, or it is not the case, that at least one *G*m causes non-*G* to be non-empty. In fact,

however, it cannot be the case that at least one *G*m causes non-*G* to be non-empty, because non-*G* contains *F*, the non-emptiness of which is assumed to be a brute fact. Still, it might be the case that at least one member of the union of *F* and *G* causes the complementary union of *H* and *I* to be non-empty. If so, it follows that all members of the union of *H* and *I* are caused to exist, at least one of which is caused to exist by at least one *F*m or *G*m. If not, it follows by Exclusion that there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of the union of *H* and *I* either. But on this latter scenario corollary C can be applied yet again, this time implying that the non-emptiness of at least one of *H* and *I* is a brute fact. Sooner or later, however, if our example domain of sixteen items looks anything like the actual world, which evidently contains a myriad of *explainable* instances of non-emptiness, by Exclusion there will be a union of classes, whose respective instances of non-emptiness are brute facts, at least one of whose members causes the complementary union to be non-empty; and then it likewise follows that all members of this latter union are caused to exist, at least one of which is caused to exist by at least one member of the former union.

To facilitate matters, however, let us return to our original assumption, prompted by corollary C, that there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of *F*. Hence, by Exclusion, it is not the case that at least one non-*F*m causes *F* to be non-empty. But if indeed the non-emptiness of *F* is not due to the creative action of at least one non-*F*m, it follows on pain of explanatory circularity (or, equivalently, metaphysical bootstrapping) that at least one *F*m is uncaused: it has not been caused to exist. (Of course, this is corollary C all over again.) Now, as illustrated earlier, we are supposing that *F* has eight elements, each of which is the sole member of a singleton class as follows:

F_1m F_2m F_3m F_4m
F_5m F_6m F_7m F_8m

Whatever else is the matter, then, suppose that F_1m is uncaused. Thus, by Exclusion, there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of F_1, meaning that there is no explanation for the existence of F_1m. Now F_1m either causes, or it does not cause, non-F_1 (i.e. the union of F_2–F_8) to be non-empty. If it does, it is ipso facto the primary existent: all other *F*ms (alongside all non-*F*ms) depend, ultimately, on F_1m. If it does not, by Exclusion there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of non-F_1 either. But then corollary C is applicable to the union of F_2–F_8, implying that at least one of these seven singleton classes is such that its non-emptiness lacks an explanation, meaning that at least one of F_2m–F_8m is uncaused.

Suppose, then, that whatever else is the matter, F_2m is uncaused. Accordingly, it might be the case that at least one member of the union of F_1 and F_2 (viz. F_1m or F_2m or both, cooperatively) causes the complementary union of F_3–F_8 to be non-empty. If so, it follows (i) that all of F_3m–F_8m are caused, and (ii) that at least one of F_3m–F_8m is caused by at least one of F_1m–F_2m. If not, it follows by Exclusion that there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of the union of F_3–F_8, and hence corollary C can be reapplied to the union of F_3–F_8, implying that at least one of these six singleton classes is such that its non-emptiness lacks an explanation, meaning that at least one of F_3m–F_8m is uncaused. And so on – there is no need to repeat ourselves. Sooner or later, there will be a class consisting of n uncaused *F*ms at least one of which causes the complementary class (consisting of all non-*F*ms plus all, if any, caused *F*ms) to be non-empty, meaning (i) that all members of the latter class are caused, and (ii) that at least one of these members is caused by at least one uncaused *F*m. And recall: our example domain of sixteen items (eight *F*ms, four *G*ms, two *H*ms, and two *I*ms) has been modelled, however abstractly, on the actual world: a world which contains at least one explainable instance – or rather a myriad of explainable instances – of non-emptiness.

Remarkably, then, given the way the world actually is, it follows by Exclusion that at least one of n members of the class non-K of uncaused existents causes K (i.e. the class of caused existents) to be non-empty. (This, I believe, captures the essence of most if not all cosmological arguments, namely, the idea of an uncaused cause: be it a necessary being, an unmoved mover, or a beginningless creator of the universe.) Unfortunately, I do not know how to determine, conclusively, the exact value of n. I do think, however, that there are at least three rather good reasons to conclude that it is 1.

First, there is Ockham's razor: we should not multiply entities beyond necessity. Or more precisely, we should not postulate more entities than necessary in order to explain that which we are seeking to explain. So, in order to explain the non-emptiness of K, we should not postulate more uncaused existents than necessary. But all that is required by Exclusion is 'at least one'. Accordingly, since 'no one wants a needlessly bloated ontology',[38] we postulate but one uncaused cause: a single primary existent which effectuates the non-emptiness of K.

[38] Spade and Panaccio (2011). Indeed, according to these authors (*ibid.*), Ockham's razor is utilized by 'virtually *all* philosophers, medieval or otherwise'.

Second, as Hoffman and Rosenkrantz opine, since we should try to explain as much as possible, we should 'not multiply brute facts unnecessarily'.[39] By Exclusion, however, every non-*K*m implies a brute fact. So, since it is hard to see, from an epistemic point of view, why there should have to be more than one non-*K*m, it is hard to see, too, why we should postulate more than one non-*K*m.

Third, provided that explanatory scope is not reduced, it makes good sense to prefer a metaphysically more elegant world view. Now recall corollary D: There can be at most one existent *x* which is metaphysically primary in that it causes the class of non-*x*s not to be empty. That is to say, there can be at most one thing on which the existence of every other (non-abstract) thing ultimately depends. (A note on abstract entities follows shortly.) But a world view that includes a unique ontological focal point is more elegant, presumably, than one that does not include such an absolute centre of activity. Therefore, since it is unlikely that the former kind of world view should have a comparatively smaller explanatory scope than the latter kind, rather than the other way around, it makes good sense to prefer a world view on which there is but one non-*K*m.

In sum, then, although the value of *n* has not been irrefutably determined, it seems to be more probable than not, for all we know, that the exact value of *n* is 1. Hence it is plausible to conclude that there is only one uncaused cause: a single existent *x* on which the existence of everything else (or at least of every other non-abstract entity) ultimately depends. In a moment, I shall argue that *x* is ideally identified as a GOD: a being who is whatever it is better to be than not to be. First, however, we need to address a potential problem.

Suppose that Platonism about abstracta (such as natural numbers and properties) is true. Presumably, then, abstracta are necessary entities which exist independently of anyone's mental activities, and so they cannot be caused to exist.[40] But then it follows that, far from having just one member, non-*K* is brimming with uncaused elements. Moreover, and perhaps more worryingly, it follows that the class of non-GODs, too, is

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[39] Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, p. 92), emphasis removed.

[40] 'This, at least', says John P. Burgess and Gideon Rosen (1997, p. 21), 'is the received view: virtually no one who holds that they [numbers] exist holds that they could perfectly well have failed to exist, so that one can meaningfully ask about the causes why they happen to exist; and virtually no one who holds that they do not exist holds that they could perfectly well have existed, so that one can meaningfully ask about the causes why they happen not to exist.'

crammed with uncaused things; and then by Exclusion there simply is no explanation for its non-emptiness, meaning that premise (3) is false.

Luckily, however, these complications are solvable. First, abstracta are 'entirely causally inert'.[41] So, even if non-*K* contains infinitely many uncaused abstracta, none of these is capable of causing *K* to be non-empty; and thus no *abstractum* is primary in the metaphysically relevant sense. Still, should anyone so prefer, the above arguments may be clarified accordingly: let *n* be, not the total number of elements in non-*K*, but only the number of non-abstract (i.e. concrete or causally efficacious) elements thereof. Hence I maintain that, even in case non-*K* contains an infinite number of abstracta, the exact value of *n* is 1.

Secondly, as regards abstracta and the class of non-GODs, the problem is easily circumvented. Consider the class of non-abstract non-GODs: the intersection, which is clearly non-empty, of the class of non-abstracta and the class of non-GODs. If there is an explanation for its non-emptiness then by Exclusion at least one of its non-members causes it to be non-empty. But a non-member of this intersection is either an abstractum or a GOD. Again, however, abstracta are causally inert, and so the only remaining candidate cause is a (non-abstract) GOD. Accordingly, to accommodate abstracta in a way that satisfies Platonists, the cosmontological argument may just as well proceed from the modified premise that the class of non-abstract non-GODs is non-empty; the conclusion will be just the same.

2.3.2 *A comparative strategy*

But now we need to determine the identity (or essential characteristics) of our supposedly unique, uncaused, metaphysically primary, causally efficacious existent *x*. Recall, to begin with, corollary E: For any non-empty class *C*, if at least one *C*m causes non-*C* to be non-empty then *C* contains at least one simple (i.e. non-composite) element. By corollary E, then, *x*, the sole (non-abstract) non-*K*m, is not made up of parts, and hence it cannot be, say, a neutron or the universe. By contrast, it might well possess different properties, just like an elementary particle can possess several physical characteristics (such as electric charge, mass, spin, and decay mode).

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[41] Balaguer (2009). Indeed, as Rosen (2009) clarifies, 'if any characterization of the abstract deserves to be regarded as the standard one, it is this: An abstract entity is a non-spatial (or non-spatiotemporal) causally inert thing'.

Still, of course, the identity of *x* is obscure. (Recall the introductory 'gap problem'.) Trying to disclose it, I shall utilize the following comparative method. Let 'maximal theism' be the cosmontological position according to which *x* is a GOD. By examining how this purported GOD-identity of *x* holds its own against some rival candidate identities of *x*, namely, those suggested by naturalism, 'minimal theism', and (for want of a better term) 'maximal diabolism', all of which will be clarified as we proceed, I will argue that maximal theism has an unsurpassable explanatory potential; and insofar as there is another identity of *x* which is equally explanatorily prolific as that of a GOD, the latter alternative still possesses an unparalleled clarity. If successful, then, this strategy will generate a fairly strong epistemic reason to conclude that *x* is indeed a GOD.

Before we get to work, however, we need to clarify what exactly a GOD-identity is supposed to be. In short, which are the essential characteristics of GOD-hood? And how are these characteristics implied by 'whatever it is better to be than not to be'? These questions will have to be postponed to §3.2; but the idea, very briefly, is this. Whatever is an actual moral being (or whatever belongs to the intersection of the classes of actually existing beings and moral beings) is greater, simpliciter, than whatever is not an actual moral being. But to be as great as possible with respect to actuality is, ideally, to be indestructible, incorruptible, uncreatable, ontologically independent, eternal, omnipresent, and necessary. Likewise, to be as great as possible with respect to morality is, ideally, to be omnibenevolent, impeccable, omnipotent, omniscient, all-free, all-just, all-merciful, all-loving, and (arguably, given a eudaemonist presupposition that a virtuous character is necessary and sufficient for happiness) all-blissful. Presumably, whatever has all of these excellences is greater, simpliciter, than whatever does not have all of them; and hence there is an intelligible sense in which *x* may be whatever it is better – absolutely better – to be than not to be. Importantly, however, though this brief analysis is, of course, inadequate as it stands here, there is a 'broad though not perfect consensus' that most of the aforesaid properties ought to be included in a traditional western list of the allegedly divine attributes.[42] And 'the regulating notion' behind these predications is precisely the notion of God as an all-perfect being: a being who is perfect in respect of every excellence and who therefore is, in *some* sense, whatever it is better to be than not to be.[43] Accordingly, I believe that, for pre-

[42] Everitt (2010, p. 78).
[43] Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, p. 13).

sent purposes, the identity of a GOD, an identity which is essentially captured by 'the philosopher's conception of God',[44] is sufficiently clear as it is.

2.3.3 *Naturalism*

Now, then, to launch our comparative strategy, consider, first, naturalism. As Charles Taliaferro explains, naturalism is currently 'the closest [intellectual] competitor with theism'.[45] It is 'sometimes characterized so broadly as to be without substance', but for present purposes it might be characterized as 'a scientifically oriented philosophy that rules out the existence of God, as well as the soul'.[46] Not all naturalists deny the existence of all non-physical entities, Taliaferro says, 'but most embrace some form of physicalism, according to which there is no thing or process that is nonphysical'.[47] Presumably, what is non-negotiable to a naturalist is that there are no *super*natural entities; but allegedly immaterial things like mental states might be naturalistically tolerable.[48]

So, on a naturalist world view, what is the identity of our supposedly unique, simple, causally efficacious and yet uncaused existent *x* on which the existence of every other (non-abstract) existent ultimately depends? What kind of thing is it? Well, presumably, since it cannot be a composite object, *x* is an elementary particle (be it zero-dimensional or not). Indeed, what other options are there? Perhaps *x* can be conceived of as some kind of pure undifferentiated energy: a physical ur-substance that might be said to permeate the universe? Or more radically still, perhaps it can be conceived of in Aristotelian terms of the allegedly indeterminate *hyle*, a formless prime matter completely devoid of any ordinary physical characteristics (like extension, density, or mass)? On these latter options, however, it becomes increasingly mysterious in what sense *x* is supposed

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[44] Sobel (2004, p. 11).
[45] Taliaferro (2009, p. 2).
[46] *Ibid*. As Michael Martin (1990, pp. 14–5) concurs, 'naturalism … rules out not only belief in a personal theistic God but also belief in an impersonal purpose that guides our destiny' along with 'belief in the immortality of the individual soul'.
[47] Taliaferro (2009, p. 2).
[48] At least in Bede Rundle's (2004, p. ix) view, neither 'the abstract' nor 'the mental' needs to be rejected as long as 'matter remains unchallenged' with respect to 'existential independence'.

to be material (as most naturalists would insist it is).[49] In addition, it becomes increasingly doubtful whether *x* even qualifies as a distinct entity to begin with.[50] Hence the safest option, I think, from a naturalist point of view, is to suggest that *x* is some kind of elementary particle.

For the sake of argument, suppose (falsely, no doubt) that *x* is an electron. Thus, among other properties, *x* has a mass of approximately 9.109×10^{-31} kilograms. This property alone entails that *x* is a member of infinitely many classes, such as, say, the class *O* of objects whose mass is greater than zero but less than 0.487 milligrams. So, since *x*, on which the existence of every other (non-abstract) object ultimately depends, belongs to *O*, it follows by Exclusion that the non-emptiness of *O* is a brute fact. By contrast, however, there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of non-*O* (since at least one of its non-members – not necessarily *x* – causes it not to be empty).

But now suppose instead that *x* is a GOD. Surely, then, *x* is a member of non-*O*.[51] Hence, inversely, while there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of non-*O*, there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of *O*. And now recall corollary B: For any two complementary classes there is at least one class whose non-emptiness lacks an explanation. Accordingly, regardless of whether *x* is an electron or a GOD, there is a brute fact involved in the complementary classes of *O* and non-*O*. As a result, neither naturalism nor maximal theism has an explanatory advantage in this regard.

A GOD, however, is whatever it is better to be than not to be. Paradigmatically, this entails that a GOD is omnipotent; hence, if indeed *x* is a GOD then *x* is a member of the class of omnipotent beings. On maximal theism, then, it follows by Exclusion that, whereas the non-emptiness of the class of omnipotent beings lacks an explanation, there is an explana-

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49 In regard to the Aristotelian option, 'no serious student or commentator of Aristotle has maintained that *materia prima* is anywhere in the physical world "actually" present' (Solmsen 1958, p. 243). Rather, it is 'nothing but a potentiality': a 'bare stuff' postulated to account for 'elemental change' [i.e. the process whereby one element of nature changes into another] (Robinson 1974, p. 168).

50 As Leibniz ([1704, §4.10.10] 1996, p. 439) points out, even if 'our general or specific conception of matter makes us speak of it as one thing … matter is not one individual thing'.

51 Strictly speaking, immateriality (or non-physicality) was not included in our deductions from 'whatever it is better to be than not to be' (although it may well be jointly derivable from some of the properties which were included, such as indestructibility, uncreatability, omnipotence, and omniscience). In line with traditional theism, however, I shall assume that a GOD is immaterial and hence has no mass at all.

tion for the non-emptiness of the class of non-omnipotent beings. Not so, however, if naturalism is true. On the latter account, there is no – indeed, *can* be no – omnipotent being. Thus, by Exclusion, the non-emptiness of the class of non-omnipotent beings is necessarily a brute fact. Interestingly, then, maximal theism has an explanatory advantage over naturalism with respect to the complementary classes of omnipotent and non-omnipotent beings. That the latter class is indeed non-empty is an undeniable fact, and maximal theism, unlike naturalism, has the resources to explain it. The same holds true with respect to most if not all of the other excellences which a GOD possesses, such as indestructibility, omnibenevolence, and omniscience. Unlike naturalism, maximal theism is capable of explaining why the classes of destructible beings, non-omnibenevolent beings, and non-omniscient beings are all non-empty. Hence there are quite a few facts about the world which maximal theism, as opposed to naturalism, is able to account for.

Or am I missing something here? It might be objected that even if naturalism is unable to account for the fact that the class of non-omnipotent beings is non-empty, maximal theism is likewise unable to account for the (supposed) fact that the class of omnipotent beings is non-empty. Thus, regardless of whether naturalism or maximal theism is assumed, the total number of brute facts will be the same; and so there is no reason to prefer maximal theism to naturalism with respect to explanatory potential.

This objection, however, is misconceived. On any metaphysical world view, as implied by corollaries A and B, it follows by Exclusion that there are infinitely many instances of non-emptiness for which there is no explanation. Remember, especially, corollary B: For any two complementary classes, even if neither class is empty, there is at least one class whose non-emptiness is a brute fact. But if indeed there are, and indeed can be, *no* pair of non-empty complementary classes such that both instances of non-emptiness have an explanation, maximal theism cannot be accused of explanatory impotence on the grounds that it only accounts for the non-emptiness of the class of non-omnipotent beings. On the contrary, in respect of the complementary classes of omnipotent and non-omnipotent beings, maximal theism is indeed explanatorily preferable to naturalism. Our epistemic ideal must be to explain as much as possible; and again there are quite a few facts about the world which maximal theism, unlike naturalism, is able to handle.

The objector may insist that I am still missing something. If naturalism is true, omnipotent beings are metaphysically impossible. According-

ly, although naturalism is unable to explain the non-emptiness of the class of non-omnipotent beings, via Exclusion it is able to explain why there can be no such explanation in the first place; and so the situation in hand is illuminated as far as possible. But this insistence itself misses the point. Just like naturalism, if true, explains why there can be no explanation for the non-emptiness of the class of non-omnipotent beings, maximal theism, if true, inversely explains why there can be no explanation for the non-emptiness of the class of omnipotent beings. At the end of the day, then, maximal theism, having a larger ontology at its disposal, still holds an explanatory advantage over its naturalist rival.

2.3.3 *Minimal theism*

Next, to continue our comparative investigation, consider (what I will call) minimal theism: belief in a powerful and benevolent but by no means all-perfect creator of the universe. Suppose that x is such a demiurge-like creature. So, for example, x is a member of the class P of powerful beings. Accordingly, by Exclusion, whereas the non-emptiness of P is a brute fact, there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of non-P. By comparison, however, maximal theism fares as well in this respect. A GOD, too, of course, belongs to P, so minimal theism holds no explanatory advantage when it comes to the complementary classes of P and non-P. By contrast, maximal theism again has the upper hand with respect to other complementarities. On the latter account, recall, x is not merely powerful but omnipotent; accordingly, by Exclusion there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of the class of non-omnipotent beings. But on minimal theism there is no such explanation to be found since there is no – presumably, *can* be no – omnipotent being. As a result, like its naturalist competitor, minimal theism is inferior to maximal theism with respect to explanatory scope.

Again, however, it might be objected that I am missing something here. Suppose that x is indeed what minimal theism suggests about it. Thus x is, for example, a powerful being. Moreover, x has an exact amount of power. Due to its demiurge-like character, let x be 'd-powerful', and let D be the class of entities which are exactly d-powerful and hence exactly as powerful as x. On minimal theism, then, there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of non-D, but this is not the case if maximal theism is true. Thus what we seem to have is rather an explanatory stalemate: either the minimal theistic scenario in which at least one

member of *D* causes non-*D* not to be empty (meaning that there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of non-*D* but none for the non-emptiness of the class of non-omnipotent beings), or the maximal theistic scenario in which at least one omnipotent being causes the class of non-omnipotent beings not to be empty (meaning that there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of the class of non-omnipotent beings but none for the non-emptiness of non-*D*). As a result, it seems as if neither scenario is explanatorily preferable to the other.

Yet neither this objection succeeds. It is true that, on the maximal theistic scenario, there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of non-*D*. But there *is* an explanation for the non-emptiness of *D* – if indeed *D* is non-empty.[52] For, on maximal theism, *x*, which is omnipotent, is a member of non-*D*, and hence it follows that at least one member of non-*D* causes *D* not to be empty. So, after all, maximal theism is just as well off as minimal theism with respect to the complementary classes of *D* and non-*D*. Minimal theism, by contrast, is inferior to maximal theism with respect to the complementary classes of omnipotent and non-omnipotent beings. For assume that there is an omnipotent being. Again, this being is a member of non-*D*. But it is all but indisputable that an omnipotent being cannot be caused to exist by non-omnipotent beings, no matter if these are d-powerful or not. Accordingly, if indeed there is an omnipotent being, it cannot be the case that *x* is merely d-powerful. In other words: the minimal theists cannot have their cake and eat it too. If at least one member of *D* causes non-*D* to be non-empty, as minimal theism suggests, there is no omnipotent being; but if there is no omnipotent being, by Exclusion there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of the class of non-omnipotent beings. Hence, to repeat, minimal theism is explanatorily inferior to maximal theism as regards the complementary classes of omnipotent and non-omnipotent beings, but maximal theism fares just as well as minimal theism as regards the complementary classes of *D* and non-*D*.

Here we might pause for a second to contemplate the conceptual utility of 'GOD'. The reason why maximal theism is wider in explanatory scope than minimal theism is that a GOD is whatever it is better to be than not to be: an all-perfect entity. Indeed, as Kant reminds us, the conception of the Supreme Being is 'an ideal without equal'.[53] Replace it

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[52] It might be noted that the old-time Gnostics, who actually believed in a demiurge, *also* believed in a far superior deity: the One.

[53] Kant ([1781/1787, A611/B639] 1998, p. 573).

with a conception of a lesser deity and something of explanatory value will inevitably be lost.

2.3.4 *Maximal diabolism*

But then there is a final candidate identity of x to consider, one that imitates maximal theism in that it maximizes the essential properties of x but also departs from it in a few crucial respects. Hence, lo and behold, maximal diabolism: belief in a simple, indestructible, incorruptible, uncreatable, ontologically independent, eternal, omnipresent, necessary, omnipotent, omniscient, and all-evil DEVIL (capitalized so as to avoid associations with lesser demons). Thus, whereas a GOD is omnibenevolent, impeccable, all-just, all-merciful, all-loving, all-free, and all-blissful, a DEVIL is, presumably, omnimalevolent, incorrigible, all-biased, all-ruthless, all-hateful, all-compulsive, and all-wretched. Surely no-one actually believes in a DEVIL, thus understood, but as a rival candidate identity of x, DEVIL-hood cannot be ruled out *ad populum* just like that.

Suppose, then, that x is a DEVIL. Thus, for example, x belongs to the class H of all-hateful beings, implying by Exclusion that there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of non-H. By contrast, on maximal theism, there is no explanation for this particular case of non-emptiness simply because x is a GOD and, as such, belongs to non-H. Moreover, on maximal theism, the scenario is very plausibly such that there is no – *can* be no – all-hateful being, for it is almost inconceivable that such a being might be caused to exist by non-all-hateful beings. Surprisingly, this means that maximal diabolism has an explanatory advantage over maximal theism in respect of the complementary classes of H and non-H. On the other hand, maximal theism has a corresponding advantage over maximal diabolism in respect of the complementary classes of all-loving and non-all-loving beings, for it is almost inconceivable, too, that an all-loving being can be caused to exist by non-all-loving beings. Here, indeed, then, do we seem to have an explanatory stalemate in hand: either the maximal diabolical scenario on which at least one Hm causes non-H not to be empty, a scenario which is explanatorily superior to maximal theism as regards the complementary classes of H and non-H, or the maximal theistic scenario on which at least one all-loving being causes the class of non-all-loving beings not to be empty, a scenario which is explanatorily superior to maximal diabolism as regards the complementary classes of all-loving and non-all-loving beings. For all its farcical

character, maximal diabolism thus presents a more serious threat than either naturalism or minimal theism to the cosmontological line of reasoning.

However, even if maximal diabolism may have as much explanatory potential as maximal theism with respect to metaphysical instances of non-emptiness, it is inferior with respect to conceptual clarity. A GOD is whatever it is better to be than not to be. From this arresting definition, this 'ideal without equal', all of the above listed divine attributes are derived – or at least it serves as the regulating idea behind their enumeration. But what if anything is the corresponding rationale behind the list of diabolical attributes? It clearly cannot be that a DEVIL is all-horrific, or whatever it is worse to be than not to be, because DEVIL-hood includes many paradigmatic excellences. But from this it seems to follow that the notion of a DEVIL is less uniform than the notion of a GOD. Whereas the latter exhibits an intrinsic coherence, involving, as it does, all and only excellences, the former is rather a mixed-up display of extremes. Accordingly, I maintain that maximal theism is conceptually more coherent than maximal diabolism in that its characterization of *x* – the primary existent – is relatively more uniform.

2.3.5 *Comparative evaluation*

To recap our comparative study, maximal theism has a wider explanatory scope than both naturalism and minimal theism; and even if maximal diabolism may have an equal explanatory potential, maximal theism is still the better option given its relatively greater conceptual clarity. Accordingly, if *x* is a GOD, the number of explained instances of metaphysical non-emptiness is greater than if *x* is an elementary particle (as suggested by naturalism) or a demiurge-like deity (as suggested by minimal theism); and moreover, if *x* is indeed a GOD, the identity of *x* is clearer than if *x* is a DEVIL (as suggested by maximal diabolism). All in all, then, if naturalism, minimal theism, and maximal diabolism represent as forceful rivals to maximal theism as any, there is, I think, a fairly strong epistemic reason to conclude that *x* is, in fact, a GOD.

But this is a big if! it may be objected. Really? To appreciate the claim that naturalism, minimal theism, and maximal diabolism represent as forceful rivals to maximal theism as any, reconsider, for example, the complementary classes of omnipotent and non-omnipotent beings. Again, this much is clear: no omnipotent being can be brought into ex-

istence by non-omnipotent beings. By Exclusion, then, with respect to the classes of omnipotent and non-omnipotent beings, any ontological world view on which *x* is not an omnipotent being (such as, typically, naturalism or minimal theism) is explanatorily inferior to maximal theism. Hence, to counterbalance this explanatory disadvantage, the former world views need to envision *x* as possessing at least one property the exemplification of which is incompatible with maximal theism. Effectively, this offsetting will result in something more or less like maximal diabolism: a world view according to which *x* is, at least in some crucial respect, like a DEVIL. (For example, it might be suggested that *x* is omnimalevolent: a property whose exemplification is surely irreconcilable with a GOD-identity of *x*.) Thus the proviso in hand looks very plausible: the three abovementioned world views really do seem to represent as forceful rivals to maximal theism as any. Accordingly, I maintain that there is a fairly strong epistemic reason to conclude that *x* is, in fact, a GOD.

Drawing to a close, we are now in a position to summarize our comparative study into the following argument in support of premise (3):

(3:1) There is a single, simple, uncaused, causally efficacious, metaphysically primary existent *x*.
(3:2) A GOD-identity of *x* would be explanatorily superior to all but one rival identities of *x*.
(3:3) A GOD-identity of *x* would be explanatorily equal to a DEVIL-identity of *x*.
(3:4) A GOD-identity of *x* would be more uniform than a DEVIL-identity of *x*.
(3:5) The real identity of *x* is explanatorily superior or equal to what all rival identities of *x* would be.
(3:6) The real identity of *x* is more uniform than what any rival, explanatorily equal identity of *x* would be.
(3:7) Hence, the real identity of *x* is that of a GOD. [From (3:1)–(3:6)]
(3:8) By Exclusion, then, there is an explanation for the non-emptiness of the class of non-GODs. [From (3:1), (3:7)]

The first four assumptions have already been addressed. (3:5) and (3:6), however, have only been alluded to so far. Hence, for example, it was only just suggested that there is a 'fairly strong epistemic reason' to conclude that *x* is a GOD, and lying underneath this suggestion is indeed something like (3:5) and (3:6): premises which reflect a fundamental metaphysical conviction that there is a close affinity between *x* and our explanatorily ideal representation thereof. There is no denying, however, that I cannot substantiate this conviction in a non-question-begging manner. For what it is worth, it simply comes down to this. If we were

able to grasp, comprehensibly, the real identity of *x*, this comprehension would not in the least be an epistemic disappointment. To some extent, however, it would be an epistemic disappointment if the real identity of *x* did not match our ideal conception thereof. Hence, indeed, if we were able to grasp it, we would see that the real identity of *x* is that of a GOD.

2.4 Interlude

All in all, then, as cautioned at the outset, the cosmontological argument does not deal a knock-down blow to atheism. It would have been nice, of course, to conclude that it is unreasonable to demur; that the cosmontological case for the existence of a GOD is so strong as to merit assent. But such conclusions are rarely if ever found in philosophy – especially not when the conclusion is of exceptional metaphysical significance. As Oppy agrees, 'wherever there is substantial perennial disagreement about matters of philosophy or religion, there is no prospect that there are successful arguments that settle the matter'.[54] This is obviously not to say that all arguments are equally unsuccessful. Indeed, though it does not settle the matter, the cosmontological argument displays a coherent structure of assumptions, each of which is worthy of consideration, thus revealing logical connections which might otherwise have gone unobserved. This is sufficient to demonstrate the intellectual permissibility of believing in the existence of a GOD. Perhaps more importantly, however, the cosmontological argument, precisely in virtue of being noteworthy and coherent, is competitive with corresponding arguments *against* the existence of a GOD. Indeed, even if no particular argument (or even collection of arguments) ever settles the issue in question, certain arguments in favour of a position *p* may still be comparatively better than opposing arguments in favour of non-*p*. Therefore, even if no particular argument for *p* is so strong as to merit assent, *p* might nevertheless be more plausible than non-*p* due to the comparatively greater force of its supporting arguments. Whether this is so in respect of the GOD issue is, of course, an open-ended and enormously multifaceted question, and the preceding discussions offer no guidance as to its correct answer. Still, what the preceding discussions do show (or so, at any rate, it seems to me) is that premise (3), which is without a doubt the relatively weakest part of the cosmon-

[54] Oppy (2006, p. 414).

tological argument, enjoys a fairly strong epistemic support. For all its meagreness and imprecision, this result should not be overlooked.

Thus far, however, the notion of 'GOD' has been taken more or less at face value. Unfortunately, pace both Anselm and Descartes, there would appear to be no a priori manner of determining whether it is metaphysically possible or not.[55] But if it is not, the cosmontological conclusion is false, in spite of whatever plausibility it appears to have. What we need to do, then, is to shed as much light on it as possible. In particular, if it can be analysed in a meaningful way, preferably in such a way as to avoid or invalidate some of the most important objections that have been levelled against it, we will at least have shown that there appears to be no overriding reason *not* to think that it is metaphysically possible. In the next and relatively longer chapter, this is what we shall attempt to do.

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[55] Famously, this is why Leibniz ([1704, §4.10.7] 1996, p. 438) faults Descartes's ontological argument: not for being fallacious, but for being 'an incomplete demonstration which assumes something [viz., that the idea of a wholly great or wholly perfect being is possible and does not imply a contradiction] which should also be proved in order to render the argument mathematically evident'.

3 THE NATURE OF EXACTLY ONE GOD

If sound, the cosmontological argument proves the existence of at least one GOD: an all-perfect being who is whatever it is better to be than not to be. Also, given the line of argument in §2.3.1, in which it was concluded that there is but one uncaused existent, it follows that *at least* one GOD boils down to *exactly* one GOD. As a result, it is quite obvious that the cosmontological argument is effectively an argument for the existence of *God*. Or is it? Naturally, there are ways to question even this apparently innocent inference; and we shall briefly check out these ways in just a moment. First, however, let us somewhat more clearly state the overall purposes of the work that lies ahead.

While the previous chapter was predominantly constructive, arguing for the existence of a GOD, this chapter will be predominantly defensive in the sense that it will be principally about responding to criticisms that have been levelled against the notion of 'GOD' in general and some of the allegedly divine attributes in particular. §3.3, for example, a section devoted entirely to the notion of omniscience, will be almost exclusively defensive in character; whereas §3.4, in which omnipotence will be dealt with, will be partly defensive, partly constructive. The rationale for these minor differences in approach will become evident, I think, as we proceed. (In short: the notion of omnipotence is generally considered to be far more elusive than that of omniscience; thus it is important to elaborate on it also in a positive manner.)

Of course, I will not be able to address very many, let alone all, of the reasons for thinking that there is no GOD, or that there cannot possibly be any GOD, or that it is simply meaningless to say anything involving the word 'GOD'. In fact, we shall have to leave out of consideration altogether the argument from evil: the singularly notable argument in support of atheism. Rather our main focus will be on conceptual difficulties surrounding 'GOD' and the attributes associated therewith. Again, I shall not be able to address very many of these difficulties, but I will at least try to tackle some of the most widely debated ones within contemporary analytic philosophy. If it can be shown that none of these gives us any particularly good reason for believing that the idea of 'GOD' is incoher-

ent, let alone meaningless, we will at least have alleviated the worry that there might be something devious about it.

3.1 The notion of 'GOD' and the notion of God

On a preliminary note, the concept of 'GOD' is obviously Anselmian in character. Yet by the term 'Anselmian' I do not wish to suggest that I am aspiring to a proper understanding of that which Anselm of Aosta, Bec, and Canterbury in the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth centuries intended to say when he was speaking about God. In fact, to be clarified in due course, my analyses of the twin Anselmian formulas, 'whatever it is better to be than not to be' and 'that than which a greater cannot be thought', presuppose the falsity of something, namely, the doctrine of divine simplicity, which Anselm himself affirmed. And yet this much is undeniable: Anselm himself believed that God is that than which nothing greater can be thought in virtue of being whatever it is better to be than not to be. Due to this historical fact alone, the cosmontological (or maximal theistic) notion of 'GOD' is adequately called 'Anselmian'. (As we shall see, however, the idea that God is all-perfect is actually of ancient origin.) Accordingly, 'maximal theism', as introduced in §2.3.2, is to all intents and purposes synonymous with 'Anselmian theism',[1] or, as it is sometimes called, 'perfect being theology',[2] at least as these phrases are being used within contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. As Thomas V. Morris explains in his book, *Anselmian Explorations*,

> My perspective is Anselmian first of all in the sense of beginning with, and employing at every point, the metaphysically exalted, basic conception of deity articulated with such succinctness and clarity by Anselm.[3]

In short, it is merely a matter of giving Anselm his due. Maximal theism is Anselmian precisely – and only – because it affirms the existence of a GOD: an all-perfect being who is properly called 'God' in virtue of being whatever it is better to be than not to be.

Now this brings us back on track and to a question that was temporarily postponed. Is the cosmontological argument an argument for the existence of God? Again, this may seem obvious, but according to Sobel '[t]here are two ways in which one may maintain that, even if there is a

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1 Nagasawa (2008, p. 577).
2 Morris (1987a).
3 Morris (1987b).

perfect being, there is no god'.[4] These ways, he suggests, are the way of 'the objective humanist' and the way of 'the normative sceptic'.[5] According to the former, 'there can be nothing [not even an all-perfect being] to which it would not be *beneath the proper dignity of a human being* to bend and to worship'.[6] According to the latter, there simply is no possible being, not even an all-perfect one, who is 'objectively worthy of worship', for there is no such thing as an objectively proper or normatively prescribed attitude, such as worship.[7] As a result, insofar as the notion of God entails the idea of a being who *is* objectively worthy of worship, it follows on both views that God does not exist. Exploring these routes in any detail, however, will have to await another occasion – only let it be noted that Sobel himself does not argue for either view but merely presents them as possibilities. Still, here are three quick comments.

First, worship involves attitudes, obviously, but also actions.[8] Even if it is granted that the former cannot be normatively prescribed, the latter can. Secondly, why cannot attitudes be normatively prescribed? Consider things like wedding vows ('to love and to cherish ... till death us do part') and ethical commands to love one's neighbour as oneself, to always treat humanity as an end in itself, and to be graceful in defeat. It would appear that examples such as these offer at least an intuitive justification of the view that certain attitudes can be normatively prescribed. Thirdly, why not simply concede that an all-perfect being (if such there is) is legitimately, in a linguistically non-contrived sense, called 'God'? One might still be an 'objective humanist' or a 'normative sceptic' who maintains that, contrary to religious sentiments, God is *not* objectively worthy of worship. At least for all I can see, this would be a more commonsensical stance to take.

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4 Sobel (2004, p. 24).

5 *Ibid*.

6 *Ibid*. As expressed by Ingemar Hedenius (1951, p. 66): 'Har det någonsin predikats en gud (värd namnet), som inte har varit likgiltig för t.ex. den fria tankens ideal? Antagligen inte. Jag tycker mig ha funnit, att alla gudar har haft till sin älsklingsidé en därmed i grunden alldeles oförenlig princip: fall ned och tillbed mig.' [Has there ever been preached a god (worthy of its name) who is not indifferent to the ideal, say, of freedom of thought? Probably not. I have come to the conclusion that the favourite idea of all gods is a principle with which this ideal is fundamentally at odds: fall down and worship me. (My tr.)]

7 Sobel (2004, p. 25).

8 Indeed, '[w]hen one thinks about worship, images of chanting monks, prostrating practitioners, and incense-waving devotees immediately come to mind – that is, one thinks of people engaged in rituals' (Smuts, forthcoming).

There is actually a third way to question the inference from 'GOD' to 'God'. It may be called the way of 'the apophatic theologian', according to which God is beyond every humanly conceivable category, including the category of *being*. As Jean-Luc Marion cautions, the very 'thought of Being as such' is 'idolatry' at work.[9] Hence, on this view, even if an all-perfect being exists, this being, precisely by being a *being*, is not God. In my opinion, however, this way, if followed to the end, leads to nowhere; in particular, it leads to no place that is of human interest. For, if indeed God is beyond all categories or classes that are humanly definable, he is also beyond the category of being of human interest. Granted, the apophatic theologian would reply that God is likewise beyond the category of *not* being of human interest. In effect, then, the way of the apophatic theologian leads to abandonment of the law of excluded middle along with the law of double negation elimination: both of which are integral parts of classical logic.

Again, these are mere remarks; I do not claim to have shown any of the abovementioned ways to be impassable. This much, however, seems perfectly clear: no actual believer in the existence of a GOD would deny the existence of God. At least to some extent, this would seem to suggest that the objections to the inference from 'GOD' to God are of somewhat academic interest. Still, to provide some positive justification of the said inference, two things may be pointed out.

First, it would seem that '[t]he pinnacle of traditional theism' is precisely its idea that God is 'that than which no greater can be conceived',[10] indeed, that this Anselmian idea provides 'the regulating notion of traditional Western theism'.[11] Importantly, it should be noted that the Anselmian idea that God is indeed a GOD is much older than Anselm. Leftow displays its historical roots in Greco-Roman philosophy, tracing it back 'at least to Plato, who takes as premisses in the *Republic* that "a god and what belongs to him are in every way in the best condition … they are the most beautiful and best possible"'.[12] In a similar vein, discussing the theology of Augustine, Edward Wierenga notes that '[a]ll of the ingredients for what has become known as "Anselmian perfect being theology"

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[9] Marion ([1982] 1991, p. 41).
[10] Morris (1987c, p. 31).
[11] Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, p. 13). Moreover, as Sobel (2004, p. 12) says, 'this conception of God [as a perfect being] fuels most contemporary … philosophical discussion of God, as well as much popular discussion' as well.
[12] Leftow (2011, p. 104).

were present already in the thought of St. Augustine'.[13] They were present in early Islamic thought as well. Majid Fakhry even goes so far as to argue that al-Fārābi (ca 870–950) had such a 'near-obsession with the concept of the necessary existence of the All-Perfect' that he stands out as 'a solitary champion in the Arabic tradition of the ontological argument'.[14] This latter suggestion, however, actually pushes it too far. At least for all I know, there just is no such thing as an ontological *argument* anywhere in al-Fārābi's writings.[15] Fakhry is quite right, however, in stressing the colossal conceptual importance of 'the All-Perfect' for al-Fārābi. And these examples go to demonstrate that Anselmian theism by no means is a medieval, let alone Anselm's, innovation.[16] On the contrary, they seem to suggest that it is an integral part of traditional western theism, and hence of theism, simpliciter, and thus is such that it offers a non-contrived and appropriate specification of the notion of God as ordinarily understood.

Secondly, it would seem that the Anselmian idea that God is indeed a GOD is a conceptual consequence of that which is 'essential to our idea of God' in the first place, namely, the idea that 'God is eminently worthy of worship'.[17] Thus Findlay, for one, argues that '[t]o feel religiously is to presume surpassing greatness in some object', and this presupposition implies that 'our religious object should have an *unsurpassable* supremacy along all avenues', indeed, 'that it should tower *infinitely* above all other objects'.[18] E. L. Mascall even warns that '[t]o adore any being less than one who comprises in himself all possible perfection would be … a kind of conceptual idolatry'.[19] Similarly, Everitt suspects that the fact that theism crucially presupposes its God to be 'worthy of worship … has been a powerful factor in pulling the articulation of theism, and of the

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13 Wierenga (2011, p. 139).

14 Fakhry (1986, p. 17).

15 Lenn E. Goodman (1992, p. 76) makes the same point about Avicenna (980–1037), whose perfect being theology 'is not an ontological argument in any strict sense at all, and it is misleading to call it one' because Avicenna simply does not 'seek to prove the existence of God a priori'.

16 What *is* Anselm's innovation is, of course, the ontological *argument*.

17 Gale (1991, p. 8). Note that 'objective humanists' and 'normative sceptics' (to re-introduce Sobel's phrases) might agree. Even if, on their view, there simply cannot be a worship-worthy being, it might still be granted that the idea of worship-worthiness, however misconceived, implies the idea of perfect greatness.

18 Findlay (1948, p. 179).

19 Mascall (1943, p. 197).

divine attributes in particular, towards extreme formulations'.[20] It may even be suggested that the paradigmatically apophatic method of 'Pseudo'-Dionysius the Areopagite (ca 6th century), a method consisting in 'the denial of all beings', is aimed (however paradoxically) at coming to know 'the *highest* God'.[21] Indeed, relying on the selfsame Dionysius, Aquinas points out in no ambiguous language that, since '[a]ll created perfections are found in God … He is spoken of as universally perfect, because He lacks not … any excellence which may be found in any genus.'[22] So, if this line of reasoning holds up, the maximal theistic notion of 'GOD', or the Anselmian notion of God, or indeed 'the philosopher's conception of God',[23] is not just *one* traditional western theistic notion of God; it is rather the exemplary one.

All in all, then, having at least indicated the antiquity and traditional western theistic significance of maximal theism, I think that the inference from 'GOD' to 'God' is both *prima* and *secunda* facie justified – so much so that the onus of justification is on those who reject it. Thus I will henceforward speak about God, rather than continue to speak about at least one (or rather exactly one) GOD; but by 'God' I shall mean precisely that which I have hitherto meant by 'GOD'.

3.2 Whatever it is better to be than not to be

According to maximal theism, then, God is an all-perfect being who is 'whatever it is better to be than not to be'.[24] In this section we will try to disentangle at least some of the well-known difficulties associated with this Anselmian characterization of God. Then, in §§3.3–4, we shall give special consideration to two of the paradigmatic divine attributes: omniscience and omnipotence.

3.2.1 *Towards greatness, simpliciter*

As a preliminary, the famous Anselmian identification of God as 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' might be clarified accordingly:

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[20] Everitt (2004, p. 305).
[21] Jones (1996, p. 363), my emphasis.
[22] Aquinas ([1274, §1.4.2] 2007, p. 21).
[23] Sobel (2004, p. 11).
[24] Anselm ([1078, §5] 1995, p. 102).

God is a being than which a greater cannot *possibly* be thought. So, if an entity *x* is such a being then there is no metaphysically possible thinker who is able to conceive of an entity greater than *x*. The unsurpassable greatness, in turn, must not be interpreted subjectively. Although some thinker might think (or perhaps even be convinced) that *x* is a fickle and self-righteous demiurge, this is beside the point. The point is rather that no possible thinker is able to conceive of a being that, as a matter of metaphysical fact, is, or would be, greater than *x*. The rationale of this objective account of greatness will be illuminated, I hope, as we proceed.

Note that what was just said is not that God is whatever is as great as possible. To be sure, if God exists, God *is* as great as possible; but for all we know, it may be the case that that which happens to be as great as possible is a far cry from being that than which a greater cannot be thought. Indeed, as Oppy notes, 'it may turn out that a maximally overall excellent being [i.e. one who is as great as possible] is *very, very far* from being a perfect [or Anselmian] being'.[25] *Ideals*, after all, need not be realizable; but they may be meaningful nonetheless. Hence, even if we were infallibly told that *x* is as great as anything could possibly be, this alone would not warrant the inference that *x* is God.

To get a better hold of this issue we may consider Yujin Nagasawa's strategy in 'A new defence of Anselmian theism'.[26] According to this strategy, Anselmian theists need not be committed to the classical 'omniGod' thesis; rather, they only need to accept the 'maximalGod' thesis: a thesis according to which 'God is the being that has the maximal consistent set of knowledge, power and benevolence'. (This thesis, note, must not be confused with 'maximal theism', according to which God, in virtue of being whatever it is better to be than not to be, is that than which a greater cannot be thought.) So, in Nagasawa's view, Anselmian theists need only affirm that God is overall *as great as possible* – not that he is 'omniperfect' in every respect.[27] Accordingly, lest they be guilty of attacking a straw-man, the compossibility objectors to Anselmian theism should only assume as much. But then, as Nagasawa concludes, it will be

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[25] Oppy (2011a, p. 135).
[26] Nagasawa (2008).
[27] *Ibid*. (p. 596). In Nagasawa's view, the maximalGod thesis is 'Anselmian' in virtue of capturing 'the core of Anselm's theological system' – not in virtue of representing Anselm's own view (*ibid*., p. 579). In fact, as regards the latter remark, I think that the maximalGod thesis is even somewhat '*anti*-Anselmian' in character (Maitzen 2005, p. 234, my emphasis).

'significantly more difficult' for these objectors to accuse Anselmian theism of conceptual incoherence.[28]

But here is the problem: if Nagasawa is right then Anselmian theism is *necessarily* coherent; it will then not only be 'significantly more difficult' but hopelessly futile to accuse it of incoherence. If God is whatever is as great as possible then God exists in at least one possible world; but if God exists in at least one possible world then the notion of God cannot be inconsistent. Hence, despite its cleverness, Nagasawa's strategy is dialectically powerless. For, unless we know *how* great that being, which is as great as possible, is, the metaphysical tautology that such a being is possible does nothing to justify the conclusion that the Anselmian notion of God is coherent.

Thus, to sum up so far: the notion of God is the notion of an entity than which an objectively greater cannot possibly be thought – whether or not such an entity is metaphysically possible.

Next, we need to address the idea of comparative greatness. Or more to the point: what does it mean for an entity *x* to be greater than another entity *y*? In response to this question, one thing should immediately be pointed out: to be great, simpliciter, is to be great in an absolute (or non-relative) sense. Thus the meaning of '*x* is greater than *y*' is that *x* is an overall (all things considered) greater *entity* than *y* – not merely that *x* is greater than *y* in a relative sense, that is, as regards particular qualities. As Hoffman and Rosenkrantz concur, 'if the aforementioned conception of God is intelligible, then a being's degree of greatness may be assessed relative to the category of Entity … the *summum genus*, or most general kind, of all categories'.[29]

Importantly, however, this is not to suggest that an entity's overall greatness is irrespective of that same entity's particular properties. 'For it is plausible', as Michael Martin says, 'to suppose that a sufficient condition for entity A being greater than entity B is that A has all and only the properties that B has except that A has, in addition, a property P that makes A more valued or prized than B'.[30] Indeed, it is plausible to suppose that, necessarily, if an entity *x* is overall greater than another entity *y*, then *x* has at least one particular quality that *y* lacks, or *x* has at least one particular quality to a higher degree, or in a better way, than *y* does.

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[28] Nagasawa (2008, p. 596).

[29] Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, p. 14). For an illuminating, Anselm-oriented discussion about 'relativistic' vs. 'absolutistic' analyses of greatness, see Burgess-Jackson (1994, esp. pp. 246–8).

[30] Martin (1990, p. 81).

On this view, then, one's overall greatness is wholly determined by one's particular properties.[31] Hence, if applied to God, his overall greatness is a 'high-level' property in that it conceptually emerges from 'lower-level' perfections that he is supposed to have, 'such as omnipotence, benevolence, and so on'.[32]

I say, *if* applied to God. According to the mainstream traditions of western theism, God does not have any properties at all; indeed, the notion of God, an absolutely simple being, admits of no real distinctions whatever, not even that between essence and existence. This idea is encapsulated in the doctrine of divine simplicity: a doctrine which, 'having been upheld for over a millennium by a veritable army of philosophical theologians', has 'fallen on hard times' of late.[33] In my opinion, indeed, this doctrine faces 'formidable objections'.[34] For example, it forces its advocates to say, paradoxically, that although God truly is, say, omnipotent and omniscient, omnipotence and omniscience are really not exemplified in God.[35] Thus Anselm, for one, having been tempted to assert that God is 'that one necessary thing, in which is all good', immediately corrects himself: 'or rather, which *is* itself the complete, one, total, and unique good'.[36] However, even if I dispute the doctrine of divine simplicity, and even if my attempted analysis of Anselm's formula presupposes something which Anselm himself would not endorse, namely, that some properties can be univocally predicated of God, my analysis can easily be interpreted so as to suit those of a more faithful Anselmian mindset. Indeed, proponents of divine simplicity may be well prepared to speak *as if* God really had distinct properties, given that this is necessarily how it must appear to finite minds; only they would add that, in reality, no distinctions whatever apply to that which ultimately transcends our understanding.

Anyway, to pick up our previous line of reasoning, if indeed overall greatness is determined by particular qualities then it is clear enough that God is that than which a greater cannot be thought precisely by pos-

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31 A more detailed discussion of the assumption involved here is provided in Oppy (2011a, p. 120). According to Nagasawa (2008, p. 579), the assumption as such is accepted by 'the majority of Anselmian theists'.

32 Gale (1991, p. 8).

33 Brower (2009, p. 105).

34 Gale (1991, p. 24).

35 Worse: it forces its advocates to say that although God truly is omnipotent and omniscient, omnipotence and omniscience are nevertheless metaphysically impossible (or non-exemplifiable) properties!

36 Anselm ([1078, §23] 1995, p. 114), my emphasis.

sessing a combinatorially perfect or ideal collection of relevant qualities. But to possess an ideal collection of such qualities is, presumably, to possess all of them in a perfect way, or to be 'perfect with respect to every excellence', as Oppy suggests.[37] This, in any case, is how I think we should interpret the Anselmian notion of God as a being than which a greater cannot be thought. What I want to argue later is that this particular notion of God can be plausibly derived from 'whatever it is better to be than not to be'. First, however, there is a more pressing matter to attend to.

3.2.2 *A relativist objection*

It may be protested that 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' presupposes something which makes no sense, namely, an absolutely unrestricted notion of comparative greatness. For, if indeed God is that than which a greater cannot be thought, God is greater, simpliciter, than every other entity. But this requires that every other entity can be ranked according to an absolute scale of greatness, with God at the top, and hence that the overall greatness of every entity is commensurable with that of every other entity. But while Jane, say, may be a better swimmer than Mary, or a greater actress, or a better public speaker, or superior in any number of particular respects, it is utterly uninformative to say that Jane is greater, simpliciter, than Mary. Likewise, though some books may be greater than other books, and some bicycles greater than other bicycles, one would be ill-advised to claim that a certain book is a greater entity than a certain bicycle. Consequently, precisely because the Anselmian notion of God requires an absolute scale of greatness on which all entities can be ranked, the Anselmian notion of God is simply nonsensical – or so, at any rate, the relativist objection goes.

In response, guided by 'whatever it is better to be than not to be', I will argue that an absolute scale of greatness can be quite meaningfully envisioned. First, however, we should note an importantly different response by Thomas V. Morris. According to Morris, the critical argument above wrongly assumes that the Anselmian notion of God requires 'universal value-commensurability', that is, the idea that every entity is value-

[37] Oppy (2011a, p. 132). On the contrary, a being which is as great as possible, or 'the best of all *really* possible beings' (Kretzmann 1966, p. 420), might, for all we know, lack any number of particular excellences.

commensurable with every other entity.[38] But what this notion requires, he says, is only that every entity be 'value-commensurable with God'.[39] So, '[t]he Anselmian can quite consistently concur with the common intuition that not all objects are [universally] value-commensurable'.[40] As he notes, however, this contention crucially requires that the relation of being 'greater than, or less than, or equal to', a relation which is entailed by the relation of being greater than, is non-transitive.[41] To support this seemingly very implausible contention, Morris unfortunately presents a faulty argument. Essentially, it goes like this. The relation of being 'a superset of, a subset of, or the same set as', *is* a non-transitive relation.[42] This can be proved quite conclusively. But this set-theoretical relation is 'strictly parallel' to that of being greater than, or less than, or equal to.[43] Hence, by a 'precisely parallel' argument, it can be proved that the relation of being greater than, or less than, or equal to, is non-transitive as well.[44] As a result, Morris concludes, the Anselmian is off the hook.

This argument is faulty for the following reason. Pace Morris, the two relations in question are not parallel, in fact, but crucially different. If set *a* is the same set as set *b* then *a* and *b* are numerically identical: they are one and the same entity. Contrariwise, if object *x* is equally great as object *y* then *x* and *y* are numerically non-identical: they are two distinct entities (even if perchance they are qualitatively identical). Hence the alleged parallelism between the two relations does not pertain. Morris correctly proves that the relation of being a superset of, a subset of, or the same set as, is non-transitive, but this says nothing about the relation of being greater than, or less than, or equal to.

Thus we need a different response to the above relativist objection. Indeed, I shall assume that its presupposition is correct, namely, that the Anselmian notion of God requires universal value-commensurability, or an absolute scale of greatness on which all entities can be ranked. As I shall now begin to argue, however, this requirement need not tell against it.

As a first attempt, to gather some intuitive counterweight to the books/bicycles example, consider a very impressive thing on the one

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[38] Morris (1987b, pp. 15–16). This idea, I believe, is equivalent to what Arthur O. Lovejoy (1961, p. 59) dubs 'the principle of unilinear gradation'.
[39] Morris (1987b, p. 16).
[40] *Ibid.* (p. 18).
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] *Ibid.* (p. 17).
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] *Ibid.* (p. 18).

hand, say, a Siberian tiger, and on the other hand something rather disagreeable, such as a piece of sludge. Is it really unintelligible (or in some sense ill-conceived) to say that the former is an overall greater ontological object – greater, simpliciter – than the latter? At the very least, surely it is far from obvious that this is so. In fact, as Katherin A. Rogers reminds us, most well-educated people in the West 'between the fall of Rome and the end of the Renaissance' would affirm, unhesitatingly, that the former (or something like it) 'is of intrinsically greater value' than the latter.[45] Here, presumably, they would rely on the ancient view that the whole of reality is hierarchically structured as a 'great chain of being', stretching from the most insignificant specks of dust, things which 'barely escape non-existence', through 'every possible grade' of perfection up to the loftiest intelligence, with God at the top: the *ens perfectissimum*.[46] Such a great chain of being is precisely an absolute scale of greatness against which all entities are measured. I do not think, however, that this formerly so popular stratification of things into the categories of 'being, living, feeling, and knowing' can be relied upon too heavily.[47] What I am about to propose is, nonetheless, a modified, less-layered version thereof, but one which I think enjoys more contemporary intuitive support than its ancient precursor.

So, as a second and more elaborate attempt to tackle the relativist objection, consider the non-universal category *M* of actually existing moral beings: the intersection of the class of actual existents and the class of moral beings (to be specified in due course). In what follows next, I shall elaborate on two lines of reasoning. First, I shall argue that any member of *M* is greater, simpliciter, than any non-member of *M*. In effect, this will amount to a modified great chain of being with only two absolute axiological thresholds. Secondly, I shall argue that to be an ideal member of *M* is ipso facto to possess a combinatorially perfect collection of relevant qualities so as to qualify as a being than which a greater cannot be thought. If sound, then, these lines of reasoning will be able to explain, in a non-relative and yet intelligible sense, how 'whatever it is better to be than not to be' might generate the Anselmian notion of God.

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[45] Rogers (1993, p. 64).
[46] Lovejoy (1961, p. 59).
[47] Rogers (1993, p. 65).

3.2.3 *Actual moral beings: part one*

To illuminate these ideas, we first need to acquaint ourselves with two competing metaphysical views: possibilism and actualism. According to possibilism, there are – exist – things which do not *actually* exist, namely, mere *possibilia*, things which *could* have been actual but, as it happens, are not.[48] By contrast, actualism is the view that only actual things exist; to exist simply *is* to be actual. Possibilism, then, offers a comparatively richer ontology. Importantly, this enables its proponents to account, rather straightforwardly, for the truth conditions of a modal sentence such as 'there might have been unicorns and a present king of France'. For, on possibilism, what makes the said sentence true (if indeed it is) is just that the totality of existents contains possible unicorns alongside possible present French royalties. Actualists, by comparison, have no such clear-cut account in hand. This has resulted, somewhat bewilderingly, in 'any number' of rival actualist accounts,[49] none of which, for all I know, can be clearly singled out as best. Interestingly, however, the different actualist proposals seem to be dividable into 'two broad categories', one of which, namely, 'trace' actualism, looks quite a lot like possibilism.[50] Indeed, the general strategy of trace actualists is to replace every mere *possibile* with 'an actualistically acceptable vestige of that object',[51] be it an 'unexemplified individual essence' (as in Plantinga's version),[52] a 'contingently non-concrete individual' (as in the Linsky/Zalta version),[53] or some other surrogate, and thereby to salvage whatever semantic advantages possibilism has without having to posit the non-actual existence of (allegedly spurious) possibilia. Now this is interesting because, to be explained shortly, although I will assume a possibilist point of view, thus assuming that the totality of existents includes actual as well as non-actual (i.e. merely possible) entities, my argument should be able to hold just as well if perchance some version of trace actualism proves itself to be the better modal-semantic account. (Whether it holds up if some version

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48 I make no distinction between being and existence. As Christopher Menzel (2012) notes, however, '[t]here is no uniformity in the literature on the use of "existence" and its cognates as it relates to the distinction between being and actuality'. (Menzel himself uses 'existence' synonymously with 'actuality'.)

49 Menzel (2012).

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*

52 Plantinga (2003, p. 198).

53 Cf. Linsky and Zalta (1996, p. 283).

of *no*-trace actualism, i.e. the other broad category of actualism, is to be preferred, is a question I shall have to leave aside.)

As said, then, I will assume a possibilist point of view, thus adopting 'an elegantly simple, general account of the truth conditions of our modal discourse'.[54] More precisely, I will assume, not a Lewisian version of possibilism, according to which actuality is merely an indexical matter of perspective and all possible worlds are ontologically 'on a par',[55] but 'classical' possibilism, according to which mere possibilia enjoy a 'rather less robust but nonetheless fully-fledged type of being than we do'.[56] Indeed, given this classical possibilist assumption, we should be able to cross the first of two absolute axiological thresholds, namely, that between actual and non-actual existents. For, on this assumption, it is plausible to suggest that whatever is actual is greater, simpliciter, than whatever is merely possible. Thus an actual rock or worm is in an absolute sense superior to a merely possible human being,[57] and an actual revolver is likewise greater than a merely possible kingdom of peace.[58] Accordingly, since on this view any member of the class of actual existents possesses a qualitative property that makes it objectively greater overall – a greater entity – than any member of the class of non-actual existents, it makes good sense to claim that it is better, simpliciter, to be actual than not to be actual.

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[54] Menzel (2012).

[55] Lewis (1986, p. 93). I do not have any good argument against this particular version of possibilism, which is at odds with the present line of reasoning, but I think few people are prepared to accept it anyway.

[56] Menzel (2012). To incorporate this assumption into the cosmontological argument in chapter two, I would need to make a few cumbersome modifications. For example, I would have to clarify that, although in a strict metaphysical sense the class of unicorns is not empty (since, presumably, there are merely possible unicorns), the class of *actual* unicorns *is* empty; thus by Exclusion there is no explanation for the non-emptiness of the latter's complementary class.

[57] Cf. Burgess-Jackson (1994, p. 247): 'An existing rock or worm is superior to a nonexisting (merely imaginary) human being'.

[58] This is emphatically not to say that actual revolvers are greater than actual *visions* or *dreams* of a kingdom of peace. (As a potential follow-up, an anonymous referee for the *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* drew my attention to this issue: are dreamt-of objects actual existents, or merely possible ones, or neither? Tentatively, I am inclined to say that dreamt-of objects enjoy the same modal status as do those things, if any, of which they are representations. If this is not a viable option, however, I would say that, insofar as dreamt-of objects are existents at all, they are merely possible.)

Therefore, on the classical possibilist assumption, there appears to be at least one thing which it is absolutely better to be than not to be.[59]

But then suppose instead that some version of trace actualism is true. For example, drawing on Plantinga's proposal, suppose that, in place of mere possibilia, there exist (actually, that is) non-exemplified abstract individual essences. Then the following seems plausible enough: It is better, simpliciter, to be an object which exemplifies an individual essence than not to be such an object. Or suppose that, in place of mere possibilia, there exist (again, actually), as Linsky and Zalta argue, contingently non-concrete objects. Then the following, too, seems plausible: It is better, simpliciter, not to be a contingently non-concrete object (which means that one is contingently concrete, necessarily concrete, or necessarily non-concrete) than to be such an object. Hence, in either case, an absolute axiological threshold appears to emerge, one that separates the ontological wheat, as it were, from the chaff. As far as my argument is concerned, this is all that matters. Happily, then, although I shall continue to assume a classical possibilist point of view, the argument could easily be rewritten, it seems, in compliance with certain trace actualist requests. As a result, even if I am unable to validate the classical possibilist assumption, apart from having noted its straightforward modal-semantic applicability, an absolute axiological threshold between two complementary categories of existents ought to be recognizable from a rather broad range of metaphysical perspectives.

Next, to approach the second allegedly absolute threshold, consider the class of moral beings: beings that are capable of distinguishing right from wrong and of deliberately doing what is right. Now, given that there are merely possible existents, not every moral being need be an actual existent; but of course every actual existent is either a moral being or a non-moral being. Here, then, as I see it, is indeed the second absolute metaphysical line of demarcation: Whatever is an actual moral being is greater, simpliciter, than whatever is not an actual moral being. That is, not only is any actual existent overall greater than any non-actual existent, but any actual existent which has the further property of being a

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[59] So, on the classical possibilist assumption, what *is* a non-actual, merely possible existent? Alas, I wish I knew! Yet this much (which is, unfortunately, very little) is clear: a mere possibile cannot be *necessary*. Hence it cannot, presumably, be conceived of as an abstract entity in the Platonic sense. Rather, then, it must be conceived of as a somehow concrete entity – yet by no means so as to be equally concrete as an *actually* concrete entity (lest Lewisian possibilism follows).

moral being is overall greater than any actual existent which lacks this further property. On this view, then, our earlier conclusion can be expanded upon: it is absolutely better to be, than not to be, an actual moral being. And note: given the above definition of 'moral being' this does not only mean that typically praiseworthy beings like Mother Theresa and Mahatma Gandhi are overall greater than non-moral things like cars and stars, but also that typically blameworthy beings like Hitler and Stalin are likewise greater.

Crucially, then, to substantiate this new line of reasoning, we need to defend the claim that any actual moral being is overall greater than any actual non-moral being. In its favour, two things, in particular, might be pointed out. First, only moral beings are responsible beings. A male lion that kills the cubs sired by another male does not act irresponsibly, hence not wrongly, whereas a human being who kills lion cubs certainly ought to be blamed. But to be blameworthy is to deserve criticism for having acted beneath one's dignity, or in a way not befitting one's stature; and these things, dignity and stature, bespeak greatness: indeed, greatness of a particularly exalted kind. So, even blameworthy beings, precisely by being moral beings, appear to distinguish themselves from the non-moral rest. One would, I believe, be hard-pressed to find something which distinguishes itself in a similarly exalted but non-moral manner.

Secondly, only moral beings are capable of supererogatory deeds, that is, voluntary but morally praiseworthy acts (such as, arguably, sacrificing one's life in order to save somebody else's, volunteering to help schoolchildren to read, testifying in court against a notorious gangster, and paying off another person's debts). But such acts, or at least those of which are particularly virtuous, are, to a lesser or greater extent, heroic; and heroism, maybe even more so than dignity and stature, is testament to greatness of a quite exceptional kind. Hence, precisely by being moral, we are potentially (if not actually) great even in this extraordinary respect; and at least for all I can see, no non-moral entity really comes close to having as greatness-enhancing a potential.

To conclude thus far, then, it seems reasonable enough to retain a modified, two-layered great chain of being: one that categorically differentiates between actual and non-actual existents on the one hand, and between actual moral beings and actual non-moral beings on the other. (The issue of universal value-commensurability will be reconsidered in §3.2.6.) Hence, on this dual assumption, there is an absolute axiological distinction to be drawn between whatever is an actual moral being and whatever is not an actual moral being. Or more precisely, to return to

our earlier classification, any member of *M* (i.e. the intersection of the class of actual existents and the class of moral beings) is greater, simpliciter, than any non-member of *M*. In this quite intelligible sense, I maintain that it is absolutely better to be, than not to be, an actual moral being.

3.2.4 *Actual moral beings: part two*

So, supposing that it is absolutely better to be a member of *M* than not to be a member of *M*, let us now focus exclusively on the members of *M*. To begin with, recall that *M* is a non-universal class; hence it satisfies the demand of the relativist objection, namely, the requirement that comparisons of greatness must be made relative to a restricted category. Just as Jane may be a relatively (but objectively) better member of the class of swimmers – a better swimmer – than Mary, she may be a relatively (but objectively) better member of *M*. To recycle our previous example, it is, after all, uncontroversial that Mother Theresa offers a relatively greater exemplification of the *M*-property than does Stalin – not with respect to actuality, of course, but with respect to morality.[60]

Now, drawing on our earlier analysis of 'that than which a greater cannot be thought', it follows that, in order to be an ideal member of *M*, an existent *x* must exemplify a combinatorially perfect collection of the properties relevant to actuality and morality; and for this collection to be ideal, it must involve all of these properties in a perfect way. So, then, as regards the property of actuality, *x* must, presumably, be *indestructible* (so as to never lose its actuality), *incorruptible* (and hence such that its actuality is immune to all kinds of deterioration), *uncreatable* (and hence such that its actuality is up to no-one or nothing else to decide), *ontologically independent* (so as to presuppose nothing for its actuality), *eternal* (and hence such that its actuality is not restricted by time), *omnipresent* (and

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[60] Whether Theresa is *absolutely* greater – a greater entity – than Stalin depends on whether or not there are sub-classes of *M* to which it is better, simpliciter, to belong than not to belong. If there are, and if perchance Stalin but not Theresa belongs to at least one of them, then (rather absurdly, it would seem) Stalin is absolutely greater than Theresa. But although I think there are such classes, for example, the intersection of the classes of actual, moral, and *omnipotent* beings, none of these are such that either Stalin or Theresa belongs to it. If this is indeed the case, it follows that Theresa *is* absolutely greater than Stalin precisely in virtue of being relatively greater than he with respect to morality.

hence such that its actuality is not limited by space), and *necessary* (and hence such that its non-actuality is metaphysically impossible). Possession of these particular excellences may not be sufficient in order to qualify as an ideal member of the class of actual existents, but each of them has at least a plausible claim to being necessary in order to qualify as such. Indeed, since each one is of such extraordinary a metaphysical character, I think it ought to be concluded that if *x* exemplifies all of them (in a perfect way, should their exemplifications admit of degrees), *x* is greater with respect to actuality than whatever does *not* exemplify all of them.

But what if there simply are no greater or less great ways of exemplifying actuality? What if actuality is a non-gradable, all or nothing affair: *x* either is, or is not, actual, and that is all there is to it? As a first reply, it should be borne in mind that, from a classical possibilist perspective, according to which existence as such does admit of different grades of exemplification, it is quite plausible to assume that actuality, which is a comparably robust species of existence, admits of different grades of exemplification, too. As a second reply, consider a typically non-gradable adjective such as 'unique' (as in being the only one of its kind). Intuitively, *x* cannot be more or less unique; still, it is commonplace to accentuate uniqueness by adding the adverbs 'totally' or 'absolutely'. Hence, linguistically speaking, 'unique', even if non-gradable in some sense, does admit of emphasis. This seems to be the case, too, from a philosophical angle. While all of us are unique, some of us (say, Michelangelo and Mozart) are unique in a rather more striking way. In other words, uniqueness, a characteristically all or nothing affair, is exemplifiable in countless ways, some of which do appear to be greater than others. By analogy, then, since there is no obvious reason to believe that actuality is an all or nothing property any more than uniqueness, there is likewise no obvious reason to believe that actuality cannot be exemplified in greater or less great ways.

As regards the property of morality, *x* must, presumably, in order to be an ideal member of *M*, be *omnibenevolent* (and hence such that it wants all that is morally praiseworthy and only what is morally all right), *impeccable* (and hence such that it never does what is morally wrong),[61]

[61] Note that impeccability is compatible with our definition of a moral being as one who is capable of distinguishing right from wrong and of deliberately doing what is right – even in case impeccability is exemplified essentially and hence such that it implies an absolute incapacity to do what is wrong (more on which in §3.4.4 below).

omnipotent (so as to be perfectly able to do all that is morally praiseworthy and/or all right), *omniscient* (so as to be perfectly able to infallibly distinguish morally right from wrong), *all-free* (and hence such that it is perfectly capable of deliberately doing whatever it chooses to do), *all-just* (and hence such that its moral judgements, or withholdings thereof, are perfectly fair), *all-merciful* (so as to be perfectly willing to forgive moral wrongdoers), *all-loving* (so as to be perfectly kind and attentive to the needs of others), and, arguably, given a eudaemonist presupposition that a virtuous character is necessary and sufficient for happiness, *all-blissful* (and hence such that its happiness is proportionate to its perfect goodness).[62] By parallel reasoning, possession of these particular excellences may not be sufficient in order to qualify as an ideal member of the class of moral beings; but since each one of them has such an exceptionally grand character, I likewise think it ought to be concluded that if *x* exemplifies all of them, *x* is greater with respect to morality than whatever does *not* exemplify all of them.

In addition, in order to genuinely qualify as an ideal member of *M*, *x* must exemplify all of the above listed excellences *essentially*, rather than *accidentally*. Otherwise, *x* might possess them merely by happenstance, which would be a less than perfect way to exemplify them.

Of course, it may not be metaphysically possible for *x* to exemplify all (or indeed any) of these extraordinary qualities. This goes to reemphasize that the greatest possible entity need not, for all we can tell, be that than which a greater cannot be thought. But the point here is this: *if* indeed *x* exemplifies all of the above listed excellences (in a perfect way), *x* has a very strong claim to have precisely those properties which are relevant for qualifying as that than which a greater cannot be thought. Accordingly, since the excellences in question have been derived from our non-relative analysis of 'whatever it is better to be than not to be', we appear to have been able to explain how God, in virtue of being exactly that which it is better, simpliciter, to be than not to be, might indeed be said to be that than which a greater cannot be thought.

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[62] Some of the properties of this list may be derivable from others. So, for example, one who is omnibenevolent may necessarily be all-merciful as well. Nevertheless, in order to be an ideal member of *M*, *x* must, presumably, not lack any of these properties.

3.2.5 *Addendum: simplicity and immutability*

Let us now pause for a moment. In light of the above discussion, God has been revealed as an indestructible, incorruptible, uncreatable, ontologically independent, eternal, omnipresent, necessary, omnibenevolent, impeccable, omnipotent, omniscient, all-free, all-just, all-merciful, all-loving, and, arguably, all-blissful being. Accordingly, we have on hand a rather typical listing of the divine attributes as predicated by traditional western theism.[63] In addition, to this list of qualities should be added at least one more: simplicity. For, as was concluded already in the previous chapter, a metaphysically primary existent, one that causes the class of entities that are not numerically identical to itself not to be empty, cannot be composed of parts.

It should be kept in mind, however, that traditional western theism often understands the just mentioned property of simplicity (i.e. of not being composed of parts) as having a more specific meaning in terms of being 'completely devoid of any metaphysical complexity'.[64] Indeed, as has previously been indicated, at the 'core' of this traditional doctrine of simplicity is the idea that the notion of God admits of no real distinctions whatever: not even that between essence and existence.[65] As Craig notes, this 'is a very odd way of speaking' because it would seem to mean that, 'in a sense', God has no essence at all.[66] Indeed, it would seem to mean that God is *nothing* at all, not even an entity: a conclusion befitting an atheistic argument! Needless to say, this idea cannot be reconciled

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63 As Everitt (2010, p. 78) says, there is 'a broad though not perfect consensus' that 'the main divine attributes' include omnipotence, creatorship, omniscience, eternality, omnipresence, personhood, perfect goodness, non-physicality, necessary existence, simplicity, immutability, and impassibility. Some of these are often considered to be more central than others. According to Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, p. 15), for example, the five '*core* attributes' are omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, incorruptibility, and necessary existence. By comparisons, Gerard J. Hughes (1995, p. 2) suggests that the 'five features which have traditionally been considered the most central' are 'existence, simplicity, omniscience, omnipotence, and goodness', and Richard Swinburne (2004, p. 7) takes the proposition 'God exists' to be logically equivalent to 'there exists necessarily a person without a body (i.e. a spirit) who necessarily is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things'.

64 Brower (2009, p. 105).

65 Hughes (1995, p. 58).

66 Craig (1980, p. 97).

with maximal theism, according to which God belongs to many different classes, meaning that God has many different properties. Thus, to repeat, by saying that God is simple, I only mean to say that he is not made up of parts.

It should also be noted that immutability (the property of not being susceptible of change), a property that is regularly included in traditional enumerations, is absent from our own list. The reason for this absence is simply that it is not obvious, at least not for all I can see, that an immutable member of *M* (the intersection of the class of actual existents and the class of moral beings) is greater, all else being equal, than a mutable member of *M*.[67] Obviously, that which is whatever it is better to be than not to be cannot possibly change for the *worse*, but it is at least conceivable that '[a] maximally great God can undergo change so long as his degree of greatness remains constant'.[68] Indeed, Hoffman and Rosenkrantz conclude that 'there seems to be no good reason to think that if God exists, then he is immutable'.[69] Now be this as it may: I believe the answer to the question of immutability depends on in what way God is supposed to be eternal. If God's eternality is specified in terms of timelessness, it is clear enough that immutability follows (since very plausibly all change entails the passing of time); on the other hand, if it is specified in terms of temporal everlastingness, the entailment is anything but clear.[70]

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67 As agreed by Everitt (2004, p. 276), 'there does not seem any obvious rationale for including immutability in the list of defining features [of God]'.

68 Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, p. 101).

69 *Ibid*. (p. 103).

70 According to Gale (1991, pp. 92), there appears to be 'no good argument for why a highest being, a being than which none greater can be conceived, must be timeless'. Similarly, Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, pp. 103) conclude that, '[a]s far as we can see, there is no good reason at all to think that if God exists, then he is atemporal'. As for difficulties associated with the temporal understanding of eternality, however, see Everitt (2004, pp. 270–4). Notably, Craig (2000) has the eternal cake and eats it, arguing that God is 'timeless without creation and temporal subsequent to creation', admitting that this view, even if coherent, is 'startling and not a little odd'. In particular, as Craig is well aware, 'without' in this analysis must not be understood in temporal terms, since that would be incoherent, involving (as it would) a scenario in which God is timeless *before* he turns temporal (cf. Everitt 2004, pp. 281–2).

3.2.6 *Taking stock*

Now let us return to, albeit shortly to end, our main Anselmian elaboration. To sum up, given the assumption that whatever is an actual moral being is greater, simpliciter, than whatever is not an actual moral being, it is apparently possible to provide a non-relative and yet intelligible analysis of 'whatever it is better to be than not to be', an analysis, moreover, which yields the Anselmian notion of God as that than which a greater cannot be thought. Accordingly, insofar as the said assumption is, at the very least, no less plausible than its denial, it follows that the objectors' accusation that 'whatever it is better to be than not to be' makes no, or little, sense, is in need of substantial support.

As yet, however, the issue of universal value-commensurability is left somewhat hanging in the air. Pace Morris, recall, the Anselmian notion of God appears to require that the overall greatness of every entity is commensurable with that of every other entity. But then recall, too, the relativist objection, according to which it is simply nonsensical to compare the overall greatness of objects belonging to radically different categories, such as, again, books and bicycles. The obvious reply, I think, is to suggest that many things, 'far from being incommensurable, are ontologically equal in value'.[71] Arguably, certain books, such as, say, the Codex Sinaiticus, *are* absolutely greater than any particular vehicles; but nothing that has been said above would seem to entail this conclusion. All that is entailed in this matter is that any actual book or bicycle is absolutely greater than any non-actual, merely possible entity; and again this conclusion seems to be plausible from a rather broad range of metaphysical perspectives. Anyway, if the relativist objection is to regain its bite, it is up to its advocates to tell us why the notion of partial value-incommensurability is preferable to that of universal value-commensurability, the latter of which includes the obvious possibility of manifold cases of value-equality.

Alternatively, rather than focusing on the issue of universal value-commensurability, the critics may argue that, since 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' entails the notion of a greatest possible being, the former notion is, in fact, incoherent. According to this line of criticism, 'there is no maximum degree of power, knowledge, or goodness;

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[71] Rogers (1993, p. 67).

just as there is no largest number'.[72] As noted by Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, however, this is not to say very much. True, there is no largest number, but there *is* 'a largest angle, namely, an angle of 360 degrees'.[73] The real question is 'whether power, knowledge, or goodness resembles *Number*, in *not* having a maximum degree, or resembles *Angle*, in *having* a maximum degree'.[74] Interesting as it is, however, this question must be partly postponed to another occasion. It can be adequately addressed only by looking closer at the corresponding properties of omnipotence, omniscience, and all-goodness, respectively – and indeed at every other excellence which appears to be derivable from 'whatever it is better to be than not to be'.

But only partly postponed: the remains of this chapter is indeed devoted to analysing, if not all of 'the big three',[75] at least two of the paradigmatic attributes of God, namely, omniscience and omnipotence. As I shall attempt to argue, these properties are not only such that they meet the requirements for a maximum degree of exemplification, but they are sufficiently robust so as to withstand quite a few of the most prominent attacks that have been launched against them by the ranks of analytic philosophy. Also, by focusing specifically on omniscience and omnipotence, we are quite plausibly directing our attention at the two divine attributes that have come under the heaviest bombardment during the last fifty years.[76]

As for all-goodness, however, including omnibenevolence, all-mercifulness, and all-lovingness, potential analyses shall indeed have to be

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[72] Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, p. 17).
[73] *Ibid*.
[74] *Ibid*.
[75] Sobel (2004, p. 345).
[76] Empirical evidence: In the Philosophy of Religion: Divine Attributes category at PhilPapers.org (accessed 2012-02-22), 118 entries were listed in the subcategory of Omnipotence; 127 in the subcategories of Omniscience + Foreknowledge; but only 17 in the subcategory of Benevolence. Notably, Sobel (2004, p. 345), in his monumental treatise on arguments for and against beliefs in God, leaves out of his book 'possible problems raised by perfect goodness alone', including issues whether it involves 'justice and mercy'. Similarly, Anthony Kenny (1979, p. 5), who also singles out for discussion omniscience and omnipotence, opines that, although '[o]ther attributes, such as justice, mercy, and love, have a more obvious significance for the religious believer … they are also less immediately amenable to philosophical investigation and analysis'. As also conceded by Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, pp. 154–5), 'a full explication of God's moral perfection requires knowledge of an acceptable moral theory … To the extent that we lack knowledge of such a theory, the explication of God's moral perfection must remain conditional and sketchy.'

postponed; and the same goes for all-justice, all-freedom, all-blissfulness, eternality, and omnipresence: all of which would certainly benefit from substantial elaborations. Impeccability, by contrast, will be taken up for considerations of compossibility with omnipotence on two occasions in §3.4.

But now it is time to round off our Anselm-inspired elaborations. In light of the foregoing, the identification of God as that which, in virtue of being whatever it is better to be than not to be, is that than which a greater cannot be thought, would seem to admit of an intelligible analysis. So far, then, the cosmontological conclusion would not seem to have been undermined.

3.3 Omniscience

As deduced in the preceding section, God is essentially omniscient, that is, omniscient in every possible world in which he exists. However, it has been argued that 'our notion of an omniscient being *itself* contains a contradiction',[77] and thus that it cannot possibly be exemplified. In what follows we shall consider three particularly important charges along this line. First, to be addressed in §3.3.2, there is the problem of indexical expressions, or expressions whose truth value depends on when or where or by whom they are uttered. Second, to be addressed in §3.3.3, there is a Cantorian problem of power sets, a problem that may seem to suggest that there are more truths than anyone can possibly know. Third, to be addressed in §3.3.4, there is the much debated question whether omniscience entails fatalism: the view that everything that happens *must* happen and hence that free will is merely an illusion.

3.3.1 *A matter of knowledge*

Before we turn to these difficulties, however, we need to say a few general words about *knowledge*: that property which an omniscient being is supposed to exemplify to a perfect degree, or in a perfect way. For want of a better analysis, I will assume the traditional account: if a person *S* knows a proposition *p*, it follows (i) that *p* is *true*, and (ii) that *S* believes *p* on *sufficiently good grounds*. This account, as Linda Zagzebski says, is 'widely

[77] Puccetti (1963, p. 92).

accepted', although of course the agreement ends as soon as one tries to explicate the intended sense of 'good'.[78] It should be noted that this account is purely *propositional* in character: it focuses exclusively on truth-bearers, or propositions.[79] That is to say, to use a well-known distinction, it is all about 'knowledge-that', not about 'knowledge-how'.[80] This might be taken to suggest that, in spite of its being so widely accepted, it is a seriously limited account of knowledge and therefore not a proper basis for an analysis of *omniscience*, which, presumably, should encompass *all* kinds of knowledge, whichever they may be. Indeed, Michael Martin, for example, argues that '[a]n all-knowing being *must* have knowledge-how [and not only knowledge-that] in the highest degree'.[81] In reply to this contention, however, it might be pointed out that, insofar as knowledge-how is an *ability*,[82] it falls naturally under the scope of *omnipotence* (to be addressed in §3.4). Moreover, there is an on-going discussion as to whether knowledge-how is *reducible* to knowledge-that – if so, then Martin's claim is off the mark.[83] But be this as it may. Even if there is 'some reason' to take knowledge in a more inclusive way, I will follow Everitt, together with most other analytic philosophers who have written about it, in focusing 'exclusively on propositional knowledge', that is, on knowledge-that.[84]

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78 Zagzebski (1999, p. 95).

79 As John Hospers (1990, p. 10) clarifies, 'philosophers ordinarily talk about [propositions] as being true or false … A sentence is only a vehicle of meaning, and only when we know what that meaning is can we know whether the proposition it expresses is true or false. A proposition has, indeed, often been defined as "*anything that is true or false*".' Accordingly, by a proposition I simply mean whatever has the property of being true or false – no matter what kind of entity it is.

80 Ryle ([1946] 1971, p. 215).

81 Martin (1990, p. 287), my emphasis. Similarly, Wesley D. Cray (2011) argues that omniscience should include *experiential* knowledge, that is, 'knowledge of *what e is like*, where *e* is some experience' (p. 148); otherwise an omniscient being 'might not know a lot of the things that we non-omniscient beings know' (p. 150).

82 The view that knowledge-how is analysable in terms of ability is drawn into question by David Carr (1979), who argues that descriptions of the former are logically different from those of the latter.

83 Notably, Jason Stanley and Timothy Williamson (2001, p. 411) argue in favour of what Gilbert Ryle calls the 'intellectualist legend', i.e. the idea that '[k]nowledge-how is simply a species of knowledge-that'. Jeremy Fantl (2008) presents an overview of this debate between 'anti-intellectualists' and 'intellectualists' from Ryle to Stanley/Williamson about the relationship between knowing how to do something and having the ability to do it.

84 Everitt (2004, p. 286).

Now, intuitively, if to be knowledgeable (or to have knowledge) is to believe, on sufficiently good grounds, that which is true, then to be omniscient (or to have perfect knowledge) is to believe, on sufficiently good grounds, *everything* which is true. In other words: to be omniscient is to know all true propositions. In fact, here we have a readily available and largely uncontroversial definition of omniscience: a definition that not only is 'employed by many theists',[85] indeed, one that 'in all likelihood has been the one most widely held among theists',[86] but a definition that is unanimously affirmed by the 'classical tradition in philosophy of religion' and hence is one that is regularly utilized by *critics* of omniscience as well.[87] In a more precise formulation, it goes something like this:

(D1) A being B is omniscient iff for every proposition p, if p is true then B knows p and if p is false then B does not believe p.[88]

Obviously, since knowledge necessarily involves truth, no-one can know that which is false; hence an omniscient being should not be required to 'know' any falsehood.[89]

Note that according to (D1), omniscience is an all-or-nothing affair. If there is a single true proposition of which B is ignorant, then B is not omniscient. Moreover, to know *all* true propositions (if this is possible) is clearly to exemplify the property of knowledge in a perfect, unsurpassable way. Hence, at least as far as omniscience is concerned, there is a prima facie plausible account available, one that undermines the potential objection that there simply cannot be such a thing as a greatest possible exemplification of knowledge. Nevertheless, there are several other potential difficulties associated with (D1), three of which will be considered in what follows.

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[85] Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, p. 112).
[86] Borland (2006).
[87] Hughes (1995, p. 64).
[88] Cf. e.g. Wierenga (1989, p. 38). It is debatable whether the clause 'and if p is false then B does not believe p' is redundant or not. According to Patrick Grim (1990, p. 273), it is *not* – at least not when it comes to characterizing 'a traditional God's knowledge'. By contrast, while agreeing that one who is omniscient clearly cannot believe any falsehood, others (e.g. Wierenga 1989, pp. 38–9; Warfield 1997, p. 84) are inclined to think that it *is* redundant, given the irrationality involved in someone's *believing* a false proposition p while simultaneously *knowing* (due to his omniscience), and hence *believing*, that p is, indeed, false. Here, however, just to be on the safe side, I choose to include the clause in question.
[89] As A. N. Prior (1962, p. 114) exemplifies, 'God doesn't know that 2 and 2 are 5, for the simple reason that 2 and 2 *aren't* 5.'

3.3.2 *The problem of indexicals*

To begin, then, there is the problem of indexicals. An indexical claim is a 'context-sensitive expression' that explicitly or implicitly contains a linguistic indexical (such as 'you', 'I', 'this', 'now', 'yesterday') and hence is one whose truth value depends on when or where or by whom it is uttered.[90] For example, the truth value of claims such as 'I love you', 'it is raining',[91] and 'the Lisbon earthquake took place 202 years ago' depends on who 'I' and 'you' are, when and where it is said to rain, and when the Lisbon claim is being made. Thus the Lisbon claim, for example, is true if made in 1957, but false if made any other year.

As presumed by Patrick Grim, a leading critic of the notion of omniscience, different indexicals may pose different problems for theism in general and omniscience in particular. Following his lead, however, we shall focus on knowledge *de se* (about oneself), as linguistically expressed by the use of first-person pronouns like 'my' and 'I'.[92]

To appreciate why knowledge de se is supposed to pose a problem for omniscience, as defined by (D1), let us imagine a theatre play building up to a final climactic scene of jealousy between a lover and a spouse. As the drama unfolds before me, I am holding my breath. Suddenly, just as the spouse is lifting a knife, my mobile phone goes off. Equally struck by panic and shame, I hasten to react.

What is it that prompts my reaction? Is it the sudden realization that Martin's mobile phone has gone off? No, says Grim, inspired by John Perry.[93] What prompts my reaction is rather the realization that *my* mobile phone has gone off. That is, what I suddenly come to realize is that *I*

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90 Braun (2010). Indexicals may be divided into two sub-groups: 'pure' indexicals and 'true demonstratives'. As David Braun (1996, pp. 145–6) explains, unlike the former items (e.g. 'I' and 'today'), which refer 'automatically' simply by being uttered, the latter items (e.g. 'that') 'require something more than the mere utterance in order to acquire a referent'.

91 As Arthur W. Burks (1949, p. 677) clarifies, '[t]he indexical element of this remark is implied in the speaker's use of the present tense, as well as in his bodily orientation, both of which give the meaning *here* and *now*; the sentence "It is raining" uttered under these circumstances is equivalent in meaning to the sentence "It is raining here and now"'.

92 See Grim (1985, esp. pp. 152–62). Grim also pays attention to knowledge *de praesenti* (about the present), as linguistically expressed by the demonstrative 'now'. By his own admission, however, the theological complications posed by this particular indexical 'are not nearly so direct as those posed by "I" and knowledge *de se*' (*ibid.*, p. 161).

93 Cf. Perry ([1979] 2000).

am responsible for disturbing the play, not merely that someone called Martin is thus responsible. (I may be suffering from some kind of amnesia that has made me forget my name.) So, Grim argues, to give a satisfactory explanation for my reaction, the first-person indexical is *essential*, it cannot be left out, as 'my having one [piece of knowledge] explains things that my having the other could not'.[94] My knowing that Martin's mobile phone has gone off does not account for my panicked reaction unless I also know that *I* am Martin; and that, of course, as Grim points out, 'is to reintroduce the indexical'.[95]

Here, then, is why knowledge de se might seem to present a difficulty for omniscience. If what I come to know when I realize that *my* mobile phone has gone off is something different from what I (or anyone else) might know in realizing that *Martin's* mobile phone has gone off, then it seems to follow that only *I* – only one who is identical to *me* – can know what is involved in the former act of understanding. If so, however, then I know something that no-one else, not even God, is able to know. Indeed, according to (the early) Norman Kretzmann, one of Grim's philosophical sources of inspiration in this regard, it then follows by generalization that '[e]very person knows certain propositions that no *other* person *can* know'.[96] So, then, as Grim concludes, 'there is no omniscient being',[97] indeed, 'there can be no being that knows everything'.[98]

This is a clever argument. Crucially, however, with respect to the fictional incident at the theatre, it requires that the following sentences,

(A) My mobile phone has gone off [believed by me],

and

(B) Martin's mobile phone has gone off [believed by those around me],

express or signify different propositions. Incidentally, it should be noted that this requirement runs counter to (what Grim calls) 'the traditional view',[99] according to which (A) and (B) do express the same proposition. Notably, Gottlob Frege voices this traditional view:

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94 Grim (2000, p. 143). To complicate matters, however, one might wonder whether *any* action, 'however uncomplicated, is explained simply by allusion to a single belief held by the agent, even when a fairly detailed description of the agent's desires and goals is thrown in' (Boër and Lycan 1980, p. 451).
95 Grim (1985, p. 153).
96 Kretzmann (1966, p. 421).
97 Grim (1985, p. 154).
98 Grim (2000, p. 144).
99 Grim (1985, p. 153).

> If someone wants to say the same today as he expressed yesterday using the word 'today', he must replace this word with 'yesterday'. Although the thought [or proposition] is the same its verbal expression must be different … The case is the same with words like 'here' and 'there'. In all such cases the mere wording, as it is given in writing, is not the complete expression of the thought, but the knowledge of certain accompanying conditions of utterance, which are used as means of expressing the thought, are [sic] needed for its correct apprehension.[100]

But of course the traditional view might be wrong. So, contrary to what it says, suppose that sentences (A) and (B) express different propositions, as Grim and other critics of omniscience would have us believe.[101]

Now consider (A) more carefully. What does it say, exactly? Or to be more precise: what exactly does the (A)-proposition – by which I mean the proposition expressed by (A) – claim? Is it that my mobile phone has gone off? No. As the theatre story goes, the (A)-proposition happens to be true, but we could easily envision another scenario in which I falsely come to believe that 'my mobile phone has gone off'. For example, it might be that someone next to me in the audience, say, Patrick, has the same ringtone as me. Suppose that two minutes after the first debacle, when I truthfully came to believe that 'my mobile phone has gone off', I am led to believe *again*,

(A*) My mobile phone has gone off [believed by me].

Yet this time my belief is indeed false; as it happens, Patrick is to blame! Now, as far as these two sentence tokens (or instances of the same sentence type) are concerned, (A) is identical to (A*). Still, since only one of them expresses a truth, the truth bearers which they express surely cannot be identical. As David Kaplan says, '[i]f what we say differs in truth-value, that is enough to show that we say different things'.[102] As a result, since (A) and (A*) express different propositions, the (A)-proposition cannot be sufficiently stated or identified merely by reiterating the words of (A).

Thus a quandary arises. What exactly does the (A)-proposition claim that is not likewise being claimed by the (A*)-proposition, expressed two minutes later? Well, the obvious answer (or so it seems to me) is that the

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[100] Frege ([1919] 1956, p. 296).
[101] Cf. Everitt (2004, pp. 292–7).
[102] Kaplan (1989, p. 500). According to Perry (1977, p. 476), this is Frege's 'criterion of difference for thoughts': '[i]f *S* is true and *S′* is not, *S* and *S′* express different thoughts' (emphasis removed). As Grim (2000, p. 143) seems to agree, '[t]he non-identity of discernibles will suffice' to establish this conclusion.

sought after specification will have to include a non-indexical reference to time. Thus it may be suggested that the (A)-proposition more specifically claims that 'my mobile phone has gone off at t_1'. Correspondingly, the (A*)-proposition more specifically claims that 'my mobile phone has gone off at t_2'. From Grim's point of view, of course, this specification is somewhat awkward, given the alleged indispensability of *indexicals*; but it might be acceptable as long as the proposition in question contains at least one essential indexical. Or then perhaps not; as we shall see, further problems immediately await.

Consider these two sentences:

(C) My mobile phone has gone off now [believed by me at t_1],

and

(D) My mobile phone has gone off at t_1 [believed by me].

Of these two, (D) is the more precise linguistic attempt at expressing the proposition which, according to the above suggestion, is being expressed by (A). But then what shall we say about (C)? Does (C), too, express the selfsame proposition? Well, no, not on Grim's view, a view whose essential idea is precisely that indexicals like 'now' *cannot* be replaced by non-indexical substitutes.[103]

Thus Grim faces a predicament. Since (C) and (D), on his view, express different propositions, the (C)-proposition cannot be specified by a reference to time. But it must be specifiable somehow, lest it be indistinguishable from the proposition expressed by the following sentence:

(C*) My mobile phone has gone off now [believed by me at t_2],

a proposition which is falsely believed by me two minutes after I truthfully believed its sibling: the (C)-proposition. So, how to specify the (C)-proposition if indeed temporal indicators are ruled out? By introducing spatial indicators? Surely not: even putting aside the fact that I am supposed to be in the same location (same theatre, same seat) at both t_1 and t_2, this proposal would soon enough force us to specify, *without reference to either time or place*, what exactly differentiates the propositions expressed by these two sentences:

(E) My mobile phone has gone off here and now [believed by me in location$_1$ at t_1],

and

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[103] See Grim (1985, pp. 155–6).

(E*) My mobile phone has gone off here and now [believed by me in location$_2$ at t_2] –

propositions, we are supposing, only the first of which is true. But in the absence of non-indexical indicators, it is entirely mysterious what exactly the (E)-proposition, unlike the (E*)-proposition, truthfully claims. This should be a matter of concern to proponents (like Grim) of the indexical irreducibility view, but as pointed out by Steven E. Boër and William G. Lycan, they 'simply take it as obvious that someone's peculiarly ineffable first-person belief content' is able to account for someone's behaviour.[104] What *is* obvious, rather, is that the said view leads to paradox. It implies that sentences (A), (C), and (E) express ineffable propositions, and still it claims that it is possible for me to know these propositions. But how is it possible for anyone to know a mysterious proposition: a proposition the exact content of which is hidden in the dark? Propositional knowledge surely presupposes a grasp of that which is known; it would be meaningless to claim knowledge of *p* and yet not know what *p* claims. Contrary to intentions, then, the indexical irreducibility view, a view that informs Grim's argument from essential indexicals, suggests that there are propositions, ineffable ones, that *no-one* can know. Insofar as this is an unacceptable conclusion, it follows that Grim's argument is undermined.

In fact, to turn the tables, it can be positively argued that, contrary to appearances, knowledge de se does not pose any threat to omniscience at all. Reconsider sentences (A) and (B):

(A) My mobile phone has gone off [believed by me],

and

(B) Martin's mobile phone has gone off [believed by those around me].

Suppose again, for the sake of argument, that Grim is right: (A) and (B) express different propositions. Grim bases this conclusion on two lines of reasoning:

> What the argument [from essential indexicals] shows is that [the] two pieces of knowledge [analogous to (A) and (B)] cannot be the same because (1) I can know one thing without knowing the other, or (2) my having one explains things that my having the other could not.[105]

But then consider the following sentence:

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[104] Boër and Lycan (1980, p. 453).

[105] Grim (2000, p. 143). Grim's example sentences are: 'I am making a mess' and 'Patrick Grim is making a mess'.

(F) Your mobile phone has gone off [said by Patrick, addressing me].

As David Braun notes, '[w]e are inclined to say' that sentences like (A) and (F) 'say the same thing'.[106] But it goes without saying that the (F)-proposition can be known by someone distinct from me. Hence, indeed, it seems that one who knows the (F)-proposition knows what I know in knowing the (A)-proposition. As a result, even if it is granted for argument's sake that (A) and (B) express different propositions, it seems that the (A)- and (F)-propositions are, in fact, one and the same, and hence it follows that the (A)-proposition is knowable by others than me.

Importantly, neither line of Grim's reasoning in support of the claim that (A) and (B) express different propositions can be used in support of the parallel claim that (A) and (F) also express different propositions. First, even on the assumption that it is possible for me to know the (B)-proposition and yet not know the (A)-proposition, it is *not* possible for me to know the (F)-proposition and yet not know the (A)-proposition. For, in order to know the (F)-proposition, I must adequately understand what (F) means; but I simply cannot adequately understand this unless I understand that I am 'you', that is, the one to whom the second-person pronoun of Patrick's utterance refers.

Secondly, the (F)-proposition seems to have just as much explanatory potential as the (A)-proposition in regard to my reaction at the theatre. If Patrick turns towards me and says, 'your mobile phone has gone off', his utterance will surely prompt me to do something – no less so than if I had come to believe that my mobile phone has gone off directly. If it is protested that I will not react unless I realize that Patrick's utterance is addressed to *me*, suggesting that the first-person pronoun is indexically irreplaceable, one needs to remember what was only just said. *Unless* I realize that Patrick's utterance is addressed to me, I shall not adequately understand, let alone know, the (F)-proposition; hence my realizing this is essential to my knowing it. Thus, as far as action-explanatory potential goes, the (F)-proposition has whatever it takes.

Of course, there might be other arguments (besides those given by Grim) in support of the claim that (A) and (F) express different propositions; but as it is, it is plausible to conclude that Grim's argument de se is not only undermined but overthrown. And even if other indexicals (like 'now' and 'here') may pose difficulties peculiar to omniscience, it is hard

[106] Braun (2010). Braun's example sentences are: 'I am hungry' [said by Fred] and 'You are hungry' [said by Wilma, addressing Fred].

to see, in light of the above discussion, how any of these could figure in a successful argument against the existence of an omniscient being.

3.3.3 *The problem of power sets*

Next, to continue our assessment of omniscience, let us go on to consider a set theoretical challenge that potentially threatens to undermine the possibility of something which (D1) takes for granted, namely, universal quantification over all propositions. If this challenge can be reinforced, it follows that (D1) is not so much false as semantically vacuous; and then of course it would be quite meaningless to maintain that God, or any other being, is (D1)-omniscient.

Again we find Grim at the forefront. In a series of publications he argues, first, that there can be no set of true propositions (or truths), and, secondly, assuming that that which an omniscient being knows by definition would constitute a set of all truths, that a (D1)-omniscient being cannot exist.[107] Let us see how these two stages of his argument are supposed to work.

First, then, as an assumption for reductio, suppose that there is a set **T** of all truths: $\{T_1, T_2, T_3, \ldots\}$. According to Cantor's 'widely accepted' power set theorem,[108] every set has more subsets than members.[109] In finite cases this is fairly obvious. Take, for instance, the set of pencils presently on my desk. It contains three items: $\{a, b, c\}$. By itself each of these items forms a singleton (a set with exactly one member): $\{a\}$, $\{b\}$, and $\{c\}$. And then of course there are three subsets of pairs: $\{a, b\}$, $\{a, c\}$, and $\{b, c\}$. In addition, albeit less obvious, there are the empty set, Ø, and the entire set, $\{a, b, c\}$. So, whereas the set of pencils presently on my desk only has three members, it has no less than eight subsets. Now, in set theoretical terminology, a power set $\wp(S)$ is the set of subsets of a given set S. In other words, the members of $\wp(S)$ are the subsets of S. Thus $\wp$(the set of pencils presently on my desk) has eight members. What Cantor's theorem shows is that, given some suitable (and preferably not ad hoc) paradox blocking restriction, *all* sets – empty, finite, or

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[107] The set theoretical mechanism is presented in Grim (1984); elaborations and specific applications to omniscience are made in Grim (1988; 1990; 1991; 2000) and, with Alvin Plantinga as opponent, in Plantinga and Grim (1993).
[108] Klement (2010a, p. 16).
[109] Cf. Quine (1937, p. 120).

infinite – have more subsets than members. Accordingly, the power set of any set S is larger in size (or cardinality) than S itself.

But then it follows by Cantor's theorem that $\wp(\mathbf{T})$ is larger, that is, contains more elements, than **T** itself. Paradoxically, however, as Grim points out, 'to each element of this power set will correspond a truth'.[110] For example, it will be true about every element of $\wp(\mathbf{T})$ whether a certain truth, say, T_{18}, belongs to it or not. So, 'there will be at least as many truths as there are elements of the power set $\wp(\mathbf{T})$'.[111] But **T** itself is supposed to contain *all* truths. Accordingly, or so Grim argues, since there obviously cannot be more truths than all truths, it follows by Cantor's theorem that, contrary to our initial assumption, there is in fact no such thing as **T**.

Having thus apparently established what 'some' or even 'many' think is '*strongly* counterintuitive',[112] namely, that there cannot be any set of all truths, Grim proceeds to the second stage of his argument: a 'short and sweet Cantorian argument against omniscience'.[113] It goes thus:

> Were there an omniscient being, what that being would know would constitute a set of all truths. But there can be no set of all truths, and so can be no omniscient being.[114]

Short and sweet indeed; this argument 'illustrates very neatly how debates about theism can be enriched by philosophical ideas coming from wholly unexpected directions'.[115] If it is sound, (D1)-omniscience cannot possibly be exemplified. Hence we need to find out if it *is* sound. Drawing principally from Alvin Plantinga's and Grim's published correspond-

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[110] Grim (1984, p. 207).
[111] *Ibid.*
[112] Beall (2000, p. 38).
[113] Grim (1988, p. 356).
[114] *Ibid.*
[115] Everitt (2004, p. 288). Roland Puccetti (1963) gives an argument against the coherence of omniscience vaguely reminiscent of Grim's. Slightly transcribed, Puccetti's argument seems to go like this: An omniscient being B must know that he knows all truths; so, in order to know that he knows all truths B must know the proposition p that there are no truths beyond those which he knows; but in order to know p he must know what is beyond his epistemic limit; but this is self-contradictory; hence, omniscience is an incoherent notion. However, this argument appears to be mistaken. If p is true then that which B knows is all there *is* to know; the fact that B cannot justify his belief in p by going beyond his epistemic 'limit' does not mean that he cannot justify his belief in p. Similarly, Fred Newman (1964, p. 102) replies to Puccetti that 'if knowing involves only the holding of a well-justified true belief, then one can know [p] without ascertaining [p]'.

ence,[116] I wish to make three comments along this enquiry: the last two of which would seem to constitute decisive reasons to conclude that the argument is, in fact, *not* sound.

First, the paradoxical potential of Cantor's theorem is by no means peculiar to theism and notions of omniscience. In fact, unless it is somehow held in check, 'Cantor's law falls immediately into paradox'.[117] To see this as clearly as possible, consider the set of all sets. Unless somehow restricted, Cantor's theorem entails absurdly that $\wp$(set of all sets) contains more sets than the set of all sets itself. Or consider an even grander set: the universal set U of 'absolutely everything' that exists, including 'itself and its own subclasses'.[118] Unless duly restricted, Cantor's theorem entails that $\wp(U)$ contains more elements than U itself. Thus it is clear that Cantor's theorem must be somehow restricted in scope, or else 'set' has to be defined so as to exclude collections that are 'too big',[119] or else some other paradox blocking approach must be pursued. In short: 'naive' set theory must somehow turn 'axiomatic'.[120] Yet is one of the great logical debates in modern times, ever since Cantor laid down his theorem in 1891, exactly how this ought to be done. As W. V. O. Quine opines, further research 'may some day issue in a set theory that is clearly best', but, as they stand, 'the axiomatic systems of set theory in the literature are largely incompatible with one another and no one of them clearly deserves to be singled out as standard'.[121]

Let us dwell on this point for a while. What we have is a century-plus long deliberation at the highest logical level, dividing the world's leading set theoreticians and resulting in several alternative axiomatizations that are 'largely incompatible with one another'. Each version, as Grim says, 'is essentially a response to two paradoxes: Cantor's paradox regarding a set of all sets and Russell's paradox regarding a set of all non-self-membered sets'.[122] One of these versions, it should be noted, namely, the ZF

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116 Plantinga and Grim (1993).

117 Quine (1963, p. 202).

118 Quine (1937, p. 121). Of course this set is different from the set of all sets only if one assumes 'with common sense' (Holmes, 2010) that not all things are sets.

119 Simmons (2002, p. 123).

120 Suppes (1972, p. 3).

121 Quine (1963, p. viii).

122 Grim (1988, p. 358). Russell's famous paradox is generated by the following question: Is the set of non-self-membered sets a member of itself? If *yes*, then it is *not* a member of itself; if *no*, then it *is* a member of itself. In either case, then, it is a member of itself only if it is not.

(Zermelo-Frænkel) axiomatization, is 'dominant' among mathematicians working today.[123] Notably, this commonly used version solves Cantor's set-of-all-sets paradox by 'proving' – from its careful selection of axioms – that this set cannot exist. In short, it turns the paradox into a reductio: if there *were* such a thing as the set of all sets then by Cantor's theorem this set would contain fewer sets than its power set; hence, since this is absurd, there *is* no such thing as the set of all sets. And of course this is a parallel conclusion to Grim's less general one, with which we are already acquainted, namely, the conclusion that there is no such thing as the set of all *truths*. Not surprisingly, then, in ZF's well-documented mathematical utility Grim finds additional support.

But of course ZF set theory does not *prove* that the set of all sets, or the universal set of everything, does not exist. As M. Randall Holmes cautions,

> there is a good reason for mathematicians who have occasion to think about foundations to be aware that there are alternatives; otherwise there is a danger that accidental features of the dominant system of set theory [i.e. ZF] will be mistaken for essential features of any foundation of mathematics. For example, it is frequently said that the universal set … is an inconsistent totality; the actual situation is merely that one cannot have a universal set while assuming Zermelo's axiom of separation.[124]

Indeed, says Holmes, '[a] common criticism of Zermelo set theory is that it is an *ad hoc* selection of axioms chosen to avoid paradox'.[125] Bertrand Russell, for one, 'had many reasons for not finding this [size limitation] approach [of which ZF is an example] very attractive'. For example, he 'insisted upon an independently *philosophically well-motivated explanation*' of which sets one might assume to exist, rather than just dismissing those candidates that are 'too big' to be consistent with certain theorems.[126] Here, however, I have no intention of trying to substantiate this common line of criticism. What is important to note is merely that, even if, pace Quine, ZF should be considered 'clearly better' than its axiomatic rivals, it does not follow that the set of all sets, or the set of everything, is an impossible totality. To validate this metaphysical conclusion, some further argument, something 'beyond anything Grim supplies',[127] is needed.

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[123] Holmes (2010).
[124] *Ibid.*
[125] *Ibid.*
[126] Klement (2010b, p. 30).
[127] Simmons (1993, p. 27).

Thus, to reiterate, the paradoxical potential of Cantor's theorem is by no means a particular problem for theism and notions of omniscience. As Plantinga says, it is 'a general problem with a life of its own'.[128] Of course, as Grim correctly replies, this generality does not mean that it is *not* a problem for theism and omniscience.[129] But the correct lesson to be drawn so far is rather something like this: although Cantor's theorem does pose a problem for the idea of omniscience, as defined by (D1), it surely does not warrant Grim's concluding speculation that, 'within any logic we have … omniscience appears to be simply impossible'.[130] According to Selmer Bringsjord, '[a] number of axiomatic set theories lacking the power set axiom are, according to many, genuine foundational contenders'.[131] Also, as Holmes notes, 'many of the alternative set theories' aim at recovering the universal set (with or without making a distinction between classes and sets),[132] a recovery that, if successful, will authenticate the set of all truths as well. And again, how best to axiomatize set theory has been discussed for more than a century. '[T]he last time I looked at these disputes', says Bringsjord, 'they weren't settled – not in the least'.[133]

To conclude thus far, the paradoxical implications of naive set theory should make us suspect that there might be something paradoxical about Grim's Cantorian argument as well.

But now let us move on: here is the second comment I wish to make. In their published correspondence, Plantinga starts by asking Grim a question:

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[128] Plantinga and Grim (1993, p. 287).
[129] Cf. *ibid.* (p. 297).
[130] Grim (1988, p. 341; cf. p. 359).
[131] Bringsjord (1989, p. 187).
[132] Holmes (2010). Those systems – notably, NBG (von Neumann-Bernays-Gödel) class theory – that do make a distinction between classes and sets want thereby to capture the intuition that some collections, viz., proper or ultimate 'classes', are 'too big' to be members of other collections. Hence, on this view, 'sets' are those collections that are 'sufficiently small' to be members of other collections. Now, as Christopher Menzel (1986, p. 69) notes, the fact that NBG disallows the universal class U to form a power collection $\wp(U)$ does not by itself justify the conclusion that $\wp(U)$ does not exist, just as the fact that ZF disallows U does not by itself justify the conclusion that U does not exist. If anyone 'is going to marshal results in formal set theory to do the metaphysical labour they are intended to do here, more argument is needed'. Indeed, of this Grim (1988, p. 341) himself is well aware: 'The attempt to draw philosophical lessons from metalogical texts is a notoriously perilous business.'
[133] Bringsjord (1989, p. 187).

> why do you think the notion of omniscience … demands that there be a *set* of all truths? As you point out, it's plausible to think that there is no such set … So I'm inclined to agree … But how does that show that there is a problem for the notion of a being that knows all truths?[134]

What Plantinga suggests in this passage is that, even if omniscience by definition involves knowledge of all true propositions, these truths need not form a ZF-defined, recursively enumerable entity called 'set'. It is perfectly possible to quantify over all truths anyway, without therefore being committed to the additional existence of a mathematical ZF set. For example, the universal assertion that 'every proposition is either true or not-true' is, well, *true*, despite the fact that Cantor's theorem seems to imply that there is no set of all propositions. In short, then, as Plantinga asks, 'why buy the dogma that quantification essentially involves sets?'[135]

In reply, Grim agrees that the 'appeal directly to propositional quantification' is 'clearly the most plausible response' to the said argument.[136] Still, he says, there is an 'immediate problem' even with this appeal: 'the only semantics we have for quantification is in terms of *sets*' and hence 'even appeal to propositional quantification fails to give us an acceptable notion of omniscience'.[137] In other words, take away the set theoretical system of reference and we are no longer able to understand what omniscience is supposed to involve.

Plantinga's rejoinder, however, is quite compelling:

> If we think we have to employ the notion of set in order to explain or understand quantification, then some of the problems you mention do indeed arise; but why think that? The semantics ordinarily given for quantification already presupposes the notions of quantification; we speak of the domain D for the quantifier and then say that '(z) *A*z' [all zs are *A*] is true just in case every member of D has (or is assigned to) *A*. So the semantics obviously doesn't tell us what quantification is.[138]

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134 Plantinga and Grim (1993, pp. 267–8).

135 *Ibid*. (p. 268). Indeed, discussing this dogma, Richard L. Cartwright (1994, p. 8) argues that '[t]here would appear to be every reason to think it false. Consider what it implies: that we cannot speak of the cookies in the jar unless they constitute a set … I do not mean to imply that there is no set the members of which are the cookies in the jar … The point is rather that the needs of quantification are already served by there being simply the cookies in the jar … no additional objects are required.'

136 Plantinga and Grim (1993, p. 268).

137 *Ibid*. (p. 269); cf. Grim (1986, p. 191).

138 Plantinga and Grim (1993, pp. 271–2).

Indeed, to continue this thought, the domain D is, according to ZF set theory, defined or 'determined' by the entities which belong to it 'in the sense that sets with exactly the same elements are identical'.[139] Hence, in order to define D, one must first have identified all of its members; but if thus all its members are implicit in the definiens or determination of D, ZF set theory cannot be required to meaningfully grasp the notion of propositional quantification. It is rather the other way round: 'in a sense … the elements of a set are "prior to" it'.[140]

Moreover, if sound, Grim's argument would have had a remarkably adverse side effect. It will be recalled that Grim uses Cantor's theorem to validate the conclusion that there can be no set of all truths. By exactly parallel arguments, however, there can be no universal set, no set of all sets, and no set of all propositions; and indeed, according to ZF set theory, none of these sets exists. So, if propositional quantification semantically presupposes the existence of sets, as Grim argues, then none of the following sentences expresses any proposition (truth bearer) at all:

(a) All existing things exist.
(b) All true propositions are true.
(c) All false propositions are true.
(d) Nothing exists.
(e) No proposition is both true and not true.
(f) For all p and q, if p, and if p implies q, then q.
(g) No object is taller than itself.
(h) There is no object with six legs.

But this is fantastically unbelievable. (a) and (b) are tautologies and thus (one would think) analytically true. (c) is a contradiction and thus (one would think) analytically false. (d) may have an air of metaphysical subtlety about it, but it is false nonetheless. (e) is the law of non-contradiction and (f) is modus ponens: both of which are non-negotiable axioms of classical logic. (g) states an obvious metaphysical necessity and is thus (one would think) necessarily true. (h), finally, is, demonstrably false.

Astonishingly, conceding that Plantinga's argument 'does raise a very important question as to what formal semantics can honestly claim or be expected to do',[141] Grim appears to bite the bullet: 'It must', he says, 'be admitted that another casualty [of my Cantorian argument against omniscience] would be "logical laws" of the form you indicate', such as (e)

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[139] Boolos (1971, p. 215).
[140] *Ibid.* (p. 216).
[141] Plantinga and Grim (1993, pp. 273–4).

and (f).[142] But this can only mean that he is prepared to accept the more general conclusion that sentences such as (a)–(h) lack truth values altogether. To be willing to pay such a price in order to save one's argument is, in a way, admirable, although the proper conclusion to be drawn is of course that there is something wrong with one's argument to begin with. In short: if Grim's argument is sound, it follows, for example, that sentence (a) does not state a truth. But (a) states a truth: an analytical one at that. Thus, by modus tollens, Grim's argument is unsound.

As if this were not enough, there is another fatal flaw with Grim's Cantorian argument against omniscience – and this is my third comment, which too is due to Plantinga.[143] Suppose again, for reductio, that Grim's argument is sound. Again, then, there is no set of all truths. Ironically, however, what was just concluded is a conclusion about *all sets*, namely, that no set is a set of all truths. That is to say, it is a universal conclusion which on Grim's own account cannot have a truth value! So, absurdly, if Grim's argument is sound then its conclusion is *not true* (since it lacks a truth value). This is an exceptional consequence of an argument whose conclusion is said to be that '[t]here can in fact be no set of all truths',[144] a conclusion that Grim trumpets as a seemingly 'solid result',[145] one that suggests, 'within any logic we have', that 'there really *cannot* be any totality of truths and really *cannot* be any omniscience'.[146] What really *is* a solid result, however, is that, contrary to our initial assumption, Grim's Cantorian argument is, indeed, unsound. Its end result is self-contradiction. Not an unexpected result, perhaps, given that the whole argument is fuelled by well-known paradoxes of naive set theory to begin with.

All in all, there are two conclusive reasons not to accept Grim's Cantorian argument. First, it has the adverse consequence that sentences like (a)–(h) lack truth values, and, second, it is sound just in case it is not.

Now, as said, Grim has had some 'second thoughts' about his Cantorian argument.[147] In fact, judging by his most recent publication on the matter, co-written with Nicholas Rescher, it is now official that he has retracted from his earlier claims. Speaking about collections such as the totality of all truths and the totality of all things, the authors explicitly

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[142] *Ibid.* (271).
[143] *Ibid.* (pp. 284–7, 291–7).
[144] Grim (1988, p. 359).
[145] Grim (1991, p. 98).
[146] Grim (1988, pp. 341–2), italics in the original.
[147] Grim (2000, p. 141).

assert that Cantor's theorem 'affords no sufficient ground for deeming such mega-collectivities impossible, let alone logically inconsistent'.[148] Thus it is all the more surprising that, in a paper advertised as forthcoming, Grim still believes that the assumption of a totality of all truths is 'provably false', given 'elementary logic'.[149] Whatever his current position may be, however, let us briefly see how he has actually tried to defend his Cantorian argument against the abovementioned points of critique.

Already in his correspondence with Plantinga, having recognized that 'Cantorian arguments are indeed very peculiar, tempting us in some cases to try to draw universal conclusions that they themselves show us cannot be drawn',[150] Grim hazards into 'dangerous waters',[151] suggesting a different strategy which is 'less direct and more deviously dialectical'.[152] This alternative strategy seems to suggest the following reiterative procedure. Even if the conclusion of the Cantorian argument (viz. that there can be no omniscient being) 'cannot be represented in the manner we might first attempt', the argument as such can nonetheless be directed 'case by case' as a 'logic bomb' against any particular affirmation of omniscience.[153] In this way, then (or so, at least, Grim argues), one might rephrase the Cantorian argument '*purely* in the particular, without any universal propositions at all'.[154] And thus the alternative strategy comes down to this: whenever someone propositionally affirms the existence of an omniscient being, the Cantorian argument can be used to expose the incoherence of that particular claim.

This new strategy, however, is no improvement on Grim's earlier approach. To see this, let p be the particular claim that God is omniscient. According to Grim, then, the Cantorian argument can be used to demonstrate the incoherence of p. So, how is this demonstration supposed to work? By pointing out that there is no such thing as the set of all truths? No. This reply would presuppose precisely that which on Grim's later account is incoherent, namely, universal quantification over all sets. But then perhaps p might be shown to be incoherent by pointing out that there cannot possibly be any totality of all truths? No. This reply would yet again be self-referentially incoherent, quantifying, as it does,

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148 Rescher and Grim (2008, p. 423).
149 Grim (forthcoming).
150 Plantinga and Grim (1993, p. 299).
151 *Ibid.* (p. 289).
152 *Ibid.* (p. 298).
153 Grim (2000, p. 152).
154 *Ibid.* (p. 299).

over all objects, claiming that no object is a totality of all truths. Ok, so perhaps *p* might be shown to be incoherent by pointing out that Cantor's theorem proves that there are more truths than all truths? No. Nothing can prove a self-contradictory conclusion. (Remember, it was *because* of this self-contradiction that Grim initially concluded that there cannot be any set of all truths.) As a final suggestion, then, perhaps *p* can be shown to be incoherent by pointing out that Cantor's theorem proves that quantification over all truths is impossible? No. Cantor's theorem does *not* prove any such thing because the conclusion of such a proof would itself quantify over all truths, paradoxically claiming that none of them quantifies over all truths.

Thus the question remains: On Grim's new slant, just how does the Cantorian argument show that *p* is incoherent? Ultimately, Grim seems to be suggesting something like this: the Cantorian argument reveals the incoherence of *p* in that it forces those who erroneously accept quantification over all truths to the absurd conclusion that there are more truths than all truths. Thus,

> Contrary to the characterization you [Plantinga] give, I'm not trying to get you to envisage and accept an argument with some universal premise and a universal conclusion to the effect that there are no universal propositions. You characterize yourself as holding certain beliefs. I merely help you to see that you are thereby led to confusion and consternation.[155]

But then *why*, on Grim's view, is one who affirms *p* thereby led to 'confusion and consternation'? Presumably, if pressed for an answer, Grim would repeat himself, saying that *p* implies quantification over all truths, which implies that there is a set of all truths, which by Cantor's theorem implies that there are more truths than all truths, which is absurd. But note that from this chain of implications Grim cannot (and yet he does) draw the conclusion that 'there can be no omniscient being',[156] because that very conclusion would quantify over all objects and hence be guilty, according to Grim, of confusion and thus of being a source of consternation.

If anything, the net result seems to be this. Those who affirm the existence of a (D1)-omniscient being and those who deny the existence of such a being are all somehow relying (implicitly in the former case; explicitly in the latter) on universal quantifications, inherently susceptible

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[155] Plantinga and Grim (1993, p. 298).

[156] Grim (forthcoming); cf. Grim (2000, p. 153): 'There is no hope yet for the being that knew too much.'

to Cantorian paradoxes. Thus Grim's Cantorian argument works just as well both ways, meaning in effect that the theist has no more to fear (or, for that matter, no less) than the atheist in this peculiar regard. But then again: the argument, being patently unsound, does not really work at all.

3.3.4 *The problem of theological fatalism*

Last up for consideration, there is an ancient worry that omniscience, as understood by (D1), effectively entails *fatalism*, 'the thesis that whatever happens must happen',[157] or, with respect to human affairs, 'that we are powerless to do anything other than what we actually do'.[158] In essence, as Richard Taylor aptly says, a fatalist 'thinks of the future in the manner in which we all think of the past'.[159] That is to say, just as we cannot now do anything about what happened yesterday, so we cannot now do anything about what will happen tomorrow – or so the fatalist claims. If she is right, there appears to be a clear sense in which it follows that free will is an illusion, because if all our future choices are actually inevitable, or such that we cannot but make them, what sense is there in maintaining that we are nevertheless endowed with free will? As a result, if indeed omniscience, as defined by (D1), effectively entails fatalism, then insofar as we should *not* accept fatalism, neither should we accept (D1).

But why think that omniscience entails fatalism in the first place? As an approximation, the idea is this. Suppose that God exists and is (D1)-omniscient. Hence he knows all true propositions (and believes no false ones). Presumably, however, God's omniscience includes *fore*knowledge: that is, comprehensive knowledge of all that *will be*, of all true propositions about the future.[160] But if God knows in advance – has *fore*-knowledge of – whatever will happen in the future, it seems as if the future is fixed. For example, if God knows that I will start smoking tomorrow,[161] or that Jones will mow his lawn next Saturday,[162] then I *will*

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157 Bernstein (2005, p. 65).
158 Rice (2010).
159 Taylor (1962, p. 56).
160 Within Christianity, it is 'traditionally claimed that God knows the future in every detail, including the future free actions of created beings' (Robinson 2000, p. 251). And this much is beyond dispute: '*if* bivalence applies to future contingent propositions, then God is omniscient only if He has knowledge of future contingent propositions' (Hughes 1998, p. 398, my emphasis).
161 See Prior (1962, p. 121).
162 See Pike (1965, p. 31).

start smoking tomorrow, no matter how much I reason with myself, and Jones *will* mow his lawn next Saturday, no matter how lazy he is or how much he tries to rest. Accordingly, scenarios in which I do *not* start smoking tomorrow, or in which Jones does *not* mow his lawn next Saturday, are in some sense not so much as possible. But if indeed these scenarios are not even possible then it seems as if neither I nor Jones has any real – at least not libertarian – choice in these matters.[163] And of course this result can be generalized, leaving us, or so it seems, to cope with fatalism: If God really knows beforehand all that will be, then *all that will be*, whether we want it to be or not.

As said, the above outline is only an approximation; it is an attempt to capture the intuitive idea of what is known as *theological* fatalism: a sort of fatalism, in other words, that is fuelled by notions of divine omniscience. Now, in order to see more exactly what the thrust of this line of reasoning is, or at least is supposed to be, we need first of all to understand what the *logical* version of fatalism is all about. According to this more general sort of fatalism, what crucially undermines freedom is not prior or timeless *knowledge*, divine or not, but prior or timeless *truth*. To illustrate with one of philosophy's most reiterated examples, consider Aristotle's sea battle argument (from *De Interpretatione*, §9). Let *p* be the proposition expressed by the sentence 'there will be a sea battle tomorrow'. Given the law of bivalence, *p* is exclusively either true or false. But if it is already or timelessly *true* that there will be a sea battle tomorrow, then ipso facto, '[s]ince propositions correspond with facts',[164] there will be a sea battle tomorrow. Contrariwise, if it is already or timelessly *false* that there will be a sea battle tomorrow, then ipso facto there will *not* be a sea battle tomorrow; '[w]hat is true (today) about tomorrow *cannot* be false tomorrow, even if that truth is a contingent one'.[165] In either case, then, it seems that the truth of the matter is already or timelessly settled.

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[163] According to libertarian views of freedom, agents act freely only insofar as their choices of actions are not determined, either by external forces or internal compulsions. These *incompatibilist* (or non-determinist) views of freedom are opposed to *compatibilist* ones, according to which free will and determinism are compatible. Indeed, 'libertarian free will, unlike a compatibilist version of free will, demands the ability, in the very circumstances that the individual finds herself, to choose among various alternative courses of action' (Bernstein 2005, p. 74). (Terminological note of caution: one may be a compatibilist regarding foreknowledge and freedom, while at the same time an incompatibilist regarding determinism and freedom.)

[164] Aristotle ([350 BC, §9] 1928, §19a.30–35).

[165] Diekemper (2004, p. 293).

No matter how cunningly naval officers deliberate and what kings ultimately happen to command, the outcome, including the very deliberations and eventual commands that preceded it, is a logically pre-given fact, and there is nothing anyone can do to alter it. Hence fatalism: we are powerless to do other than what we actually do.

Note an all-important assumption in the above line of reasoning: for any proposition *p*, *p is* – already or timelessly – true or false. That is, no proposition *becomes* true or false as the events of the world unfold. This assumption, it should be admitted, is far from obvious. Indeed, Aristotle himself concluded that the threat of logical fatalism should be avoided precisely by denying this assumption.[166] Note, too, that this Aristotelian solution is applicable to the theological version as well: if propositions about the future lack truth value beforehand then obviously there are no truths for God to *know* beforehand (since knowledge by definition presupposes truth).[167] Hence, those who launch either version of the fatalistic argument must accept, pace Aristotle, the assumption that propositions about the future *are* – already or timelessly – true or false. It is my impression that some proponents of the theological version have devoted considerably less time to this issue than one would have expected.[168]

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166 More precisely, although '[t]here is some controversy concerning how Aristotle's remarks should be interpreted' (Tomberlin 1971, p. 353), it seems that Aristotle had at least two possible solutions in mind, solutions which he did not clearly distinguish between, viz., (i) that propositions about future contingencies have an *indeterminate* truth value until the time when they become determinately true or false, or (ii) that they have no truth value *at all* until they become true or false.

167 Contrariwise, this line of reasoning might actually be held against (D1), given the further (and not obviously wrong-headed) assumption that the notion of omniscience *entails* the notion of foreknowledge. For, if this further assumption is right, and if indeed – a very big if! – there are no true propositions about the future, it follows that (D1) is false.

168 Thus Nelson Pike (1965, p. 36)), for example, in a now-classic exposition of theological fatalism, confesses that 'I share the misgivings of those contemporary philosophers who have wondered what (if any) sense can be attached to a statement of the form "It was true at T_1 that *E* would occur at T_2"'. But still he simply assumes that 'it makes straightforward sense' to say that God held a 'true belief' at T_1 about what would happen at T_2. Indeed, whether that which was believed by God at T_1 was true *at that time* (T_1) 'is a question', Pike adds, 'I shall not discuss'. Even more surprisingly, William Hasker, a leading proponent of foreknowledge/freedom incompatibilism, devotes his entire (1989) book to problems associated with theological fatalism without so much as mentioning Aristotle's solution. A pivotal exception is A. N. Prior. In his (1962) paper, a piece which together with Pike's augmented the contemporary analytical discus-

Actually, let us devote some time to it ourselves; it might help us see more clearly whether, or to what extent, the theological version of fatalism differs from its logical cousin. Let t_2 indicate the time when the sea battle begins, and let t_1 be any time prior to t_2, say, one day earlier. Also, suppose (as indeed fatalistic arguments of either brand suppose) that the sentence, 'there will be a sea battle at t_2', uttered at t_1, expresses a proposition, p. One question, to which we shall return shortly, is whether p is true *already* at t_1 or if p rather is true in a *timeless* sense (in which case it is misleading to say that p is true *at* any particular time). Another question, however, one of more immediate concern, is *why* p is true, if indeed it is. That is, what makes p true? Naturally, given the 'correspondence intuition',[169] the intuition that truth is about correspondence with reality, one would think that it is the sea battle's occurring at t_2 which makes p true. But then how can p be true if indeed the sea battle has not yet occurred? Or perhaps more to the point: how can p be true (already at t_1 or timelessly) if that which p is supposed to correspond to does not yet exist? So puzzling is this question that one well understands why Aristotle concluded that p lacks a (determinate) truth value up until t_2.

Yet Aristotle's solution is no less puzzling itself. To begin with, there is the seemingly symmetrical problem regarding propositions about the *past*. Let q be the proposition stated by the sentence 'the battle of Salamis took place in 480 BC'. What makes q true is obviously the historical fact that the battle of Salamis *did* take place in 480 BC. Yet, presumably, at least on one of two interpretations of the A-theory of time,[170] the past no longer *exists* – in any case it does not *presently* exist. So, if it is argued that q is true because the battle of Salamis *was* real in 480 BC, even if it no longer *is* real, it might be analogously argued that p is true because Aristotle's sea battle *will be* real at t_2, even if it not yet *is* real.[171]

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sion about omniscience, the Aristotelian solution is given adequate consideration; so much so, in fact, that Prior seems to conclude that it is correct.

[169] Johnson (2009, p. 439), emphasis removed.

[170] On this interpretation, only the present exists; the past and the future are both unreal; hence 'the passage of time consists in the movement from unreality to reality and from reality to unreality' (Rice 2006, p. 128). On another interpretation of the A-theory of time, the past and the present are equally real, only the future is not – but more on this alternative interpretation in the next note.

[171] Or perhaps not. Given the apparently irreversible directionality of the arrow of time, the battle of Salamis appears to have *some* claim to reality, and thus to that which a true proposition would correspond to, that future sea battles lack. Indeed, something like this intuitive idea is used in support of the 'Growing Block' (or 'Growing Universe') theory, according to which the past and the

Another and perhaps more serious difficulty with Aristotle's solution is this. Again, let p be the proposition expressed by the sentence 'there will be a sea battle at t_2'. If Aristotle is right, it would seem to follow that p lacks a truth value (or, alternatively, lacks a *determinate* truth value) up until t_2, when it becomes true. But this would be very odd because surely a *true* proposition cannot be the selfsame truth bearer as one that earlier lacked a truth value and so were *not* true. Thus it would rather have to be suggested that p ceases to exist at t_2 only to be replaced by something else, say, p'. But then it is altogether more economical, and maybe more in line with Aristotle's original line of thought, to suggest instead that the sentence 'there will be a sea battle at t_2' does not express any proposition at all – at least not until t_2 when perchance it is retroactively connected to a true one.[172] Anyway, if this latter interpretation of Aristotle's solution is justified, it is still rather counter-intuitive. Looking back, it is natural enough to think that one who said at t_1 that 'there will be a sea battle at t_2' said something true *at* t_1 (supposing that a sea battle actually occurred at t_2). All in all, then, one is hard-pressed to take a stand. Even if Aristotle's solution is a reasonable one, given the assumption that the future, that which p is supposed to correspond to, does not yet exist, it is also deeply problematic.[173] As far as bewilderment goes, one is reminded that

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present exist as an expanding universe as new moments are continually added to it. As Roberto Casati and Giuliano Torrengo (2011, p. 240) point out, 'Growing Blockers have a strong intuitive weapon, the epistemological asymmetry between memory and premonition. Whatever the doubts one can have about one's memory, and whatever the confidence one may have on one's premonitions, it stands to reason that one's memory that P is prima facie evidence that P occurred, but that one's premonition that P is not half as good evidence that P will occur.' (As an aside, Casati and Torrengo (*ibid.*) actually suggest an interesting rival: the 'Shrinking Block' theory, according to which only the present and the future are real and where '[t]he present is the constantly eroding edge of the future'.)

[172] For a highly readable analysis of this apparently Aristotelian consequence, see David Kaspar (2002). In fact, according to Kaspar (*ibid.*, pp. 280–1), Aristotelians have been 'rather sheepish' about this issue and 'there has been widespread silence about the details of the change of TBs [truth bearers] from indeterminate to true, as the event [i.e. the sea battle] happens'.

[173] For a defence of the Aristotelian solution, see Richard Gaskin (1998). According to Gaskin, the Aristotelian opts for a restriction of the law of bivalence because she takes the asymmetry between past and future seriously 'and draws the consequence: the future is not as metaphysically determinate as the past' (p. 88). Also, at least according to Kaspar (2002, p. 277), the philosophy faction supporting this solution is traditionally 'the one with the most members'. By contrast, however, Taylor (1963, p. 497) complaints that 'the suggestion that

metaphysical issues involving time are second to none. This makes it all the more surprising that some proponents of theological fatalism – or better: some foreknowledge/freedom incompatibilists, who argue that God's knowledge does not involve foreknowledge – so easily pass them by.

This brings us back to an earlier question that was temporarily postponed: is *p* true (on the assumption, required by fatalism of either type, that it *is* true) already at t_1, when someone utters the sentence 'there will be a sea battle at t_2', or is it rather true in a timeless sense? (Or is there a third alternative?) Suppose that *p* is true already at t_1. Then there will be a sea battle at t_2 regardless of whether God or anyone else believes *p* at t_1. That is to say, if *p* is true already at t_1, theological fatalism adds nothing of significance to logical fatalism. On the other hand, suppose instead that *p* is true in a timeless sense: it is timelessly (or eternally) true that a sea battle occurs at t_2. Then again theological fatalism adds nothing of significance to logical fatalism. If *p* is timelessly true, *this is it*. Whether or not God knows (timelessly or beforehand) that a sea battle occurs at t_2, a sea battle occurs at t_2. In either case, then, it seems that the threat of logical fatalism is what matters here. The threat of theological fatalism is merely the same threat all over again, albeit with a theological twist: 'an entirely gratuitous detour', as Susan Haack puts it.[174] For all I can comprehend, it is rather surprising that some philosophers have thought that the latter should pose a graver difficulty for (libertarian) freedom than the former.[175]

In fact, let us try to understand more exactly what has motivated this idea, that is, the idea that theological fatalism has more bite than logical

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some propositions about the future may be as yet not true and as yet not false, but will in time be made true or false by men's acts, is generally received as though it were an attack upon reason itself'.

[174] Haack (1974, p. 157). In a follow-up paper, however, Haack (1975) unfortunately loses track of her previous conviction. In this latter paper she suggests that, if it is conceded that God (a necessary being) is *essentially* foreknowledgeable, then theological fatalism might not after all be a gratuitous detour. But why should she change her mind because of that? In any possible world in which God is foreknowledgeable there are *truths* about the future (since in any possible world, knowledge presupposes truth). The alleged fact that God or just anyone *knows* these truths (timelessly or beforehand) does not make the threat of fatalism any more real.

[175] These philosophers include Helm (1974), Hasker (1988, esp. p. 420), and Fischer (1994, esp. pp. 112, 128, and 200–1).

fatalism. According to Zagzebski, who seems to be taken in by it herself, the following premise,

(Z1) If some proposition was true in the past, it is now-necessary that it was true then,

a premise which figures in an argument for logical fatalism, is 'less plausible' than the following premise,

(Z2) If [an event] E occurred in the past, it is now-necessary that E occurred then,

a premise which figures in a corresponding argument for theological fatalism.[176] Unfortunately, however, she offers no supporting argument for this claim – in fact, I am hard-pressed to find even the slightest kind of intuition, let alone argument, to reinforce it. Indeed, if, as a matter of historical fact, a proposition was true in the past, what then could now (or later) alter this historical fact? To my mind, at least, it is enormously unlikely that anything could do that, and hence I am at a loss to see why (Z1) should be considered less plausible than (Z2).

Hasker would seem to have something to say on this point. According to him, the 'crucial difference' between logical fatalism and theological fatalism is that, whereas the latter only requires that '*one particular kind* of propositions' that were true in the past be now-necessary, the former requires that '*all* propositions' that were true in the past be now-necessary.[177] Yet he does not explain why this difference counts in favour of theological fatalism. Instead, without offering supporting arguments, he just claims that logical fatalism is 'quite implausible' in this regard.[178] I find this claim not a little odd – as if *any* proposition about tomorrow, which as a matter of historical fact was true yesterday, could somehow cease to be true today. Quite the opposite: if indeed theological fatalism does *not* require that all propositions that were true in the past be now-necessary, this alone, I think, suffices to write it off.

Again, it will not help to locate the truth bearers in a timeless (rather than past) sphere. Timeless truth bearers are certainly no more alterable

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[176] Zagzebski (2011). In Zagzebski's terminology, these premises are labelled as (2L) and (2), respectively.
[177] Hasker (2001, pp. 99–100).
[178] *Ibid.* (p. 100).

than past dittos – if anything, they are even *less* alterable since their very timelessness eliminates any possibility of their alteration.[179]

In sum, then, theological fatalism would seem to add nothing of philosophical substance over and above logical fatalism.[180] Importantly, in respect of the present objection against omniscience, as defined by (D1), this conclusion is enough. *If* the threat of logical fatalism is real,[181] this may be the end of (libertarian) *freedom* – but not of *omniscience*. Indeed, as I have tried to show, logical fatalism is indifferent as to whether there is someone who is (D1)-omniscient or not. Hence I conclude that the problem of theological fatalism gives us no reason to reject (D1). If there are genuine theological problems related to questions about fatalism and freedom, these are likely to involve notions such as providence and predestination rather than omniscience per se.

All in all, none of the three problems that have been considered in the foregoing, namely, the problem of indexicals, the problem of power sets, and the problem of theological fatalism, seems to give a strong reason to suspect that omniscience, as defined by (D1), is somehow an impossible property. As a result, the maximal theistic notion of God – a being who

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[179] As Jonathan Westphal (2011, p. 247) asks, '[h]ow does it help to move the knowing that is said to determine our actions from the past to the timeless? It seems to make matters *worse*!'

[180] As David Kyle Johnson (2009, p. 445) concludes, 'the doctrine that there is comprehensive truth about the future, by itself, is enough to derive that the future exists; thus … theological incompatibilism reduces to logical incompatibilism'. Similarly, Plantinga ([1986] 1999, p. 15) says that 'the argument [for *theological* determinism] can be transformed into an argument for *logical* determinism', and Jonathan Kvanvig (1992, p. 95) argues that 'theological fatalism is true only if logical fatalism is true'. The view that theological fatalism effectively boils down to logical fatalism is likewise defended e.g. in Haack (1974) and Warfield (1997), and it is implied in McCall (2011).

[181] It may be noted that, although reports of its death are at least 'somewhat exaggerated' (Bernstein 2005, p. 66), logical fatalism seems to have 'few defenders' (Zagzebski 2011). It is widely recognized that the inference from 'necessarily, if it is true that A will happen then A will happen' to 'if it is true that A will happen, then necessarily A will happen' is modally fallacious. The fatalist trick, then, is to make the antecedent – it is true that A will happen – somehow necessary in order to validly transfer the requested modality to the consequent: A will happen. As has been indicated above, the common strategy is to locate the antecedent in the past, thus concluding that it is *now*-necessary, or *accidentally* necessary, that the consequent follows. A painstaking analysis of such accidental necessity is given by Wierenga (1989, pp. 59–115). According to Thomas Talbott (1993, p. 65), 'virtually all fatalistic arguments, including the most sophisticated arguments for theological fatalism', are modally fallacious nonetheless.

is whatever it is better to be than not to be – is yet to be found guilty of self-contradiction or conceptual confusion.

3.4 Omnipotence

When it comes to omnipotence, the situation is rather more complex. In the previous section, discussing omniscience, we were able to lay down a widely agreed-upon definition almost at the outset; the challenge, then, was to respond to certain accusations that the property thus defined is not, or cannot be, exemplified. But now, when omnipotence is up next for scrutiny, there is no candidate account that even comes close to enjoying any kind of consensus approval. This situation is unsatisfactory for defenders and critics alike. It is unsatisfactory for defenders in that the absence of an agreed-upon definition suggests that no-one really knows what omnipotence is. It is unsatisfactory for critics in that whatever definition *D* is singled out for attack, and however impressive the accompanying rebuttal may be, perhaps even concluding that omnipotence is an 'impossible concept',[182] the whole case will be largely ignored unless it is supplied with a convincing argument for why *D* should be accepted in the first place – and this is precisely the issue on which there is no consensus. Thus the situation in hand is one of elusiveness: in the absence of an agreed-upon definition, the notion of omnipotence is hard both to understand and to undermine.

3.4.1 *Looking back and ahead*

Intuitively, of course, omnipotence is the ability to do anything. But this might suggest something like the following analysis:

(D2) An agent *A* is omnipotent iff *A* can perform any grammatically well-describable action.

(Here and in what follows, let an 'agent' be any causally efficacious entity: be it atomic or complex, material or non-material, personal or non-personal.) Thus, if he satisfies (D2), *A* is not only able, say, to create the universe *ex nihilo* and instantaneously cure all diseases, but he can also

[182] Cowan (1965, p. 108). Slightly less radically, Richard R. La Croix (1977, p. 182) concludes that 'it is impossible' to 'provide a *general* definition of omnipotence'.

draw pictures of square circles, step over living corpses, and have a beer with married bachelors. On this account, then, *A* can do absolutely 'everything that can be expressed in a string of words that makes sense' – even if that sense is self-contradictory.[183] As Peter Geach says: 'You mention it, and God can do it' – a claim that Geach himself, of course, does not endorse.[184] A towering figure in the history of philosophy who *did* endorse it, however, was René Descartes.[185] This fact singlehandedly warns us not to dismiss (D2) too hastily.

Suppose, however, that (D2) is true. Thus, at one stroke, all conceivable theological difficulties and potential self-contradictions disappear into oblivion. Take, for example, the problem of evil. If God is (D2)-omnipotent then obviously it is within his power to ensure that whatever is objectively a moral outrage is nevertheless objectively morally all right; that whatever is evil is in fact not evil but good; that no suffering has as a matter of fact ever occurred; in short, that everything is and has always been in a state of sublime happiness. Moreover, as has been pointed out rather ingeniously by Harry G. Frankfurt, it is likewise (on this account) in God's power to create a stone too heavy for him to lift, for

> [i]f an omnipotent being can do what is logically impossible, then he can not only create situations which he cannot handle but also, since he is not bound by the limits of consistency, he can handle situations which he cannot handle.[186]

Thus, having created a stone too heavy for him to lift, he then lifts the stone that is too heavy for him to lift! In like manner, God can perform any action that is not performed by God, like writing a novel that has the property of not being written by God. All in all, then, if indeed omnipotence is to be defined in line with (D2), it is utterly futile to advance any charges of logical inconsistency against it, for its point is precisely that omnipotence is not bound by any logical constraints.

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183 Geach (1977, p. 7).

184 *Ibid*.

185 Thus Descartes: 'I would not even dare to say that God cannot arrange that a mountain should exist without a valley, or that one and two should not make three'. Quoted in Frankfurt (1964, pp. 262–3), which also contains several other relevant quotations from Descartes's letters (to Mersenne et al.).

186 Frankfurt (1964, p. 263). As for the paradox of the stone (or the 'omnipotence paradox'), there seems to be 'no general agreement on whether or not the paradox proves that the concept of omnipotence is incoherent; nor is there any general agreement among those who think the paradox unsound as to what exactly is the matter with it' (Rosenkrantz and Hoffman 1980, p. 473).

In a way, then, (D2) is congenial to theism. Yet it comes with a price that almost no philosopher is willing to pay: abandonment of rationality and, with it, coherence of theistic ideas. That which transgresses logical laws cannot be logically discussed – except by one who is (D2)-omnipotent, that is. Accordingly, since to accept (D2) is to reject the prospects of further analysis altogether, almost all philosophers agree in concluding that (D2), though pre-philosophically somewhat intuitive, and though 'unscrupulous logicians could fadge up a case for this view',[187] is false. Purported actions like stepping over living corpses and drawing square circles are 'pseudo-tasks' which simply cannot be done, regardless of one's powers, and thus they 'are not objects of power at all'.[188] Also, as Sobel points out, even if (D2) *is* pre-philosophically somewhat intuitive, it is still the case that 'no well speaker, innocent of philosophy, who said that an omnipotent could do anything would *mean* that an omnipotent would be capable of changing the past, or making three less than two, or anything else that is impossible'.[189] So, as generally affirmed, 'it seems reasonable not to require of an omnipotent being that he be able to bring about a state of affairs that it is logically impossible to bring about'.[190]

Now, if (D2) is false, there is another account that immediately suggests itself:

(D3) An agent *A* is omnipotent iff *A* can perform any logically possible action.

According to this definition, omnipotence does not involve the ability to perform pseudo-tasks but only the ability to perform such tasks that are logically possible to perform: that is, tasks whose linguistic descriptions are not self-contradictory. Unfortunately, in spite of whatever advantage over (D2) it may have, (D3) runs into a very serious difficulty. Take, for example, the action of writing a novel that is not written by *A*. Obviously any novelist *except A* is able to write such a novel; hence the action in question is perfectly performable. It is just that *A* cannot perform it. But clearly the 'inability' on *A*'s part to write a novel that is not written by *A* is no reason to think that *A*'s literary creativity is somehow flawed or limited. Similarly, the 'inability' of *A* to perform an action that is not performed by *A* clearly does not tell against *A*'s omnipotence. After all, *no-one* is able to do an action that he or she does not do. In fact, if (D3)

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[187] Geach (1977, p. vi).
[188] Mavrodes (1963, p. 223); see also Metcalf (2004, p. 290).
[189] Sobel (2004, p. 346), my emphasis.
[190] La Croix (1977, p. 181).

is true, omnipotence is an impossible property: one that cannot be exemplified in reality.[191] To dismiss omnipotence on this condition, however, is premature; why not rather conclude that (D3) is *false*, since it states a seemingly unreasonable criterion?

Trying to evade this difficulty, a third candidate analysis readily presents itself:

(D4) An agent *A* is omnipotent iff *A* can perform any action that it is metaphysically possible for *A* to perform.

Note that the modality in question has changed from 'logical' to 'metaphysical'. (Logical impossibilities, as I use the terms, form a sub-class of the class of metaphysical impossibilities; not every linguistic description of a metaphysical impossibility involves a logical contradiction.) Nonetheless, (D4) is certainly no improvement. To see this, consider Plantinga's creation, Mr McEar,[192] an abnormal man who, 'for unspecified reasons',[193] is essentially unable to do anything except to scratch his ear. Farcically, given (D4), it turns out that, if possible, this 'notorious weakling'[194] is omnipotent, since he is able to perform the one action that it is metaphysically possible for him to perform. Hence (D4) should be rejected. Whatever omnipotence is, it is perfectly clear that it is not possessed by McEar.

Here an early lesson might be drawn. Despite his severe disabilities, McEar is consistently causing trouble to those who may attempt to relativize omnipotence to God by abandoning the naïve formula, 'a perfect being can do anything', in favour of 'a perfect being can do anything the doing of which does not impair its perfection'.[195] Remember, God is essentially impeccable. As we shall discuss in detail in later sections, this means that he cannot possibly do what is morally wrong. So, if (D4) is suggested as an account of omnipotence so as to allow for the essential properties of God to limit the scope of actions that an omnipotent being must be able to perform, the drawback of this suggestion is that creatures like McEar threaten to come out as omnipotent as well.

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191 This is the conclusion drawn by J. L. Cowan (1965, p. 104). He argues that, since '[t]here are perfectly respectable, non-self-contradictory predicates' which are 'such that the capacity to have them truly predicated of one logically excludes the capacity to have *other* similarly non-self-contradictory predicates truly predicated of one', there cannot be an omnipotent being.

192 Cf. Plantinga (1967, p. 170). Its name is due to La Croix (1977, p. 189).

193 Wielenberg (2000, p. 40).

194 Flint and Freddoso (1983, p. 84).

195 Kretzmann (1966, p. 417).

A more promising response to the difficulty posed by (D3) is this:

(D5) An agent *A* is omnipotent iff *A* can actualize any actualizable state of affairs.

Rather than being stated in terms of the ability to perform actions, (D5) is stated in terms of the ability to actualize (or bring about) states of affairs.[196] By this apparent circumlocution, a defender of omnipotence may hope to sidestep the fact that all agents except *A* are able to perform actions that are not performed by *A*. For, whereas all agents except *A* are able to perform actions that are not performed by *A*, *no* agent is able to actualize the state of affairs consisting in *A*'s performing an action that is not being performed by *A*. Accordingly, *A*'s own 'inability' to actualize this state of affairs ought not to count against his claim to omnipotence – nor does it on (D5)'s account.

Yet there is a serious problem with (D5). Defenders of omnipotence are often defenders of libertarian freedom as well: a view, recall, according to which agents act freely only insofar as their choices of actions are not determined, either by external forces or internal compulsions. Now consider, say, the state of affairs consisting in Jane's freely reading a text on metaphysics. Suppose someone *other* than Jane actualizes this state of affairs. Then it surely seems as if Jane's *freely* reading a text on metaphysics becomes something of an oxymoron. To actualize a state of affairs *s* is presumably to ensure or determine somehow that *s* is brought about (or made to obtain). But if Jane's reading is thus determined by an external force, it apparently follows that Jane's reading is not, after all, a result of her own free choice. Conversely, if there *is* such a thing as Jane's *freely* reading a text on metaphysics, then this state of affairs cannot be actualized by anyone other than Jane. That is to say, if libertarian freedom exists, (D5) is false.

To sidestep this problem, one may attempt to make a distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' actualization: the former kind being exemplified whenever someone directly and determinately causes a certain state of affairs to obtain, and the latter kind being exemplified when someone arranges things so as to ensure (in some incompatibilistically acceptable sense) that someone else will freely act in a certain way. As an example of

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[196] As indeed are most contemporary definitions of omnipotence. According to Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, p. 167), it is even the case that the alternative analyses in terms of the ability to perform certain actions have been shown to be 'fruitless'. By contrast, however, Sobel (2004, p. 347) thinks that 'there is little to be gained' by opting for analyses in terms of states of affairs.

the latter kind, Thomas P. Flint and Alfred J. Freddoso suggest that 'a mother might actualize her child's freely choosing to have Rice Krispies for breakfast by limiting his choices to Rice Krispies and the hated Raisin Bran'.[197] Thus, if it is insisted that 'an analysis of omnipotence … be construed broadly to include both strong and weak actualization',[198] one may then argue that, even if no-one distinct from Jane can strongly actualize the state of affairs consisting in Jane's freely reading a certain text, it is still possible for someone distinct from Jane to weakly actualize this state of affairs.

Unfortunately, as Flint and Freddoso show, this last line of argument seems doomed; on their view, it should rather be concluded that, even if the distinction between strong and weak actualization is accepted, 'there will be some state of affairs … which even an omnipotent agent is incapable of actualizing'.[199] Nevertheless, according to Flint and Freddoso,

> since this inability results solely from the *logically necessary* truth that one being cannot causally determine how another will freely act, it should not be viewed … as a kind of inability which disqualifies an agent from ranking as omnipotent.[200]

Now be this as it may, here is where we reach a point of seemingly no return: that state of elusiveness described earlier in which there is no consensus left to be found. In fact, the sheer complexity of certain contemporary accounts of omnipotence is a source of bewilderment.[201] As Wes Morriston notes,

> In recent years definitions of omnipotence have become more and more complicated. Indeed, they frequently employ so much technical apparatus and contain so many subordinate clauses and qualifications, that it

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197 Flint and Freddoso (1983, p. 86).

198 *Ibid*. By comparison, Wierenga (1989, p. 25) draws the conclusion that 'it is the ability to *strongly actualize* states of affairs that is relevant to omnipotence'.

199 Flint and Freddoso (1983, p. 95).

200 *Ibid*. Flint and Freddoso then proceed by giving a highly complex definition of omnipotence, one that is relative to times and possible worlds and that ranges over states of affairs and sets of counterfactuals of freedom (cf. p. 99). For in-depth critique of this account, see Wielenberg (2000, pp. 31–37); Oppy (2005, pp. 70–77); and Leftow (2009, pp. 174–183).

201 Besides the account given in Flint and Freddoso (1983, p. 99), see those in Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, p. 172), Sobel (2004, p. 349), and Leftow (2009, pp. 190–1). A refreshingly simple alternative is presented in Wielenberg (2000, p. 42).

> is natural to wonder whether they have much to do with what an ordinary person might mean by saying that God is all-powerful.[202]

Thus we seem to be back to where we started: a place that is unsatisfactory for everybody involved.

Still, on a preparatory note, I think we are able to draw a modest and philosophically largely uncontroversial conclusion – yet one that is prephilosophically somewhat unintuitive. Whatever omnipotence is, it does *not* involve the ability to perform every performable action. To be sure, this conclusion presupposes that (D3) is false; but as we have seen there is a strong if not conclusive reason to think that this is indeed the case. A second conclusion that might be drawn so far, one that is conditional in kind, is this: If compatibilism regarding determinism and free will is true (i.e. if it is possible to act freely even if one is determined to act as one does), *or* if free will simply does not exist, then (D5) appears to be quite a plausible analysis. Yet again, many defenders of omnipotence are not ready to accept either of these ifs; hence this second conclusion is of somewhat limited interest.

Looking ahead, this is how we shall proceed. In spite of there being no candidate analysis of omnipotence that is widely accepted, there has resurfaced, during the last thirty or so years, a clever argument to the effect that, whatever omnipotence is, it cannot be had by someone who, like God, is said to be essentially impeccable. In the next three sections this line of argument will be carefully scrutinized. Then, in §3.4.5 and §3.4.7, we will endeavour a positive analysis of our own, a relatively uncomplicated one at that, of what omnipotence *is*.

3.4.2 *Omnipotence and impeccability: part I*

As said, a clever argument against the compossibility (or the possibility of an individual's simultaneous possession) of omnipotence and essential impeccability has resurfaced during the last three decades or so.[203] In its basic version, it goes something like this. Ordinary people are able to murder, lie, and cheat, but one who is essentially impeccable is necessarily unable to do any of these things. Yet one who is omnipotent must by any reasonable account, regardless of its details, be able to do what ordi-

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[202] Morriston (2002, p. 358).

[203] Leftow (2009, pp. 167–70) presents a succinct overview of some classical theological treatments (by e.g. Augustine, Anselm, Peter Lombard, and Aquinas) of the issues surrounding this problem.

nary people are capable of doing all the time. As W. R. Carter says, one who 'not only does not but cannot do many things (murder, rape) that ordinary humans can do … has no claim at all to being judged omnipotent'.[204] Hence, since God by nature is both omnipotent and impeccable, it follows that, necessarily, God does not exist.

Let us try to spell out this basic argument in a little more detail. After all, given our preparatory conclusion that an omnipotent being need *not* be able to perform every performable action, the alleged fact that God by nature is unable, say, to act cruelly is not by itself sufficient evidence that he cannot be omnipotent. So here is a first attempted specification. If indeed God is essentially impeccable, then God is not as powerful as possible. For, suppose that there is a being, Potentia, who is able to do all that God is able to do but who, in addition, is able, say, to act cruelly. Thus, however powerful God may be, he is *not* as powerful as Potentia. But, as Oppy says, 'it is simply an analytical truth that nothing can be more powerful than an omnipotent being',[205] and, as Leftow concurs, '[w]e can agree in advance of any detailed account of omnipotence that an omnipotent being is as powerful as it is possible to be'.[206] Consequently, if Potentia is so much as possible, it follows that God, a necessary being, cannot be essentially omnipotent, precisely because one who is omnipotent must be a maximally powerful agent in any possible world in which he exists. As a result, since God by nature *is* (among other things) impeccable and omnipotent, it follows that God cannot possibly exist.

The crucial clause in this line of reasoning is this: *if Potentia is so much as possible*, it follows that God cannot exist. Note that the reverse conditional is equally true: *if God is so much as possible*, it follows that Potentia cannot exist. That is, the possibility of either being entails the impossibility of the other; hence the above argument does not establish the impossibility of God unless it is accompanied by an argument to the effect that Potentia, unlike God, is possible. But for all I know, such an argument has never appeared in print; hence, thus interpreted, the compossibility

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[204] Carter (1985, p. 54).

[205] Oppy (2005, p. 78). Thomas Metcalf (2004, p. 292) proposes a 'maximal-power test' that proceeds from this idea. Accordingly, '[t]o submit a being, S, to the maximal-power test, we question whether there could be a more powerful being … If S fails the maximal-power test, S is not omnipotent'. This maximal-power test may be compared with the more detailed analogue of Oppy (2005, p. 80): a 'necessary condition for omnipotence'.

[206] Leftow (2009, p. 183).

argument in hand against the existence of God seems at best to be a radically unfinished business.

As one would suspect, however, it may be possible to specify the argument differently. Although its proponents may not always have been as explicit on this subject as one would have wished, the compossibility objection can be couched purely in terms of conceivability. Perhaps the leading voice of this version is Morriston. As he points out, it is 'simply too easy' to conceive of (someone like) Potentia not to compare the *idea* (or notion) of Potentia with that of God.[207] Indeed, *if* compared with each other, the idea of Potentia will distinguish itself as a better *conceptual candidate* for omnipotence than will the idea of God. In other words: *in theory*, Potentia is more powerful than God. But this suffices to conclude that God, however powerful, is *not* omnipotent, for to qualify meaningfully as omnipotent one must be as powerful as *conceivable*, or a being than which a more powerful cannot be *thought*. Thus Morriston:

> An omnipotent person … must have the maximum *conceivable* degree of power. If we can, without absurdity, conceive of a person having more power than would be possessed by the best possible God, then the best possible God is not all powerful. Such a God might still be very powerful of course. But simple 'truth in advertising' forbids describing [such] a God … as omnipotent.[208]

The underlying idea is this. In order to determine whether some agent *A* qualifies as omnipotent or not, '[w]e should first decide what we think omnipotence is'.[209] But this is a purely conceptual procedure which can be carried out whatever the limits of metaphysical possibilities may be. Hence, what omnipotence comes down to is a matter of conceivability, not possibility; even if *A* might, for all we know, be more powerful than any other possible being, he may still not be powerful enough to qualify as omnipotent.[210] Accordingly, given that the notion of Potentia entails

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[207] Morriston (2001a, p. 18).

[208] *Ibid*. (p. 19).

[209] *Ibid*. Sobel (2004, p. 360) agrees: 'Questions concerning omnipotence – what it comes to and whether it is possible – are properly *prior* to questions concerning God and omnipotence.'

[210] Bruce R. Reichenbach (1980, p. 213) concurs, 'an omnipotent being must not only be able to … consistently implement each of its abilities, but its abilities must be such that a being with none greater can be conceived'. The distinction between the greatest *possible* and the greatest *conceivable* power is not always made clear. For example, having said that God is 'maximally powerful' in the sense of possessing 'the maximal degree of power it is possible (in a broadly

more wide-ranging capabilities than does the notion of God, 'it is natural enough to conclude that a God of the Anselmian type could not be omnipotent'.[211] (Which is to say: a God of the Anselmian type could not possibly exist.) Thus, to drive the point home,

> I think it must be acknowledged that, whether or not he possesses the maximum metaphysically possible degree of power, the Anselmian God lacks the maximum *conceivable* degree of power. And that, I think, is all that is needed to show that the Anselmian analysis cannot be the correct analysis of the *concept* of omnipotence.[212]

As Morriston concludes, then, 'I think we have a reason of some weight for not saying that possessing maximal power is sufficient for being all powerful'.[213]

Thus interpreted, I think this is an important argument against the alleged compossibility of omnipotence and impeccability, and hence, in effect, against the Anselmian (maximal theistic) notion of God. Indeed, drawing on our earlier analysis of 'whatever it is better to be than not to be' (see esp. §3.2.1), I agree with Morriston that possession of maximal power may not, for all we know, be sufficient for being omnipotent (or all-powerful, or almighty).[214] Moreover, I agree that in order to qualify as omnipotent in a maximal theistic sense, one must be a being than which a more powerful cannot, 'without absurdity', be conceived.[215] As I shall argue in what follows, however, this very important qualification – *without absurdity* – makes it anything but clear what exactly one who is as powerful as conceivable must be capable of doing. In particular, I do *not* agree with Morriston that a figure like Potentia is a better conceptual candidate for omnipotence than God. At the very least, or so it seems to me, it is very far from obvious that God, due to his other essential characteristics, cannot be as powerful as conceivable. Our main focus will be on the compossibility of omnipotence and essential impeccability, but let

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logical or metaphysical sense) to exemplify', Thomas V. Morris (1986, p. 166) goes on to clarify that 'God is thus a perfect being who is perfectly powerful'.

[211] Morriston (2001a, p. 10).

[212] *Ibid*. (p. 14).

[213] *Ibid*.

[214] On a terminological note, then, I disagree with Geach (1977, p. 3) as to the usefulness of the distinction between 'almighty' and 'omnipotent'. Insofar as I use 'almighty' or 'all-powerful' at all, they are merely to be understood as synonyms for 'omnipotent'.

[215] Morriston (2001a, p. 19).

us start by looking into a few other parallel combinations of potential discord.

3.4.3 *Some other problems of compossibility*

Recall that God has all of his defining properties essentially. Thus, necessarily, if God exists, he is omnipotent; he cannot exist and *not* be omnipotent. For purposes of comparison, however, suppose that Potentia (i.e. God's conceptual rival for omnipotence) is merely *accidentally* omnipotent; that is, although as a matter of fact Potentia *is* omnipotent, she is not *essentially* omnipotent; it is possible for her to cease being omnipotent and yet continue to exist. Now, then, as a conceptual exercise, who is the more powerful being: Potentia or God?

It should first be noted that Potentia is able to do at least one action that God is essentially unable to do, namely, to *relinquish* her omnipotence. This fact alone might seem to give her an advantage, as far as powerfulness is concerned. Or perhaps not: it might also seem to be a sign of weakness rather than of strength.[216] After all, if she abandons her omnipotence, it is extremely unlikely that she will then be able to regain it; thus the action of relinquishing one's omnipotence may be described as rather fateful. Is it then the case that Potentia is, in theory, more powerful in this respect than God?

Here it is interesting to note that opinions vary quite considerably – even among those who otherwise are in agreement that God cannot be omnipotent. Notably, whereas Sobel takes an uncompromising point of view, arguing that God 'would *not be* omnipotent' precisely because he 'would be incapable of diminishing [his] power',[217] Morriston seems to suggest instead that, 'once the case is fully understood', we do not 'run foul of any strong pre-philosophical intuition' if we concede that God's inability to give up his omnipotence 'is *not* inconsistent with maximal power'.[218] Whatever the case may be, then, it is at least not *obvious* that

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[216] On a similar note, discussing the 'ability' to find things hard to do, Leftow (2009, p. 17) suggests that it is 'not implausible' that this ability 'is a mark not of power but of weakness'.

[217] Sobel (2004, p. 362). In Sobel's view, then, '[i]nabilities that a being could not, because of its essential nature, escape are still inabilities' and hence such that they should 'tell against its omnipotence' (*ibid.*, p. 350).

[218] Morriston (2001b, p. 156), my emphasis.

the ability to relinquish her omnipotence makes Potentia a better conceptual candidate for omnipotence than God.

In fact, I think Potentia's conceptual claim to omnipotence is *weaker* than God's. The alleged fact that Potentia is merely accidentally omnipotent seems to suggest that, not only is she able to *relinquish* her omnipotence, but she is also able to *lose* it – involuntarily perhaps, by sheer metaphysical coincidence. In any case, it is clear enough that Potentia is relatively more likely to possess this ability (or rather liability) than God, who due to his essential possession thereof just *cannot* lose his omnipotence. Hence, while God's losing his omnipotence is inconceivable, it *is* conceivable, without absurdity, that Potentia suffers from a rare kind of metaphysical vulnerability. It is even conceivable that she might one day find herself completely impotent: an 'ability' which clearly is detrimental to anyone's claim to omnipotence. Likewise with respect to the ability to willingly *but stupidly* relinquishing one's omnipotence. It is clear enough that Potentia's being merely accidentally omnipotent makes it relatively more likely that she has this ability than that God has it, since the likelihood of God's having it is absolutely nil. This goes to reinforce the conclusion that, at the very least, it is far from obvious that the alleged ability to relinquish her omnipotence makes Potentia relatively more powerful than God in this respect. For, unlike Potentia's accidental possession of omnipotence, God's essential possession of omnipotence is not in any conceivable way threatened, either by external forces or internal deterioration.

Next, by parallel reasoning, consider immortality. God is essentially immortal (and hence essentially alive).[219] For purposes of comparison, then, let Potentia be merely accidentally immortal. Thus, unlike God, Potentia can cease being immortal and yet continue to exist. Again, this means that Potentia is able, should she become mortal, to do at least one action that God is essentially unable to do: namely, to kill herself. Hence it might be argued that, all else being equal, Potentia is relatively more powerful than God, since she is potentially able to do one more action. On the other hand, however, it is by no means obvious that the potential ability to commit suicide, and thus to cease to exist, is a power enhancing property. In fact, I think it can be plausibly argued that the requisite property in question, that is, the property of being potentially mortal, *weakens* Potentia's claim to omnipotence. To be potentially mortal

[219] This attribute was not explicitly mentioned in our deduction of the divine attributes (see §3.2.4). Yet it is clear enough that it is derivable from the attributes of eternality, indestructibility, incorruptibility, omnibenevolence, etc.

(which anyone who is accidentally immortal is) is not only to be potentially able to kill oneself but also to be potentially able to die for some other reason. Indeed, it is conceivable, without absurdity, that one who is potentially mortal will someday be involuntarily (or perhaps even unwittingly) *killed*. But it is quite incontestable that *this* ability adds no credibility to anyone's candidacy for omnipotence. Still, to underline the rationale of our previous argument, it is clear enough that Potentia, who is merely accidentally immortal, is relatively more likely to have it than God, who due to his essential immortality simply cannot ever die, either by his own hand or by anyone else's. This, I think, lends support to the parallel conclusion that, at the very least, it is far from obvious that the ability to kill oneself is a power enhancing property.

What about omniscience? God is essentially omniscient. By contrast, suppose that Potentia is not omniscient at all. This means that there is at least one thing that Potentia but not God is able to do: *to learn*. According to Thomas Metcalf, this inability to learn counts against God's being omnipotent. For, whereas (someone like) Potentia 'can perform every task' that God can perform, 'plus one more task' that God cannot perform, God has no 'power-granting analogue in His repertoire'.[220] Thus, Metcalf argues, his inability to learn invalidates God's claim to omnipotence.

This argument, however, strikes me as misconceived; I think Sobel, for one, would agree. Discussing the ability to 'stand up', Sobel says that someone who is 'always standing' and hence 'can never stand up' should not be debarred from 'the title "omnipotent" as naturally deployed'.[221] Likewise, then, I think that the inability of God, who already knows all there is to know, to learn, should not be taken as evidence that he lacks omnipotence. Moreover, and I think more importantly, Metcalf does not discuss the prospects of Potentia suddenly *forgetting* what she in fact knows. Unless it is being assumed that Potentia is essentially knowledgeable (in a non-omniscient way), it is conceivable, without absurdity, that she might suddenly suffer from some kind of metaphysical stroke that makes her forget *all* that she knows. At the very least, it is more likely that this malady befalls Potentia than that it befalls God who, in virtue of being essentially omniscient, simply cannot forget anything. And this goes to support the conclusion that God's way of essentially knowing all

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[220] Metcalf (2004, p. 293).
[221] Sobel (2004, p. 348).

there is to know is not something that counts against his claim to being perfectly all-powerful.

3.4.4 *Omnipotence and impeccability: part II*

But now we come to the crux of the matter, or at least to that which most frequently has been held forward as a decisive reason to disqualify God from considerations of omnipotence. Recall, God is essentially impeccable: in no possible world does God do anything that is morally wrong. Indeed, as Everitt clarifies, it is not merely that an essentially impeccable being 'never has done or never will do anything immoral, but that he *cannot* do anything immoral'.[222] By contrast, Potentia, let us suppose, *can* do what is immoral. For example, she can torment disabled children. She might as a matter of fact never do so, but – and this is what matters here – she is *able* to. God, on the other hand, is *not* able to torment disabled children; hence there is something that Potentia but not God is able to do. Of course, this conclusion can be generalized: there are innumerable actions that God, in virtue of being essentially impeccable, cannot perform; hence it would seem as if Potentia in this case has a considerably larger range of actions available to her than what God has. Prima facie, then, it seems that Potentia has a stronger claim to omnipotence than God.

In response to this argument, I wish to make two points. First, look again at this scenario: An omnipotent being tormenting a disabled child. Is this an exercise of power or rather a display of madness? Arguably, it is not only a demonstration of cruelty and cowardice, but also of a rather twisted intelligence. Whereas there may be some perverted instrumental rationality involved in school-yard bullying, there seems be no comparable rationale behind an omnipotent being looking to torment a disabled child. Or to speak more generally: there is *something* about the ability to do evil that makes it dubious as far as power enhancement is concerned. Anselm tries to pinpoint what it is by arguing that the more one can do what one ought not to do, 'the more power misfortune and wickedness

[222] Everitt (2004, p. 264). In the Christian tradition this is the received view, one that has been upheld e.g. by Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. As Vincent Brümmer (1984, p. 203) notes, 'it has generally been claimed that God, being perfectly good, has the attribute not only of *impeccantia* (freedom from sin) but also of *impeccabilitas* (inability to sin)'.

have over him, and the less he has over them';[223] and Aquinas likewise argues that '[t]o sin is to fall short of a perfect action; hence to be able to sin is to be able to fall short in action, which is repugnant to omnipotence'.[224] As Morriston sums up, 'the ability to choose evil [according to these lines of reasoning] is not an active power, but a liability – a liability that is due either to ignorance or to weakness'.[225] But if so, if indeed acts of immorality are expressions either of ignorance or of weakness of character, it is far from obvious that Potentia's candidacy for omnipotence is stronger than God's.

Let us dwell on this point for a while and see if it can be somehow illuminated. Consider the relation between morality and reason. As Alan Gewirth says, '[t]he most important and difficult problem of philosophical ethics is whether a substantial moral theory can be rationally justified'.[226] Philosophers who have sought to provide answers in the affirmative paradigmatically include Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Mill; those who have rather attempted to answer in the negative paradigmatically include Hume, Marx, and Nietzsche. Suppose, however, that the former line of answer (whatever its details might be) is right. Hence, necessarily, to act immorally is to act irrationally (or contrary to reason, or against better judgement). On this view, then, Potentia's ability to torment disabled children is ipso facto an ability to act irrationally. But is really *this* – the ability to act irrationally – a power enhancing property? Why not rather think that, in order to qualify as omnipotent, one simply cannot ever act irrationally? At the very least, I find it far from obvious that the former suggestion is any more plausible than the latter.

However, this argument, or rather these argumentative indications, is of course dependent on an affirmative answer to that 'most important and difficult problem of philosophical ethics'. Yet the point is only this. There is a very significant idea that runs through much of the history of moral philosophy, namely, the idea that morality is somehow necessarily a matter of rationality. If this idea is true, it throws considerable doubt on the suggestion that God, simply by being essentially impeccable, has a weaker conceptual claim to omnipotence than Potentia.

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223 Anselm ([1078, §7] 1995, p. 103). Morriston (2002, p. 364) agrees, saying that one who would be essentially unable to do good would be 'a slave to his own evil character ... wholly subject to evil desires and inclinations'.

224 Aquinas ([1274, §1.25.3] 2007, p. 138). In Aquinas's view, then, it is precisely '*because* of His omnipotence' that 'God cannot sin' (*ibid.*, my emphasis).

225 Morriston (2001b, p. 157).

226 Gewirth (1978, p. 9).

The second point I wish to make is this. Since Potentia is not essentially impeccable, it is conceivable, without absurdity, that she either has tormented disabled children in the past, or she will do so in the future. By contrast, of course, it is *in*conceivable that God has done, or will do, any such things. But then consider this act: the act of truthfully guaranteeing that one has never tormented, and will never torment, any disabled child. God is able to perform this act. But what about Potentia: is she also capable thereof? Well, only if she knows that she is, and will remain, innocent in the said respect. Thus we seem to have the following predicament on our hands. In the first place it is being argued (by Morriston and others) that the capacity to do what is wrong is necessary for being omnipotent. Still, once this capacity is exercised, the ability to guarantee that one has never done, and never will do, what is wrong is perpetually lost. In other words, the exercise of the one ability rules out the exercise of the other. But if these abilities cannot both be exercised, the mere *possession* of both abilities is hardly of any significance to anyone's candidacy for omnipotence. Hence, even if Potentia is supposed to possess both of them, this does not seem to strengthen her claim to omnipotence as compared to God's. And this goes to vindicate the conclusion that, at the very least, it is far from obvious that essential impeccability is incompossible with omnipotence.

In sum, even if none of the above incompossibility accusations has been decisively falsified, it is clear, I think, on closer scrutiny, that none of them is particularly plausible.

3.4.5 *A positive account: part one*

To be omnipotent (in the relevant maximal theistic or Anselmian sense) is to be a being than which a more powerful cannot be thought. As said, to be omnipotent in this sense entails being as powerful as possible. The reverse, however, need not, for all we know, be true. As Morriston says, although having 'maximal power' (or as much power as possible) sounds 'grand and godlike', it may not suffice for qualifying as 'all powerful'.[227] It all depends on how powerful one who is as powerful as possible really is. And not only that: it also depends on how powerful *other* beings are;

[227] Morriston (2001a, p. 14). Note that, if God exists, maximal power *is* sufficient for omnipotence; but the notion of omnipotence ought to be analysed irrespective of this conditional.

in particular, how powerful the *next* most powerful being is. This latter point, in fact, is too often overlooked.

To see why the comparative aspect is important, envision two beings: deity_1 and deity_2. Suppose that deity_1 is as powerful as possible (however powerful that may be) and that deity_2 is less powerful – but only infinitesimally so. Hence, to all intents and purposes, deity_2 is just as powerful as deity_1. Indeed, they are seemingly capable of an all but endless struggle for dominance. Precisely because this is so, however, the correct conclusion that should be drawn is that neither deity_1 nor deity_2 is omnipotent. Omnipotence excludes competition; it simply does not matter in this case that deity_1 is as powerful as possible.[228]

This reasoning can be generalized so as to show that there can be at most one omnipotent being. As an assumption for reductio, suppose that there *are* two (or more) omnipotent beings: deity_3 and deity_4.[229] Next, to borrow an example from Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, imagine a certain feather located at a certain spot.[230] As it happens, at a certain time t deity_3 wants to move the feather to another location. Also at t, however, deity_4 wants the feather to remain where it is. At t, then, what happens to the feather? Is it being moved or not? If so, then the will of deity_4 is frustrated; if not, then the will of deity_3 is frustrated instead. Either way, one of our deities is being thwarted in his plans for the feather. But this is absurd, for anyone who is adequately called 'omnipotent' must be able to carry out his intentions as to where a certain feather is to be located. Hence it ought to be concluded instead that, necessarily, there cannot be more than one omnipotent being. As concluded indeed by James Baillie and Jason Hagen: 'the potential for conflicting wills is sufficient to show that there can be no possible world with two omnipotent beings'.[231] By way of reply, perhaps one wants to propose that if deity_3 and deity_4 really do disagree about the proper location of the feather then the feather will necessarily be annihilated. But this would merely double the amount of divine frustration, since the wishes of *both* deity_3 and deity_4 would then come to nothing. And this goes to validate our earlier conclusion that at least one GOD (a being who is, among other things, omnipotent) boils down to exactly one GOD: that is, God.

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[228] As Geach (1977, p. 4) points out on a similar note, 'no creature can compete with God in power, even unsuccessfully'.

[229] 'It seems clear that the addition of a third or fourth omnipotent being raises no new philosophical problems.' (Baillie and Hagen 2008, p. 22)

[230] Cf. Hoffman and Rosenkrantz (2002, p. 168).

[231] Baillie and Hagen (2008, p. 33).

Omnipotence, then, quite clearly excludes competition in the sense that there is no possible world in which there are two (or more) omnipotent beings; nor is there a possible world in which there are two beings, one of which *is* omnipotent and the other of which is *almost* as powerful. But then it is clear enough that, if this line of reasoning is followed to its end, omnipotence excludes all kinds of threat or challenge. For, if someone was able, however insignificantly, to trouble one who is omnipotent, then what would stop this trouble-maker from joining forces with other likeminded agents, thus collectively causing the omnipotent one quite a lot of nuisance? Hence I think it is clear that omnipotence rules out any possibility of meaningful power contest or even comparison. By mathematical analogy, if an agent *A* is omnipotent, *A*'s being more powerful than other agents is like an infinite set being greater in size (or cardinality) than finite sets. The differences in power and size, respectively, are infinite rather than enormous, limitless rather than vast.

Hereafter, I will utilize the notion of *incomparability* to capture this idea: the idea of a more-powerful-than relation that cannot be expressed in terms of ratios or percentages. Thus, to be omnipotent is, necessarily, to be incomparably more powerful than any other agent.

To get an intuitive hold of the notion of incomparability, let us consider a couple of analogies. In a perfectly trivial sense, Michelangelo is an incomparably greater sculptor than all chimpanzees put together. The fact that a number of Senegalese specimens have been spotted to sharpen tools in a spear-like manner to be used for hunting, thus indicating 'the kind of foresight and intellectual complexity that most likely typified early human relatives',[232] or the fact that a Swedish zoo chimpanzee has gained international fame by preparing and compiling stones to be used as missiles against spectators,[233] merely goes to prove the point: the idea of comparing Michelangelo's artistic abilities with those of chimpanzees is meaningless more than misleading. In this case the incomparability is a matter of belonging to different classes (or genera): Michelangelo is a member of the class of sculptors; chimpanzees are not; hence it is meaningless to compare them with respect to sculpting precisely because the former is incomparably greater in this respect than the latter. However, it can also be the case that different individuals exemplify the same property in such radically different ways so as to warrant the conclusion that comparisons between them become pointless. Consider a cow and a

[232] Pruetz and Bertolani (2007, p. 414).
[233] Cf. Osvath (2009).

mackerel. While both are able to swim, the latter's ability is not merely superior but so different so as to justify the claim that their respective abilities are, indeed, incomparable. In this case the incomparability is a matter of belonging to distinctively different sub-classes (or species). So, to generalize, if an agent *A* is incomparably greater than an agent *B* in respect of an ability *F*, then the difference between *A*'s being *F* and *B*'s being *F* is a matter of kind (genus or species) rather than degree.

In order to be omnipotent, then, it is necessary to be incomparably more powerful than any other agent. Also, as has been clear already from the outset, it is necessary to be as great as possible. Combining these two conditions, one might suggest the following definition:

(D6) An agent *A* is omnipotent iff *A* is incomparably more powerful than any other possible agent (of which *A* is not a part).

In light of our distinction between actual and merely possible beings (in §3.2.3), however, this is too crude. I have previously suggested that any actual existent is a greater entity than any non-actual existent. Similarly, then, any actual agent is a more powerful entity than any merely possible agent. Thus an actual grain of sand is more powerful, indeed, *incomparably* more powerful, than a merely possible demiurge. In effect, then, the most powerful actual agent is ipso facto as powerful as possible. But this is likely not what one has in mind when one requires of an omnipotent being that he be as powerful as possible. Presumably, what one has in mind in this case is rather that, whether or not it is actual, no possible agent is more powerful than one who is omnipotent. Accordingly, taking this into consideration, (D6) might be reformulated thus:

(D7) An agent *A* is omnipotent iff (i) *A* is incomparably more powerful than any other actual agent (of which *A* is not a part), and (ii) *A* is incomparably more powerful than what any merely possible agent (of which *A* is not a part) would have been, had it been actual.

In my view, this is a true account of omnipotence – and yet I think that, for all we know, it is inadequate as it stands. Recall, whether or not one who is as powerful as possible is adequately called 'omnipotent' depends on just *how* powerful he really is. Now perhaps it is conceivable, without absurdity, that there is an actual agent (say, a demiurge-like deity) who, although it happens to satisfy both conditions of (D7), is less than ideally powerful and hence not deserving of the title 'omnipotent'. Perhaps this agent, for all its powers, is unable to create matter ex nihilo. Hence, in order to secure a sufficiently majestic level of power, I venture to add the following condition:

(iii) If an agent *A* is omnipotent then the possibility of any other agent (and thus of any action not done by *A*) is exclusively created by *A*.

So, for example, if another agent *B* is capable of building a tower then *B*, together with any tower-building initiative she might undertake, is made possible (or 'possibilized') in the first place solely by a creative act of *A* – on condition that *A is* omnipotent.[234] Likewise with respect to any other possible agent *X*: if it had not been for an exclusive creative action of *A*, *X* would not have existed in a single possible world. Thus, if (iii) is a true implication of omnipotence, it would seem that the *omni*-aspect of omnipotence is satisfied at the most basic metaphysical level.

Quite literally, then, if (iii) is a true implication of omnipotence and if an agent *A* is omnipotent, *A* can be said to be a 'delimiter of possibility' because he is able to create metaphysical space.[235] That which *A* does not possibilize cannot possibly be. Interestingly, this condition seems to radicalize the 'non-negotiable element of orthodox western theism' according to which 'no created thing can remain in existence for any interval of time without being directly conserved by God throughout that interval'.[236] As Geach says, 'God is … the source of all power; any power a creature has comes from God and is maintained only for such time as God wills'.[237] Thus the radicalization consists in this: rather than claiming that other agents are *actual* only if they are being infused with actuality by one who is omnipotent, the idea is that other agents are *possible* only if they are being infused with possibility by such a being – if such there is.[238]

3.4.6 *A metaphysical excursion*

Now the introduction of condition (iii) calls for a couple of metaphysical explications. First, for all I can see, (iii) cannot be semantically formalized in terms of possible worlds. Consider, for example, this attempt:

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[234] Possibilization (as here introduced) must not be confused with weak actualization (see our discussion in §3.4.1).
[235] Morris (1985, p. 266).
[236] Freddoso (1988, p. 81).
[237] Geach (1977, pp. 4–5).
[238] Cf. Leibniz ([1714, §43] 1998b, p. 273): 'without God there would be no reality among possibilities: not only would nothing exist, but nothing would even be possible'.

> If an agent A is omnipotent then for any possible agent B and any possible world W, if B exists in W and if $B \neq A$, then B is created in W by A.

This interpretation will not do; it requires of an omnipotent being that he create all agents (other than himself) in the *actual* world (which too is a possible world), but there are many agents in the actual world that are created by *us*, such as machines, fireworks, liquor, drugs, and, at least to some extent, human offspring. Nor will it do to try to exempt the actual world from consideration thus: 'for any possible agent B and any possible *but not actual* world W…' If the actual world is thus exempted from consideration, the resulting analysis is obviously of no actual interest.

This drawback, however, need not force us to retract. If, pace Lewis's 'genuine',[239] or rather 'extreme',[240] modal realism, it is assumed that the difference between our world and other possible worlds is not merely a matter of indexicality, then we shall have to conclude that the semantics of possible worlds is patently unable to tell us what it is for a world to be actual rather than merely possible – given the assumption (discussed in §3.2.3) that not just actual but also merely possible entities *exist*. Yet (iii) *presupposes* that there is a metaphysical difference between what is actual and what is merely possible. Whether or not he *actualizes* other possible agents, an omnipotent agent (if such there is) *possibilizes* them, according to (iii). Therefore, the inability of (iii) to be formulated in semantic terms of possible worlds need not count against it, because the semantics of possible worlds is incapable anyway of making a real distinction between what is actual and what is merely possible.

Next, there is a deeper conundrum to consider: one that threatens to play havoc with our semantic intuitions. If indeed the very possibility of an agent B is created by another agent A, this would seem to suggest that B might *not* have been possible – that is to say, that B might have been a member of the class of *im*possible entities. In other words, to underline the paradox, if (iii) is satisfied then it seems as if B is, possibly, impossible. Here it is plainly obvious that the semantics of possible worlds is of no avail at all; what is called for is rather a super-semantics of both possible and impossible worlds. To say that B might not have been possible is

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[239] Divers (2002, p. 43).

[240] Pruss (2001, p. 169). In short, as Phillip Bricker (2006, pp. 46–47) explains, the 'Lewisian Thesis' is that actuality is *relative*. According to this thesis, a world's actuality is merely a matter of perspective. 'The inhabitants of any one region [in logical space] are all actual relative to one another, but not actual relative to the inhabitants of any other region.' Contrariwise, the 'Leibnizian Thesis' is that actuality is *absolute*.

to say (or so it would seem) that *B* might have existed in an impossible way. Indeed, on this view, the slogan 'everything exists' takes on a more profound meaning than one may first be inclined to think. For example, it means that square circles really do *exist* – albeit impossibly so, in impossible worlds. But this is all too much to swallow. While a designation like 'square circle', or the notion of square circularity, appears to have a *meaning*, however self-contradictory, it simply cannot have a *reference* – or so, at any rate, one would think. Hence, if indeed the satisfaction of (iii) entails the existence of impossible entities, this would seem to radically diminish the plausibility of the present account.

Fortunately, there may be a way to avoid having to postulate a plethora of impossibilities. Ironically, it takes its lead from the old saying that '[b]eing is obviously not a real predicate',[241] a saying normally associated with *critique* of certain (ontological) arguments for the existence of God. Remember: a class (in the Fregean sense) is an extension of a property; hence, if existence as such is *not* a property, there just is no such thing as a class of existing things. Indeed, on this view, the universal class *U* of all that exists is a self-contradictory idea – an unwelcome result, maybe, for those who were hoping that the introduction of (Fregean) classes would restore *U* to its former, pre-axiomatic glory. This is obviously not to say that there is something wrong with all that exists; it is just that this totality – all that exists – is not a (Fregean) *class*. But this in turn means that there are no such relations as membership or non-membership of *U*; and thus we are not forced (by the law of bivalence) to the self-contradictory conclusion that, if an agent *B* had not existed, then *B* would still have *existed*, namely, as a member of the class of non-existent entities.

As a consequence, by the Kantian view that existence is not a predicate, it seems to follow that there is no such thing as the class of all possibilia either. For, on both possibilism and actualism, to say that an entity *e* is possible is just another way of saying that *e* exists. (On actualism, to say that *e* is actual is yet another way of saying the same thing.) On this view, then, even if by (iii) we assume that the possibility of an agent *B* is created by another agent *A*, we do not have to conclude that *B* therefore could have existed as an impossible entity. Instead, we might say that the claim 'possibly, *B* might not have been possible' means that, possibly, *B* might not have existed at all, either as an actual or a non-actual (merely possible) entity. In other words, *B* might have been *nothing* – not in the confused sense that it may have exemplified the property of nothingness,

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[241] Kant ([1781/1787, A598/B626], 1998, p. 567).

but in the real sense that it might not have existed in any way. So, given the Kantian view in question, it would seem that condition (iii) manages to escape the looming threat of an inflationary semantic chaos. For, even if (iii) is a true implication of omnipotence, it need not follow that there are – exist – impossible things. Indeed, to possibilize other agents may in a quite literal sense be said to create ex nihilo, out of nothing. According to this scenario, it is not as if an omnipotent agent decides from among the totality of impossibilities which other agents to possibilize. Rather, it is to introduce into the world of possibilia instances of absolute novelty: things which would otherwise not have been at all. And to be able to *do* that is, I think, an ability befitting one who is omnipotent.

Of course, the Kantian thesis that existence is not a predicate might be wrong. Indeed, according to Oppy, neither Kant nor any subsequent philosopher has been able 'to explain the content of the claim' in question.[242] Still, it *is* a thesis that is 'commonly, though not universally, held by analytic philosophers',[243] and thus I may be excused for not attempting to substantiate it myself. I simply note that it seems to offer a way to accept (iii) without having to postulate impossible things.

3.4.7 *A positive account: part two*

To recap, taking condition (iii) into account, we now have the following analysis on hand:

> (D8) An agent *A* is omnipotent iff (i) *A* is incomparably more powerful than any other actual agent (of which *A* is not a part), (ii) *A* is incomparably more powerful than what any merely possible agent (of which *A* is not a part) would have been, had it been actual, and (iii) the possibility of any other agent is exclusively created by *A*.

Are we here looking at an adequate definition of omnipotence? For all I can see, yes. However, it may be objected that even if conditions (i), (ii), and (iii) are all necessary, they are not jointly sufficient so as to entail the notion of omnipotence. In particular, it may be objected that even if an agent *A* satisfies (i), (ii), and (iii), it may still be the case that *A* for some reason is unable to *actualize* things; or at least that he is rather limited in

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[242] Oppy (1995, p. 130). According to Everitt (2004, p. 51), Kant's own attempt is 'very confused, and anything but conclusive'.
[243] Miller (2009).

this respect. In that case it would be rather obvious that *A*, despite being the ultimate metaphysical foundation of agency, is not omnipotent.

In response, although I think that this objection in fact presupposes something that is impossible (viz., that the sole creator of metaphysical space is a feeble actualizer),[244] I propose the following modifications of (i) and (ii). To put it loosely, rather than requiring of an agent *A* who is omnipotent that he be *incomparably more powerful* than any other possible agent (of which he is not a part), I suggest instead that it be required of *A* that he be *incomparably greater at actualizing states of affairs* than any other possible agent (of which he is not a part). If conditions (i) and (ii) are modified accordingly and placed alongside (iii), we thus end up with the following result:

> (D9) An agent *A* is omnipotent iff (i) *A* is incomparably greater at actualizing states of affairs than any other actual agent (of which *A* is not a part); (ii) *A* is incomparably greater at actualizing states of affairs than what any merely possible agent (of which *A* is not a part) would have been, had it been actual; and (iii) the possibility of any other agent is exclusively created by *A*.

If he satisfies each of these conditions, *A* is not only the sole possibilizer, the exclusive metaphysical creator of the very possibility of other agents, but, in addition, his actualizing capacities are incomparably greater than those of any other possible agent or collaboration of forces (of which *A* is not a part). In my opinion, this should settle it; *A* is, indeed, rightfully called 'omnipotent' (in the maximal theistic or Anselmian sense).

It might still be objected, however, that it is conceivable, without absurdity, that *A* satisfies all three conditions of (D9) and yet is unable to do some action – say, create matter ex nihilo – that any candidate omnipotent agent on any reasonable account must be able to do. In reply to this objection, it suffices to note that it is no less conceivable, without absurdity, that one who satisfies all three conditions of (D9) is necessarily capable of creating matter ex nihilo. Or which is the prima facie more plausible alternative: that one whose creative act is necessary and sufficient for the very possibility of matter and who, in addition, is incomparably greater at actualizing states of affairs than any other possible agent (of which he is not a part), is or is not able to create matter ex nihilo? At the very least, I think, the former alternative is no less plausible than the latter. If so, then the present objection does not get off the ground. It is

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[244] Indeed, in 'Omnipotence and Other Possibilities' (forthcoming), my position is that (iii) is both a necessary and sufficient condition for omnipotence.

widely recognized that two conflicting metaphysical scenarios may both be conceivable, without apparent absurdities, and so even if it *is* conceivable that *A* may satisfy the three conditions of (D9) and still not be adequately entitled 'omnipotent', this conceivability need not count for very much.

On a similar note, it may be just as conceivable that a character like Potentia exemplifies (D9)-omnipotence as that God does it – though it is *not* conceivable, of course, without absurdity, that both Potentia and God exemplify (D9)-omnipotence. And this goes to highlight one of its advantages: while (D9) is metaphysically satisfiable only by one, it is not conceptually relativized to anyone in particular.

Finally, it should be noted that even if the notion of incomparability (as introduced in §3.4.5) is susceptible to problems of vagueness, possession of (D9)-omnipotence is an all-or-nothing affair. Importantly, then, (D9) contradicts the critical claim of §3.2.6 that there cannot be such a thing as a greatest possible exemplification of power. If true, (D9) states which criteria must in fact be met in order for there to *be* such a thing.

By way of summary, (D9) seems to provide a promising account of omnipotence. By contrast, the compossibility objections discussed earlier all seem to be in need of substantial support. Apparently, then, the crucial property of omnipotence is not so elusive so as to justify the contention that God cannot exist.

3.5 Concluding remarks

The cosmontological conclusion – in short: that God exists – is yet to be conceptually undermined. In this chapter we have seen that the maximal theistic (or Anselmian) notion of God as an all-perfect being, one who is whatever it is better to be than not to be, appears to have been satisfactorily defended against some prominent charges of incoherence or unintelligibility. As listed in §3.2.4, however, there are well over a dozen essential attributes of God, only two of which have been properly analysed in the foregoing. Accordingly, the maximal theistic notion of God, including its multiple ideas of absolute perfection, is in many respects a notion still to be clarified and defined. At least for the foreseeable future, this work will continue to attract advocates as well as opponents.

As for the properties of omniscience and omnipotence, I have set out to substantiate two definitions: (D1) and (D9). Of course, this is not to suggest that a maximal theist is committed to these particular analyses. A

maximal theist is committed to God's being omniscient and omnipotent and everything else that is derivable from 'whatever it is better to be than not to be' – not to any particular definitions thereof. If it turns out that (D1) or (D9) is false, there are other options. Indeed, it might be argued that there are *too many* options; that the unending prospects of further modifications undermine maximal theism 'by inches', eventually resulting in 'the death by a thousand qualifications'.[245] Countering rhetoric by rhetoric, however, it may be suggested that a thousand qualifications are every bit as significant of *life*. And even if it is granted that endless qualifications often betray an innate defect in the original hypothesis, there is always the possibility of breakthroughs and novel developments, some of which may revive a philosophical interest in the notions in hand. Again, however, this is all *if*. In my view, at least, (D1) and (D9) are true.

In this chapter, which has been predominantly defensive in character, positive contributions have come to the fore on two occasions: first, with respect to 'whatever it is better to be than not to be', which we were able to analyse in a non-relative and yet apparently meaningful way; second, with respect to (D9), our preferred definition of omnipotence, including its intrinsic ideas of incomparability and possibilization. Also, our treatment of the problem of indexicals, as this affects omniscience, was, if not constructive, at least original; as I deem it, Grim's argument from essential indexicals had not previously been satisfactorily rebutted. Similarly, I believe that our handling of the compossibility problems related to omnipotence, in particular that which involves impeccability, had the merit of bringing an otherwise relatively serious threat to maximal theism to a halt. As for our dealings with the omniscience-related problems of power sets and theological fatalism, their respective merits consisted mainly in clarifying and summarizing ideas to which others had already brought a proper amount of attention.

Thus ends our cosmontological treatise. It testifies, I hope, to the revitalization of contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. In case it is received with interest by some practitioners thereof, in particular some of an agnostic or atheistic slant, I will rest content. Insofar as its conclusions are true, we might even have had something of importance to say.

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[245] Flew ([1950] 1955, p. 97).

4 SAMMANFATTNING

[Summary in Swedish]

De många kosmologiska argumenten för Guds existens har detta gemensamt: de försöker förklara vissa synnerligen generella fenomen. Eller mer precist: de försöker förklara varför vissa synnerligen generella egenskaper är exemplifierade överhuvudtaget. Så försöker exempelvis det aristoteliska argumentet förklara det faktum att ting är i rörelse, eller mer precist: det faktum att egenskapen att vara i rörelse är exemplifierad överhuvudtaget. Typiskt för de förklaringar som ges är att de inkluderar minst ett ting som *inte* exemplifierar egenskapen ifråga. I det aristoteliska exemplet förklaras alltså rörelsen i världen med hänvisning till en yttersta realitet, en första rörare, som själv *inte* befinner sig i rörelse. På motsvarande sätt förhåller det sig med *kalam*-argumentet: det generella fenomen som består i att ting börjar existera – att egenskapen att börja existera är exemplifierad överhuvudtaget – förklaras med hänvisning till en yttersta realitet, en urskapare, som själv *inte* har börjat existera. Den princip som ligger till grund för dessa härledningar kan formuleras enligt följande:

> *Exclusion*: För varje klass *K* gäller, om *K* inte är tom, att det finns en förklaring till att *K* inte är tom om och endast om det finns minst en ickemedlem av *K* som gör så att *K* inte är tom.

En klass ska här förstås predikatlogiskt, som extensionen av en egenskap, snarare än mängdteoretiskt. Att säga att *K* inte är tom är detsamma som att säga att det finns minst ett ting som exemplifierar egenskapen *K*.

De många ontologiska argumenten för Guds existens utmärker sig i detta avseende: de försöker *inte* förklara något. Deras avsikt är istället att bevisa Guds existens genom blotta begreppsanalyser. Så menar exempelvis Anselm att även den dåraktigaste människa kommer att inse att Gud finns om hon bara begrundar innebörden i uttrycket ”det än vilket något högre inte kan tänkas”. Typiskt för de ontologiska argumenten är just att de idéer eller begrepp som analyseras beskriver ett högsta väsende, en absolut perfekt realitet, eller en ultimat storhet: Gud.

Ponera att de kosmologiska argumenten är korrekta. I sådana fall vet vi, bland annat, att det finns en fundamental metafysisk existens *x* som är orörd och utan ontologisk begynnelse. Därmed inte sagt, naturligtvis, att *x* är *Gud*, åtminstone inte om man med ”Gud” menar ett idealt perfekt väsende. Häri ligger en av de största utmaningarna för de kosmologiska

argumenten: att identifiera *x* (det må vara en orörd rörare, en första orsak, eller ett nödvändigt ting) med Gud.

Den främsta utmaningen för de ontologiska argumenten är istället att överbrygga klyftan mellan *idén* om Gud till Gud som *realitet*. Nästan inga filosofer idag anser att Guds existens kan härledas via Anselms tankeoperation. Däremot är det en öppen fråga vilket bevisvärde de kosmologiska argumenten besitter. Det övergripande syftet med denna bok är att konstruera en ”kosmontologisk” syntes: ett a posteriori argument för existensen av en all-perfekt entitet: en entitet som är det än vilket något högre inte kan tänkas i kraft av att vara vadhelst det är bättre att vara än att inte vara. Mig veterligen har något liknande projekt inte tidigare genomförts.

Den centrala tankegången är mycket enkel att följa. Låt en GUD vara ett ting som är vadhelst det är bättre att vara än att inte vara. Om detta råder ingen tvekan: det finns minst ett ting som *inte* är en GUD. Eller för att återvända till ovanstående begreppsapparat: klassen av icke-GUDar är inte tom. Via *Exclusion* följer därmed, att *om* det finns en förklaring till detta faktum (alltså det faktum att klassen av icke-GUDar inte är tom), så finns det minst en GUD. Anta således att det finns en förklaring till detta faktum. *Ergo*, då finns minst en GUD. Det kosmontologiska argumentet kan alltså formuleras på följande sätt:

(1) Klassen av icke-GUDar är inte tom.
(2) *Exclusion*.
(3) Det finns en förklaring till att klassen av icke-GUDar inte är tom.
(4) Alltså, det finns minst en GUD som gör så att klassen av icke-GUDar inte är tom.

Premiss (1) är nästintill obestridlig. Den kosmontologiska utmaningen består således i att underbygga premisserna (2) och (3); detta försöker jag göra i kapitel två. Därutöver måste förstås begreppet ”GUD” analyseras på ett adekvat sätt; detta försöker jag göra i kapitel tre, som också tar itu med ett större antal invändningar som går ut på att GUD-egenskapen inte kan vara, eller åtminstone inte är, exemplifierad i verkligheten.

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Kapitel två handlar alltså om att försöka styrka premisserna (2) och (3). Vad (2) beträffar, är det tydligt vari utmaningen består. Om det är så att minst en icke-medlem av klassen *K* gör så att *K* inte är tom, då finns det naturligtvis en förklaring till varför *K* inte är tom. Däremot är det inte så självklart att den omvända implikationen också är sann: om det finns en förklaring till varför *K* inte är tom, då finns det minst en icke-medlem av

K som gör så att *K* inte är tom. Därför fokuserar jag uteslutande på att försöka visa att även det senare påståendet är korrekt.

Här begagnar jag mig av en induktiv strategi. Jag presenterar tretton alternativa scenarier, de bästa jag kan komma på, som skulle kunna tänkas förklara varför en icke-tom klass *K* inte är tom. Jag finner att inget av dessa scenarier består provet. Gemensamt för nästan alla förslagen är att deras förmenta förklaringar antingen förutsätter just det som ska förklaras (alltså att *K* inte är tom), alternativt att de blott upprepar det som ska förklaras (om än i förtäckta ordalag). Givet dessa konkurrerande förklaringars enstämmiga fiasko, drar jag slutsatsen, att *om* det finns en förklaring till varför *K* inte är tom så finns det minst en icke-medlem av *K* som gör så att *K* inte är tom. Med andra ord (eftersom den omvända implikationen är oomtvistad): jag drar slutsatsen att *Exclusion* är sann.

Innan jag lämnar *Exclusion* passar jag på att lyfta fram, och föra i bevis, fem av dess mest intressanta följdsatser, listade från A till E. Av särskild betydelse för det fortsatta resonemanget är följdsats C, enligt vilken det måste finnas minst en positivt definierad klass, som inte är tom, vars icke-tomhet saknar förklaring – är ett *factum brutum*. Men om det alltså finns minst en dylik, icke-tom klass, vars icke-tomhet saknar förklaring, så följer av *Exclusion* att det finns minst ett icke-orsakat element: ett ting vars existens inte har orsakats av något. Klassen av icke-orsakade entiteter är följaktligen inte tom.

Det riktigt intressanta är nu att det går att visa, återigen med hjälp av *Exclusion*, att minst en medlem av nämnda klass av icke-orsakade entiteter har gjort så att klassen av *orsakade* entiteter – ting vars existens *har* en orsak – inte är tom. Det finns också relativt starka skäl att dra slutsatsen att antalet element i den förra klassen är *ett*. Alltså: det finns relativt starka skäl att dra slutsatsen att det finns exakt ett ting *x* som är metafysiskt fundamentalt, inte bara i bemärkelsen att sakna orsak, utan i bemärkelsen att vara den yttersta orsaken till att det alls existerar orsakade ting.

Därmed har vi redan i praktiken tagit oss an den grannlaga uppgiften att underbygga premiss (3). Den strategi jag använder mig av är tvådelad: för det första, i linje med vad som just sagts, att visa att det finns exakt en entitet *x* som är metafysiskt fundamental (i nämnda bemärkelser); för det andra, att visa att det kunskapsteoretiskt ideala vore om *x* är en GUD.

Vi har alltså redan sett att det finns exakt en entitet *x* som är metafysiskt fundamental. Nästa uppgift blir att identitetsbestämma *x*. Vad för slags ting har vi att göra med? Vilka är dess essentiella egenskaper? I syfte att försöka visa att *x* är en GUD, iscensätter jag en hypotetisk, jämförande

begreppsstudie. Låt således ”maximal teism” motsvara den kosmontologiska idén att *x* är en GUD. Genom att jämföra den maximala teismens förklaringsvärde med tre representativa, rivaliserande åskådningar – naturalism, ”minimal teism” och ”maximal diabolism” (varav den sistnämnda inte torde omfattas av någon) – finner jag att en maximalteistisk världsbild är kapabel att förklara fler fall av metafysisk icke-tomhet än vad fallet är med en naturalistisk eller minimalteistisk världsbild. Det vill säga, om *x* är en GUD så följer att fler instanser av icke-tomhet har en förklaring än om *x* är vad naturalismen eller den minimala teismen föreslår. Däremot tycks det som att en maximaldiabolistisk världsbild, enligt vilken *x* är en allsmäktig och all-ond DEMON, har samma förklaringspotential som den maximalteistiska dito. Till den senares fördel kan dock anföras att GUD-begreppet är mer homogent än DEMON-begreppet. Således har den maximala teismen ett försteg framför den maximala diabolismen vad gäller begreppslig klarhet.

Till slut mynnar den jämförande begreppsstudien ut i följande argument till stöd för premiss (3):

(3:1) Det finns en metafysiskt fundamental entitet *x*.
(3:2) En GUD-identitet på *x* vore förklaringsmässigt bättre än alla utom en konkurrerande identiteter på *x*.
(3:3) En GUD-identitet på *x* vore förklaringsmässigt likvärdig med en DEMON-identitet på *x*.
(3:4) En GUD-identitet på *x* vore mer enhetlig än en DEMON-identitet på *x*.
(3:5) Den verkliga identiteten på *x* är förklaringsmässigt bättre än, eller likvärdig med, vad alla konkurrerande identiteter på *x* hade varit.
(3:6) Den verkliga identiteten på *x* är mer enhetlig än vad någon konkurrerande, förklaringsmässigt likvärdig identitet på *x* hade varit.
(3:7) Alltså, den verkliga identiteten på *x* är en GUD-identitet. [Från (3:1)–(3:6)]
(3:8) Alltså, via *Exclusion*, det finns en förklaring till varför klassen av icke-GUDar inte är tom. [Från (3:1), (3:7)]

De fyra första premisserna styrks i texten. Däremot ser jag ingen möjlighet att styrka premisserna (3:5) och (3:6) utan att förutsätta det som ska bevisas. Tanken är i vart fall denna. Om vi vore i stånd att inse *x*’ verkliga identitet så skulle denna insikt inte på något sätt vara en kunskapsteoretisk besvikelse. Men i någon mån vore den en kunskapsteoretisk besvikelse ifall *x*’ verkliga identitet inte motsvarade vår ideala uppfattning om densamma. Alltså, om vi vore i stånd att inse *x*’ verkliga identitet så skulle vi inse att *x* är en GUD.

Längre än så kommer vi inte. Till syvende och sist kan vi konstatera det som vi alla visste redan från början: det kosmontologiska gudsbeviset innebär inte ateismens undergång. Dock är det ett noterbart argument i det att dess premisser, som är följdriktigt sammanlänkade, är långt ifrån orimliga. Därtill är det en öppen fråga huruvida det är relativt sett bättre än motsvarande argument *mot* existensen av en GUD.

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Om det kosmontologiska argumentet är korrekt så följer att det finns en GUD. Därmed är det inte alldeles uppenbart att *Gud* finns – det beror ju på vad vi menar med ”Gud”. Kapitel tre inleds dock med ett antal synpunkter till stöd för slutsatsen att ”GUD” verkligen implicerar ”Gud”, och därefter talar vi helt sonika om Gud: det som i kraft av att vara vadhelst det är bättre att vara än att inte vara är det än vilket något högre inte kan tänkas. Detta anselmianska gudsbegrepp har naturligtvis sin beskärda del av oklarheter. Syftet med kapitel tre är att reda ut ett antal av dessa. Om så låter sig göras, kommer vi i motsvarande mån ha kunnat styrka den kosmontologiska slutsatsens trovärdighet.

Det första problemet som behöver lösas har att göra med ”vadhelst det är bättre att vara än att inte vara”. Utmaningen ligger i att analysera detta uttryck på ett icke-relativt men ändå meningsfullt sätt. Poängen är ju inte att Gud är vadhelst det är bättre för *Gud* att vara än att inte vara, vilket vore intetsägande, utan att Gud är vadhelst det i *absolut* mening är bättre att vara än att inte vara. Men vid första anblick verkar det som att det inte finns några sådana egenskaper. Det är bättre att ha än att inte ha åtta ben om man är en spindel, men det förhåller sig tvärtom om man är en insekt. Kan det alltså finnas en egenskap *F* sådan att det för *alla* entiteter är bättre att ha *F* än att inte ha *F*?

Förmodligen inte – men min poäng är att det går att förstå ”vadhelst det är bättre att vara än att inte vara” på ett annat, betydligt bättre, och inte desto mindre icke-relativt sätt. Anta, för det första, att varje aktuellt ting är bättre, simpliciter, utan kvalifikation, än varje blott möjligt ting. Ett aktuellt sandkorn är alltså en bättre entitet än ett blott möjligt palats. I sådana fall är det ju begripligt i vilken icke-relativ mening det är bättre att vara ett aktuellt ting än att inte vara ett aktuellt ting. För det andra, anta att varje aktuellt ting som dessutom är moraliskt (i bemärkelsen att kunna skilja mellan rätt och fel och att medvetet kunna göra det som är rätt) är bättre, simpliciter, än varje aktuellt ting som inte är moraliskt. En klandervärd aktuell varelse (typ Hitler) är alltså en bättre entitet än ett enastående aktuellt monument just i kraft av att vara moralisk (i den just nämnda bemärkelsen). På motsvarande sätt blir det då begripligt i vilken

icke-relativ mening det är bättre att vara ett aktuellt moraliskt ting än att inte vara ett aktuellt moraliskt ting.

Dessa båda antaganden är naturligtvis inte självklara, och i texten försöker jag underbygga dem så långt jag kan. Inte minst behöver distinktionen mellan aktuella och blott möjliga ting problematiseras. Vad som är intressant är dock att de båda egenskaperna i fråga (aktualitet och moralitet) kan exemplifieras på olika bra sätt. Det verkar rimligt att tänka sig att en ideal exemplifikation av aktualitetsegenskapen innefattar oförstörbarhet, oförgänglighet, oskapbarhet, ontologiskt oberoende, evighet, allestädes närvaro och nödvändighet. På likartat sätt tycks det rimligt att tänka sig att en ideal exemplifikation av moralitetsegenskapen innefattar allvälvillighet, ofelbarhet, allsmäktighet, allvetande, allfrihet, allrättvisa, allbarmhärtighet, allkärleksfullhet och (givet ett eudaimonistiskt villkor) allsalighet. Men denna uppräkning av egenskaper är i själva verket ganska typisk för hur ”det än vilket något högre inte kan tänkas” brukar analyseras. Alltså, om en entitet *x* exemplifierar aktualitets- och moralitetsegenskaperna på ett idealt sätt, verkar det som att *x* just i kraft därav är det än vilket något högre inte kan tänkas. Den viktigare poängen är dock denna: om *x* exemplifierar alla de nämnda attributen är det rimligt att tänka sig att *x* är en bättre entitet än vilket ting som helst som *inte* exemplifierar alla dessa attribut. I sådana fall är det också klart nog i vilken icke-relativ mening *x* är vadhelst det är bättre att vara än att inte vara.

Givet föreliggande analys är alltså det maximalteistiska gudsbegreppet – eller begreppet ”GUD” – sådant att närmare ett halvtannat dussin ideala egenskaper tycks kunna härledas därifrån. Därmed inte sagt att alla (eller ens någon av) dessa egenskaper är metafysiskt *möjliga*. Var och en av dem tarvar noggrann begreppsanalys. Men det finns ingen möjlighet att inom denna boks ramar genomföra alla dessa analyser. Istället väljer jag ut *två*, nämligen de som handlar om allvetandet och allmakten: förmodligen de två gudsattribut som också fått utstå mest kritik från analytiskt-filosofiskt håll under de senaste femtio åren.

Vad allvetandet beträffar är läget till en början ganska gynnsamt. Det råder betydande filosofisk enighet om att ”allvetande” adekvat kan definieras i linje med följande förslag:

(D1) Ett subjekt *S* är allvetande om och endast om, för varje proposition *p*, om *p* är sann så vet *S p* (och om *p* är falsk så tror *S* inte *p*).

Utmaningen ligger snarare i att bemöta invändningar som går ut på att (D1)-allvetande är omöjligt, eller åtminstone oförenligt med något visst sakförhållande i världen. Jag tar här itu med tre dito: indexikalitetsproblemet, potensmängdsproblemet samt det teologiska fatalismproblemet.

Indexikalitetsproblemet går i korthet ut på att (den fregeanska) uppfattningen, att satser i stil med dessa två,

(i) Min mobiltelefon har just börjat ringa [en sats som jag – Martin Lembke – tänker vid tidpunkten *t*],

och

(ii) Martin Lembkes mobiltelefon börjar ringa vid tidpunkten *t*,

uttrycker samma proposition (eller sanningsbärare), är felaktig. Enligt Patrick Grim, som menar att (D1)-allvetande är en omöjlig egenskap, är det istället så att (i) och (ii) uttrycker olika propositioner. Han ger två argument till stöd för denna slutsats: dels att det är möjligt för mig (ML) att veta att (ii) är sann utan att därmed också veta att (i) är sann; dels att det finns möjliga scenarier där (i) men inte (ii) får mig att reagera. Men om det alltså är så att (i) och (ii) uttrycker olika propositioner, verkar det som att ingen annan än *jag* kan veta den proposition som (i) uttrycker. Av detta följer att ingen kan veta alla propositioner; alltså är allvetande à la (D1) en omöjlig egenskap.

Jag bemöter denna invändning längs två fronter. För det första visar jag att Grims grundläggande antagande, nämligen detta att satser som (i) och (ii) uttrycker olika propositioner, implicerar en mystisk outsäglighet. Det visar sig nämligen att varken Grim eller någon annan kan precisera vilket det sakpåstående, som uttrycks av (i), *är* – givet antagandet att det *inte* är detsamma som det som uttrycks av (ii). Men om den proposition som (i) uttrycker alltså är outsäglig, på vilka grunder kan Grim påstå att ingen annan än jag kan veta den?

För det andra tycks det som att följande sats,

(iii) Din mobiltelefon har just börjat ringa [sagt till mig av någon bredvid mig vid tidpunkten *t*],

uttrycker detsamma som (i). Åtminstone tar den effektivt itu med Grims två argument för att satser som (i) och (ii) inte uttrycker samma proposition, ty dels är det omöjligt för mig att veta att (iii) är sann utan att också veta att (i) är sann, dels har (iii) samma möjligheter som (i) att få mig att reagera. Och poängen är förstås att den proposition som (iii) uttrycker är sådan att andra än jag kan ha kunskap om den. Alltså, även om vi för argumentationens skull antar att (i) och (ii) uttrycker två olika propositioner, tycks det ändå vara så att den proposition som (i) uttrycker är vetbar av andra än mig. Sammantaget verkar det alltså som att indexikalitetsproblemet är hanterbart, så långt allvetandet beträffar.

Potensmängdsproblemet bottnar i Georg Cantors väletablerade sats, enligt vilken varje mängd har fler delmängder än element. I mängdteoretisk terminologi säger man att en potensmängd $\wp(S)$ utgör mängden av delmängder av en given mängd S. Anta att det finns en mängd **S** av *alla sanna propositioner* (eller sanningar): $\{S_1, S_2, S_3, \ldots\}$. Enligt Cantors sats följer då att $\wp(\mathbf{S})$, vars element är alla delmängder i **S**, är större – innehåller fler element – än **S** själv. Men till varje element i $\wp(\mathbf{S})$ korresponderar sanna propositioner. Alltså finns det minst lika många sanningar som det finns element i $\wp(\mathbf{S})$. Men **S** själv, som innehåller färre element än $\wp(\mathbf{S})$, är definierad som mängden av *alla* sanningar. Motsägelse! Tvärtemot vad vi antog till att börja med tycks det alltså *inte* vara så att det finns en mängd **S** av alla sanningar. Än värre, det tycks följa av Cantors sats att **S** är en *omöjlighet*. Men det som allvetande inbegriper *är* **S**. Slutsatsen blir alltså att även allvetande är en omöjlighet.

Så argumenterar åtminstone – återigen – Patrick Grim: världens kanske främste kritiker av allvetandebegreppet. Gentemot denna ateistiska framstötning föreslår jag tre motdrag, av vilka de två sista är inspirerade av Alvin Plantingas publicerade korrespondens med Grim.

För det första, det måste hållas i minnet att Cantors sats ofrånkomligen leder till paradoxer. Betänk bara mängden av alla mängder. Av Cantors sats följer att potensmängden av alla mängder innehåller fler mängder än mängden av alla mängder själv, vilket är absurt. Därav behovet av att axiomatisera den s.k. ”naiva” mängdläran. Men ännu 120 år efter det att Cantor slog fast sitt teorem är det en öppen fråga hur detta bäst låter sig göras. Därmed inte sagt att potensmängdsproblemet inte är ett problem för allvetandet, men i synnerhet är det ett problem för *logiken*. Att Grim lyckas hitta en motsägelse i allvetandebegreppet med hjälp av Cantors sats beror helt enkelt på att Cantors sats leder till paradoxer – med eller utan hänvisning till allvetande.

För det andra, (D1) förutsätter att man kan kvantifiera över alla *sanningar* – inte att det finns en matematiskt definierad *mängd* av alla sanningar. Grim replikerar att det är meningslöst att kvantifiera över alla sanningar om man inte just förutsätter att det finns en mängd av alla sanningar. Men denna replik skjuter snett. Ty om så vore fallet vore det lika meningslöst att kvantifiera över alla *objekt* om man inte förutsätter en *mängd* av alla objekt, liksom att kvantifiera över alla *propositioner* om man inte förutsätter en *mängd* av alla propositioner – och enligt Grims sätt att resonera så kan det omöjligen finnas några sådana mängder. Det skulle alltså innebära att satser i stil med följande,

(e) Ingen proposition är både sann och falsk,

och

(h) Det finns inget objekt med sex ben,

satser som kvantifierar just över alla propositioner respektive alla objekt, är *meningslösa* – inte sanna eller falska. Men (e) är en essentiell beståndsdel i all klassisk logik, och (h) är demonstrativt falsk. Det är anmärkningsvärt att Grim tycks vara beredd att acceptera den här beska konsekvensen, snarare än att dra (den riktiga) slutsatsen att det är något fel på hans ursprungliga argument.

För det tredje, ponera för sakens skull att Grims argument är korrekt. Således finns det ingen mängd av alla sanningar (och alltså inte heller, enligt Grim, något allvetande). Men notera att denna slutsats kvantifierar över alla objekt, ty vad den säger är ju att inget objekt är en mängd av alla sanningar. Med andra ord, själva slutsatsen i Grims argument är – enligt Grims eget resonemang – meningslös. Men det säger sig självt att om slutsatsen i ett argument är meningslös så är argumentet som sådant *inte* korrekt – än mindre ett hot mot allvetande. Det hela är snarare ett snillrikt utnyttjande av den naiva mängdlärans paradoxala potential.

Det teologiska fatalismproblemet går ut på att allvetande, såsom det definierats av (D1), omöjliggör den fria viljan. Anta exempelvis att Gud redan igår visste att det kommer att bli ett sjöslag imorgon. Då kommer det ju att bli ett sjöslag imorgon, alldeles oavsett vad kungar och kommendörer råkar besluta under de närmaste timmarna. Således verkar det som att morgondagens sjöslag är lika omöjligt att nu göra något åt som det är omöjligt att nu göra något åt slaget vid Salamis 480 f.Kr. Men då tycks det ju som att vi saknar genuint fri vilja (åtminstone givet en libertariansk analys), vilket många skulle säga är en oacceptabel slutsats. Med andra ord: idén om allvetande kan bejakas endast om man förnekar idén om den fria viljan.

Det finns flera aspekter som behöver problematiseras i detta schematiska resonemang. Den viktigaste invändningen är dock denna: *om* Gud redan igår visste att det kommer att bli ett sjöslag imorgon så var det *sant* redan igår att det kommer att bli ett sjöslag imorgon. Men om det var sant redan igår att det kommer att bli ett sjöslag imorgon så kommer det att bli ett sjöslag imorgon – oavsett om Gud eller någon annan vet om det. Det är sanningen om framtiden som i sådana fall är den avgörande ingrediensen – kunskapen därom, som ju inkluderar sanningen, lägger inget väsentligt därtill. Alltså finns det ingen anledning att avfärda (D1) med motiveringen att den är oförenlig med den fria viljan.

Sammanfattningsvis verkar det alltså som att allvetandet låter sig analyseras på ett ganska smidigt sätt: en analys som dessutom är kapabel att hantera flera uppmärksammade problem.

Vad allmakten beträffar är läget annorlunda. Till skillnad från allvetandets relation till (D1) så finns det ingen befintlig analys av allmakten som är allmänt accepterad. Allmakten gäckar oss, med andra ord, vilket innebär att den är svår såväl att försvara som att kritisera. I texten ger jag en översiktlig inledning till problematiken genom att redogöra för svagheterna med några av de hitintills viktigaste analysförslagen.

Inte desto mindre har en viss typ av kritik mot allmakten slagit rot på senare tid. Idén är, att *oavsett* hur allmakt mer precist bör analyseras, står det klart att *Gud* inte kan vara allsmäktig, givet att han också antas vara (essentiellt) ofelbar. Ty den som är ofelbar kan ju inte utföra omoraliska handlingar (som att mörda och bedra), men den som är allsmäktig måste rimligen vara kapabel att göra sådant som vanliga människor är kapabla att göra hela tiden. Alltså kan Gud inte existera, ty Gud antas vara både allsmäktig och ofelbar.

Jag har två synpunkter på detta argument. Anta att det finns en varelse, Potentia, som i allt väsentligt är lika mäktig som Gud men som dessutom är kapabel att begå onda handlingar. Till exempel: Potentia, men inte Gud, är kapabel att plåga handikappade barn. Det är inte alls klart att Potentia därmed är en bättre allmaktskandidat än Gud. Ponera (med Platon, Aristoteles, Kant och Mill) att en omoralisk handling är en irrationell handling. Om så är fallet är det långt ifrån uppenbart att Potentias förmåga att agera omoraliskt gör henne mäktigare än Gud, ty det är ju långt ifrån uppenbart att förmågan att agera irrationellt är en nödvändig förutsättning för att på ett adekvat sätt kunna kallas ”allsmäktig”. Det är den första synpunkten.

Den andra synpunkten jag har är att det finns handlingar som Gud, just i kraft av att vara ofelbar, är kapabel att utföra, men som det inte alls är säkert att Potentia mäktar med. Betänk till exempel denna handling: att försäkra, med absolut visshet, att man varken har plågat, eller kommer att plåga, handikappade barn. Potentia kan utföra denna handling endast om hon vet att hon är, och kommer att förbli, oskyldig i nämnda avseende. Det vill säga, hon kan garantera sin oskuld i frågan endast om hon vet att hennes kapacitet att plåga handikappade barn aldrig ges utlopp. Men om alltså själva *utövandet* av denna kapacitet omöjliggör för Potentia att garantera sin oskuld, är *besittandet* av densamma knappast något som stärker hennes allmaktskandidatur. Således drar jag slutsatsen, mot bakgrund av denna och föregående synpunkter, att det är allt annat

än klarlagt att allmakt och ofelbarhet inte båda kan vara exemplifierade i en och samma individ.

Efter att på så sätt ha behandlat en viktig invändning mot allmaktsbegreppets maximalteistiska applicerbarhet, tar jag mig an uppgiften att i positiva ordalag försöka definiera vad allmakt *är*. Mitt slutgiltiga förslag lyder således:

(D9) En agent *A* är allsmäktig om och endast om (i) *A* är ojämförligt bättre på att aktualisera saktillstånd än någon annan aktuell agent (av vilken *A* inte är en del); (ii) *A* är ojämförligt bättre på att aktualisera saktillstånd än vad någon blott möjlig agent (av vilken *A* inte är en del) hade varit, hade vederbörande varit aktuell; och (iii) möjligheten av varje annan agent är exklusivt skapad av *A*.

Två idéer ligger till grund för (D9). Den första är att allmakt utesluter all form av tävlan. Om agent *A* är allsmäktig så varken finns det någon, eller kan finnas någon, annan agent *B* som ens i en minimal bemärkelse utgör en hotbild mot *A*. Med en matematisk liknelse kan man säga att *A*s makt är lika mycket större än *B*s som en oändlig mängd är större än en ändlig. Denna idé försöker jag uttrycka i villkoren (i) och (ii), som är formulerade i beaktande av vår tidigare distinktion mellan aktuella och blott möjliga ting.

Den andra idén, som uttrycks i villkor (iii), är att om *A* är allsmäktig så är varje annan agent – aktuell eller blott möjlig – avhängig av *A*s skaparakt. Inte så att varje annan agent beror på *A* för sin aktualitet, men väl för sin *möjlighet*. Villkor (iii) försöker på detta sätt fånga ”all”-aspekten av allmakten på det mest grundläggande metafysiska planet. All skaparkraft och orsakspotential beror till syvende och sist på den allsmäktige – förutsatt att en sådan *finns*.

En noterbar konsekvens av (D9) är, som sig bör, att det maximalt kan finnas *en* allsmäktig varelse. Därmed kan vi också knyta an till ett tidigare resultat, nämligen detta att antalet element i klassen av icke-orsakade ting verkar vara *ett*.

Trots sin till synes undanglidande karaktär, tycks det alltså som att allmakten låter sig analyseras på ett både begripligt och motsägelsefritt sätt. Lägg därtill att ofelbarhetsinvändningen visade sig vara långt ifrån övertygande, och det verkar som att det maximalteistiska gudsbegreppet alltjämt framstår som en sammanhängande idé.

Avslutningsvis bör vi dock påminna oss om att nämnda gudsbegrepp har visat sig ha närmare halvtannat dussin extraordinära attribut, av vilka vi bara har kunnat gå igenom två. Arbetet med att analysera ”Gud”, eller ”GUD”, lär fortgå ännu en tid.

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