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Polytheism, pantheism, and the ontological argument

R. HARWOOD

Department of Philosophy, Georgia State University, Atlanta GA 30303–3083

Abstract. I show that if the ontological argument is sound, it proves that a number of maximally great beings must exist. I show that maximal greatness does not imply uniqueness, that such beings can be omnipotent and yet not restrict each other's power, and that each must have its own separate stream of consciousness. I also show that attempts to unify the beings by unifying the streams of consciousness leads to a form of pantheism.

I
INTRODUCTION

St Anselm's ontological argument[1] has traditionally been regarded as an argument that supports traditional monotheism, since it not only purports to proves the existence of God, but also purports to have corollaries which demonstrate at least some of the qualities of God that the monotheistic religions proclaim. I will show that it is, in fact, disastrous for the traditional monotheist, since it leads either to an extravagant polytheism or to a position resembling *Advaita Vedanta* or pantheism.

Most treatments of the argument concentrate on the question of whether the argument is sound. I will take a different approach. For the purposes of this paper I will leave the issue of soundness aside and instead consider some of the implications of the argument. That is, I will take as my starting point the supposition that the argument succeeds in showing that if we can conceive of a being than which there cannot be a greater, then such a being exists, and that its existence is logically necessary. I will ignore the suggestion of Hartshorne (1941) and Malcolm (1960) that Anselm actually had two arguments, and simply proceed from the supposition that, however many arguments Anselm used, they are all sound. I will take the same position on the modal ontological argument, regardless of whether or not it is actually one of Anselm's arguments. Following Plantinga (1974), 199, I will interpret 'conceivable' in the argument to mean 'broadly logically possible', and also use his terms 'maximal greatness' and 'maximally great'.

Anselm's 'being than which we cannot conceive a greater' is, then, a being than which it is not logically possible that there be a greater. Such a being has maximal greatness, and is maximally great. Greatness involves having

[1] The arguments Anselm used in the *Proslogion* have been given a variety of interpretations, and I have not considered all possible interpretations.

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positive qualities, and so a Maximally Great Being (MGB) is one that has all possible positive qualities to the highest possible extent, and is totally devoid of negative qualities. Traditionally, these qualities have been taken to include omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection.

The ontological argument shows that, since an MGB is logically possible, such a being necessarily exists. However, the concept of an MGB does not, on the face of it, in itself imply that there can only be one such being. It does not have to be greater than all other beings. There could be two equally great beings, both possessing all possible positive qualities to the highest possible extent. According to the argument, then, if it is logically possible that there could be two such beings, they both necessarily exist. This argument can be extended to any number of beings, leading to the interesting result that there can be an enormous number of gods (perhaps an infinite number) all of whom are maximally great.

The ontological argument, if sound, appears to deliver far more gods than the monotheist wants. At first blush this might seem to be good news for unreconstructed polytheists who would like to prove the existence of the old gods, but unfortunately it does not help us with that honourable task. (But see note 2 below.) We cannot restore the Olympians, nor El and Enlil, nor Isis and Osiris, on the strength of the argument, for it implies gods far too similar to each other to carry out the varied roles that classical polytheism requires. The argument has been excessively productive, and productive in the wrong way. There are too many gods, even for polytheists (except, perhaps, for Hindus) and they are the wrong sort of god. Each one is exactly similar to the next, since they have all the same qualities, whereas the polytheist wants differing gods with differing qualities to perform differing tasks.

The question to be considered, then, is whether the concept of an MGB does, contrary to appearance, imply that there can be only one such being.

II

MAXIMAL GREATNESS AND ABSOLUTE PERFECTION

In discussions of the ontological argument, it is usually assumed that an MGB will be an absolutely perfect being, since maximal greatness and absolute perfection are regarded as equivalent. However, there is no clear-cut way of deciding what constitutes either maximal greatness or absolute perfection. The description of maximal greatness I gave above – possessing all possible positive qualities to the highest possible extent, and being totally devoid of negative qualities – is worthless until we have spelt out what those qualities are.

Once we start trying to spell them out, we find that we have to appeal to our intuitions to decide which qualities an MGB would actually have.

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Morris, in *Anselmian Explorations* (1987), places great stress on the intuitions of monotheists in this matter, but we cannot simply accept them. Why should the intuitions of the monotheist have greater value than those of the polytheist in deciding what characteristics constitute greatness and perfection? It is not sufficient to say that the monotheist has a background theory to explain the source of the intuitions, that is, that God builds those intuitions into us so that we can come to know His nature. The classical polytheist has a matching theory to explain his intuitions, which is that Apollo and Athena send us polytheist intuitions, that we may grow in wisdom and honour the gods better. We must work on shared intuitions, and we must test them against the deliverances of logic, or no discussion will be possible.

Since there are an enormous number of possible qualities, I will have to restrict my discussion to a few of the traditional qualities that are usually attributed to God, and decide whether or not they are part of greatness/perfection, and whether they imply that there can be only one MGB or not.

If the quality of being-the-source-of-all or the quality of uniqueness are necessary to being an MGB, then there can only be one. One quality, *caritas*, implies that there must be more than one. If the concept of an MGB is coherent, there must be some resolution of this incompatibility. First, I shall give reasons for excluding uniqueness and being-the-source-of-all from the concept of an MGB. Next, I will present the argument for *caritas*. Then I will present arguments about omnipotence, sovereignty, the coherence of creation and omnipresence. Finally I will show that attempting to unite the MGBs leads to pantheism.

III
BEING-THE-SOURCE-OF-ALL

If there are several necessary beings, none of them can be the source of all other things besides itself, since it would not be the source of the other necessary beings. But if a necessary being is not the source of all, it cannot be an MGB, as we can, it seems, imagine a greater being who is the source of all. I will offer two arguments to suggest that we should not include the quality of being-the-source-of-all other things as part of the concept of an MGB. The first of these is the argument from lesser necessary beings. The same argument that generates an MGB seems also to generate other necessary beings, and to reject the latter would lead us to reject the MGB as well. The second argument is the argument from nasty things.

IV
LESS THAN PERFECT NECESSARY BEINGS

Kane (1984) argues that if the modal ontological argument is sound, then there must be other necessary beings, which Kane refers to as Less than

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Perfect Necessary Beings (LPNs). If there are such beings, then, Kane argues, God cannot be the source of all other things besides himself. Morris has attempted to defuse Kane's argument by appealing to monotheistic intuitions, but Leftow (1988) shows that monotheistic intuitions support the possibility, and therefore, by the modal ontological argument, the necessary existence, of other necessary (divine) beings.

To avoid the proliferation of LPNs, the monotheist has to appeal to the intuition that it is necessarily true that there is only one divine being.[2] Morris claims that God's nature excludes the possibility of other concrete necessary beings, but since he does not tell us what aspect of God's nature is involved, or how it is involved, this seems (as Leftow says) like nothing more than insisting on the intuition. Morris' justification for privileging the intuitions of monotheists depends on the fact that monotheists have a background theory to explain where the intuitions come from, and why they are likely to be correct, but Leftow points out that when the intuitions tend against the background theory, they weaken the basis for accepting the theory, and thus for granting privileged status to the intuitions. Now clearly the logical inferences from some of the monotheists' intuitions conflict with monotheist theory. There is, therefore, no particular reason to treat the monotheistic intuition as anything other than a monotheist mistake.

Thus, it remains to be argued that there are no other necessary beings besides God. Morris would like to separate the concepts of necessary existence and independence from God so that the LPNs can be necessary beings and yet dependent upon God for their existence. Since Morris does not accept the possibility of concrete LPNs, he only deals with abstract LPNs, suggesting that they exist as ideas in the mind of God. Of course, this solution (if it is a solution) only works for abstract LPNs. It cannot be applied to concrete LPNs. For them, the link between necessary existence and independence seems indissoluble.

If something exists as a matter of logical necessity, it cannot fail to exist without the laws of logic being violated. Its nonexistence is a logical impossibility. Such a thing would exist whether God existed or not, so it cannot be dependent upon God. (However, if necessary beings can *per impossible* be dependent on another being for their existence, then a multitude of equally great beings could perhaps be mutually dependent on each other for their existence. This would fit in with the *caritas* argument, which shows that they are mutually dependent on each other for their perfection. Swinburne (1994) discusses this question in greater detail.)

[2] If we accept the existence of LPNs, and yet reject the existence of MGBs (say, on the grounds that the concept is incoherent) we then may have a basis for polytheism. The various beings could fall short of maximal greatness in a variety of interesting ways, and thus provide the variety of gods that we want. Alternatively, if we accept the pantheist conclusion I arrive at later, we can take a Stoic or Neoplatonic position on the gods. Perhaps the ontological argument is of some use to polytheists after all. There would still be a dizzyingly large number of gods, though.

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Thus, the modal ontological argument presents us with a conclusion (the possibility of other necessary beings) that conflicts with the requirement that the quality of being-the-source-of- all other things should be included in the concept of an MGB. This is a reason for rejecting that quality.

This is not to deny that MGBs are the sources of some other things. MGBs can be creative without being the source of *all* things. Nonetheless, if there are a number of necessary beings, then the traditional monotheist will have to admit that there are no beings who have the quality of being-the-source-of-all as one of their qualities, and so nothing fits his conception of God. He has made a mistake in supposing that such a thing could exist and be an MGB.

V
THE SOURCE OF NASTY THINGS

Another reason is that the quality of being-the-source-of-all implies the property of being the source of nasty and evil things, such as birth defects, natural disasters, and the entire system of some living things eating others to survive. A perfect being would, as Epicurus taught us, only create and sustain in existence a perfect world, and ours is not perfect. This is surely a prima facie reason for excluding the quality of being-the-source-of-all from being entailed by perfection. The huge body of work on the problem of evil is an acknowledgment of the tension between the idea of perfection with the idea of being-the-source-of-all, and constitutes an attempt to reconcile the two. I take the existence of the attempt, and its meagre success, to be evidence in favour of denying that the quality of being-the-source-of-all is entailed by perfection or maximal greatness.

Thus, either MGBs do not exist, or they are not the source of all things. Since the first alternative is excluded *ex hypothesi*, I conclude again that being-the-source-of-all is not a property of MGBs.

VI
UNIQUENESS

We must also decide whether we should include uniqueness as a positive quality. If it is, then a being which possessed all other positive qualities to the fullest possible extent would not be maximally great unless it also possessed the quality of uniqueness. If maximal greatness includes uniqueness, there can only be one MGB.

As an argument against thinking that uniqueness is positive, consider the most evil of all tyrants. This tyrant exceeds all others in quantity and type of evil, and is, therefore, unique. Does his uniqueness give him any positive value? It does not. Indeed, his uniqueness depends on his negative qualities.

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To suggest that the intensity and extent of his negative values add up to a positive value is absurd, so if those negative values are what makes him unique, his uniqueness can hardly be a positive value. But suppose there are several equally evil tyrants, one of whom is different from all others by virtue of some additional quality which is not in itself either positive or negative, but neutral. (Teeth fillings, perhaps, or the number of buttons on his jacket.) This tyrant is unique, but his uniqueness does not depend on his negative qualities. Does his uniqueness give him a positive quality that the others lack? It certainly does not lessen the negativity of his evil. The tyrant's uniqueness will not suffice to save him from the mob when the revolution comes. Uniqueness by itself does not seem to be a positive quality, and so is not to be included in the concept 'maximal greatness'.

It is true that we sometimes value unique items, and indeed consider that their uniqueness gives them extra value, but this seems to be because they are irreplaceable. The uniqueness of an item of a particular positive value means that if the item is destroyed, the positive value will be lost. Thus, when we value a unique Egyptian temple, it because it is both beautiful and irreplaceable. If it were destroyed, a particular kind of beauty would be lost. However, I, at least, also think the situation would be better if there were several such temples scattered around, for then there would be more beauty. Nor would I think the temples any the less beautiful for not being unique. The intrinsic value of the temple would not be reduced. Similarly, I think it would be better if there were several benevolent people than if there were only one benevolent person in the world, for then there would be more benevolence.

I suspect that there are some people who hold the view that uniqueness makes a positive quality even more positive, which seems to imply that the less of the positive value there is, the more positive it is. I cannot help regarding that view as perverse. Nonetheless, the perverse claim needs to be dealt with.

If uniqueness is not itself a positive quality, can it make other positive qualities even more positive? To show that it does not, I will consider some omniscient and less than omniscient beings, and see how uniqueness affects their greatness. If knowledge is a positive quality, the more knowledge a being has, the greater that being is. When the maximum (omniscience) is reached, no more knowledge can be added to make the being greater. (This means the maximum knowledge possible at any given time.)

Suppose that in World 1, we have *OB1*, an omniscient being. It is the only omniscient being in World 1. In World 2, we have *OB2* and *OB3*, who are both omniscient, and therefore not uniquely omniscient. Is *OB1* greater than *OB2* and *OB3*? If we say this, then we are saying that *OB1*'s omniscience is more positive because *OB1* is unique. If so, the positive quality is not just 'having knowledge' (since that is the same for all of them) but either

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'knowing more than anyone else' or the combination of 'having knowledge' and 'knowing more than anyone else'.

The first possibility leads to the following difficulty. In World 3 there are no omniscient beings. All except one of the beings in World 3 know only one thing. That one, *B4*, knows two things, and therefore knows more than any other in World 3. All other things being equal, *B4* is the greatest being in its world. This would seem to make *B4* greater than *OB2* and *OB3*. This seems absurd.

The second possibility also leads to difficulties. First, assume *B4* takes an intensive course of study, until it knows almost everything that *OB2* and *OB3* know. There is only one item of knowledge lacking. Does the fact that *B4* knows more than any other in World 3 outweigh its deficiency of knowledge sufficiently to make it greater than *OB2* and *OB3*? I have no idea how I could begin to answer that.

More importantly, suppose that *OB1* and newly-educated *B4* share the same world, and *B4* and *OB1* are equal in all positive qualities except knowledge. Of course, *B4* no longer knows more than anyone else in its world. *OB1* is greater than *B4*. Now suppose that *B4* learns that one final item, and becomes omniscient. *OB1* is no longer greater than *B4*, and, it would seem, no longer as great as it was before. This means that *OB1*'s greatness is an extrinsic property. It can vary without any change in *OB1*'s intrinsic properties.

If *OB1* were an MGB, when *B4* gains that final item of knowledge, *OB1*'s greatness would decline, and it would cease to be an MGB. I find the idea of an MGB that can cease to be an MGB without any change in its intrinsic properties to be absurd, and so I suggest that uniqueness cannot make other positive properties more positive. Thus the concept of maximal greatness does not include uniqueness, since uniqueness is not a positive quality in itself, and it does not make the other qualities more positive.

VII
CARITAS

I raise the question of *caritas* because it is a quality that supports the idea of a multitude of gods. In his work on social trinitarianism, Bartel (1993) has revived an argument from Richard of St Victor.[3] This argument begins from the position that *caritas* (love of another) is a positive quality, and is more perfect than *amor*, which can be confined to oneself. A perfect being will be one that has the virtue of *caritas* to the maximum extent. The maximum of *caritas* cannot be that which one feels to an inferior, imperfect, created being,

[3] Several of the arguments in support of social trinitarianism seem to support the possibility of a multitude of gods.

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for such a being is not worthy of being loved to the maximum. Only an MGB is worthy of that. This means that if anything is an MGB it can only be an MGB if there are other MGBs towards whom it feels *caritas*. (I am tempted to add, the more MGBs that are loved, the greater the lover, and so there must be many MGBs.) From this argument, then, it seems the ontological argument will only work if there is more than one MGB, for unless there is more than one, there cannot be one.

One objection (and, I think, a legitimate one) to this is that it seems odd to suggest that love can only be at the maximum when it is directed towards an object of maximum worth. It seems contrary to the nature of love to moderate it, in a calculated manner, according to the worth of the object loved.

In reply, I will point out that in some cases we do, in fact, expect love to be proportionate to the worth of the object loved. We expect humans to love cats more than teddy bears, and humans more than cats.[4] Many theists have urged us to love God more than we love our fellow men, because God is greater and so more worthy of love than they are.[5] The idea that for love to be the maximum, it must be directed towards objects of maximum worth is not entirely alien to us.

However, if *caritas* is a necessary quality for an MGB, that MGB cannot also have the quality of being-the-source-of-all, nor the quality of uniqueness, even though both these qualitites seem to be part of greatness and perfection. We are forced to choose between the quality of perfect *caritas* and the qualities of uniqueness and being-the-source-of-all.

I am inclined to reject all three, even though *caritas* strengthens my claim for multiple MGBs. Each of these seems to make the greatness of an MGB an extrinsic feature, depending (for being-the-source-of-all) on the non-existence of LPNs, and on the nonexistence and existence of other MGBs for uniqueness and *caritas*.

VIII
OMNIPOTENCE

The quality of omnipotence creates another problem. It seems that if all the beings are omnipotent, they will be able to restrict each other's actions and end up in a stalemate. But omnipotence cannot be restricted. Therefore, the concept of several omnipotent beings is incoherent.

Now it is generally accepted among theologians that the concept of omnipotence does not include the power to do something that is logically impossible. An MGB is not only omnipotent, but also omniscient, omni-sapient, and morally perfect. Such a being must, necessarily, always act for

[4] Teddy bears and cats dispute this ranking.
[5] All too often this love has been at the expense of our fellow men.

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the best. It will, necessarily, always recognize what the best way of acting is, and always, necessarily, be able to do so. It is logically impossible for it to act in any other way.

In the case of multiple beings, it would be logically impossible for the beings to act counter to each other. Each being is omnipotent, omniscient, omnisapient, and morally perfect, and will, therefore, necessarily recognize the best way to exercise its power, and necessarily exercise its power in that way. So long as there is one way of exercising power that is better than all others, it is logically impossible for one being to act counter to another.

Suppose, however, there are two ways of exercising power that are equally good, and better than all other ways, but incompatible with each other. Will all the MGBs choose one way rather than another, or will some choose one way and others choose the other way, and so come into conflict when they try to act? This too is a logical impossibility. All wise, morally perfect beings will not come into conflict because they will recognize that that would not be the best way of acting. If there are two ways of exercising power that are morally perfect, they will perhaps co-operate to produce two universes so that each way will be realized.

In short, all their other perfections make it logically impossible for MGBs to act counter to each other, and so they can be both omnipotent and yet not able to limit each other's power, because they are necessarily constrained to either co-operate or refrain from interfering. Of course, they cannot destroy each other, because the existence of each is logically necessary.

It seems, then, that the omnipotence of an MGB is compatible with the existence of several such beings.

This has been argued at greater length and in greater detail by Bartel (1993). I will not repeat all of his argument here, but simply sketch out the main points. Bartel has two lines of argument. The first starts from the assumption that each god has middle knowledge of what choices the other members will make, and shows that under the assumption no deadlock is possible. Each god will recognize that the others are perfectly good, and therefore that they are obliged not to frustrate the desires of the others. The decision-sharing method any god proposes will be recognized as perfect by the others. (We can leave the details of the method for the gods to work out.) If such a method has been proposed, all the gods will accept it. If no such method has been proposed, either they will adopt some decision-sharing method, or a decision-sharing method will not be necessary, because they will all automatically do the right thing, and know that the others will do the right thing, anyway.

Thus, a society of essentially perfect beings will be perfectly co-ordinated in their volitions and activities. Each will freely choose to do the right thing.

The second line starts from the assumption that middle knowledge is not possible. In such a circumstance there can only be a stalemate if one god

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wants to create, but there is never a decision-sharing method proposed at any moment after that. (If one is proposed, it will be accepted immediately.) But the number of subsequent moments is infinite, and one god proposing a decision-sharing method will be a genuine possibility. Thus the probability that there will never be a decision-sharing method proposed fades to infinitesimally small. Again, their volitions and acts will be perfectly co-ordinated. The apparent reduction in divine perfection by allowing an infinitesimally small probability of creative deadlock is outweighed by the increase in divine perfection by including the possibility of infinite divine love of equally exalted beings, as mentioned in the *caritas* argument above.

IX
SOVEREIGNTY

The claim of divine sovereignty is the claim that the creative/sustaining power of an MGB is sufficient and necessary for the existence of any creature. The problem here is as follows. If the will of divine being *G1* is not sufficient for the existence of any created entity, then *G1* is not maximally great. If the will of divine being *G1* is not necessary for the existence of any created entity, then *G1* is not maximally great. However, if the will of *G1* is sufficient, then it seems that the will of divine being *G2* is not necessary, and if the will of *G1* is necessary, it seems that the will of *G2* is not sufficient. In which case, *G2* cannot be an MGB.

Here I can use Bartel's (1994) argument that sovereignty can be shared between the members of the social trinity, and extend it to the multitude. The core of the argument is that the wills of *G1*, *G2*, *G3*, etc, can all be both sufficient and necessary. Divine causation (which is *ab extra*) can be defined in terms of counterfactual, as follows:

> For any state of affairs and any possible world W, if *x* and *y* obtain in W and *x* is a divine volition that *y* obtain-in-W, then *x* is causally necessary in W for *y*'s obtaining-in-W if and only if it is true that if *x* had not obtained, *y* would not have obtained (Bartel, 1994, 371).

Thus, if *u* (the universe) at time *t* would not have existed if a divine being had not willed it, that volition was causally necessary. (In partial support of this analysis Bartel contrasts it with a case of a light that can be turned on by either of two switches. In such a case we regard neither switch as causally necessary.)

I have already established in the discussion of omnipotence that *G1*, *G2*, *G3*, etc, will all have the same volitions at the same time. This means that in all possible worlds, if (*p*) *G*1 wills *u* at *t*, then (*q*) *G2* wills *u* at *t*, (*r*) *G3* wills *u* at *t*, etc. That is, in all worlds where *p* is true, *q*, *r*, etc. are also true. They are logically equivalent.

Now, suppose *p* (*G1* wills *u* at *t*) is causally necessary for *u* at *t*. By the

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analysis, if not *p*, then not *u* at *t*. Since *q*, *r*, etc., are logically equivalent to *p*, it is also the case that if not *q* (*G2* wills *u* at *t*), then not *u* at *t*, if not *r* (*G3* wills *u* at *t*), then not *u* at *t*, etc. This means that the volitions of *G2*, *G3*, etc, are all necessary.

They are also all causally sufficient. That is an essential property of divine volitions. On this analysis, then, the divine volitions of all the gods can be both sufficient and necessary. They can all be sovereign.

X
THE COHERENCE OF CREATION

An argument can be offered from the order of creation to monotheism. Essentially, the argument is that the universe seems to be well planned and ordered, so it must have been the product of a single mind. (But is the world well ordered? Sierichs (1998) has argued that the best explanation for the many problems in the world is that they are the result of conflicts between the Olympians.) However, as I have argued above, the MGBs would necessarily co-operate to produce an ordered universe if such a universe were the best universe they could create, so an ordered universe is consistent with a multitude of MGBs.

XI
OMNIPRESENCE

Consideration of omnipresence leads to the problem of identity of indiscernibles. Omnipresence can be interpreted either as simply being extended throughout all space, or as not being spatially located at all, but able to both be aware of all space and influential at each and every point in space. I will agree with the traditional monotheists that a being who is omnipresent is greater than a being who is spatially located.

If there were several, or even an infinity, of MGBs they would all share exactly similar properties, including omnipresence. If two physical objects have exactly similar properties, we distinguish them by spatial location. There is no property of any region of space that distinguishes it from any other region of space, but one region of space is, nonetheless, distinct from all other regions of space. Spatial location seems to be a fundamental distinction. If there is no distinction between the location, the two objects are indistinguishable, and in such cases we are inclined to follow Leibniz's law and decide that there is only one object.

If MGBs do not have spatial location, or are extended throughout all space, there will be no spatial distinction between them. It seems, then, that they will be indistinguishable,[6] and, by analogy with physical objects,

[6] David Beisecker suggested that it is possible that the MGBs could differ in some quality which is neutral as regards greatness. His example was colour. A blue being would be neither greater nor lesser

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identical. (Questions of coincidence under sortals, such as those raised by the statue and the lump of clay, do not arise here, since the same sortal applies to all the beings.)

However, assuming that MGBs are persons, there is a distinction that seems to be as fundamental as the distinction between spatial location. That is, that of first-person point of view. In the case of physical objects there is no intelligible difference between one Φ and another Φ exactly like it, but this does not extend to persons. If I were replaced by a person exactly like me in every physical and mental characteristic, to the extent of having exactly the same mental states, this would be undetectable to another person, but not to me. From the first-person point of view I am not replaceable. This has been elaborated by Madell (1981), Knox (1969, 1970, and 1995), Woodhouse (1970), and Harwood (1998) so I will only discuss it briefly here.

If a description of X does not include the information that I am X, there is no way of deducing 'I am X' from the description. For example, I cannot deduce from the *description* 'an impoverished and untidy-looking philosopher currently thinking about the ontological argument' the *fact* that 'I am that philosopher' without either being told 'this is you' or already knowing 'I am an impoverished and untidy-looking philosopher currently thinking about the ontological argument'.

Even if all the states of a mind (that is, the ordered totality of thoughts, experiences and dispositions possessed by a person) were completely described, it would still tell me no more than that there is a mind with exactly the contents my mind has now. It would tell me that there is someone exactly like me, but this does not make it possible for me to know that this person *is* me, that the states of mind are mine, that the experiences are mine. The full third-person point of view description of the world leaves out which set of conscious experiences, etc., is me. Thus, the 'mineness' of experience cannot be deduced from the characteristics of the experience. The full description of the contents of experiences does not imply that they are mine. A further, first-person fact, is needed to complete the picture.

The necessity of taking this first-person fact into account shows that even persons without spatial location can be distinguished by first-person point of view. Suppose that I have an identical twin in Brisbane, and that the contents of my mind are exactly similar to his. Since our bodies are exactly similar, we are only distinguished by our location and by the fact that we have two distinct streams of consciousness, one mine, and the other his. Suppose further that we both suddenly die at the same time, and become disembodied

than a green being. Colour, however, is a spatial property, and so if MGBs are non-spatial, they could not be coloured. If they are extended throughout all space, it is possible for one MGB to have a blue patch, another to have a green patch, and so on, as long as they prevent the coloured bit from coinciding. If it is possible for MGBs to have some such properties (and I can think of no reason why they should not) this would mean that they are not indiscernible, and so the problem would not arise.

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beings without spatial location. From a third-person description it is no longer possible to distinguish between us, but from the first-person point of view there are still two beings. One is me, and the other is not. Similarly, although we may not be able to distinguish between one MGB and another, each being knows that it is itself, and not one of the others.

Omnipresence does not provide any grounds for denying the possibility of multiple MGBs.

XII
THE SLIDE INTO PANTHEISM

A possible reply to my argument from first-person point of view is that the consciousness of MGBs is different from ours. Thus, if two MGBs have exactly similarly properties, their consciousness is of such a nature that it provides no way of distinguishing between them. On the contrary, it is such that it makes them identical. There is only one, shared, consciousness that unifies the beings. Thus, there is only one MGB, for if there were two, there would be no way of distinguishing between them.

This suggestion raises the problem of what sort of consciousness is entailed by the concept of 'MGB'? It is not sufficient for the monotheist to declare that we cannot know what sort of consciousness an MGB has, for if their consciousness is unknowable, we cannot decide whether there would be any fundamental difference between one MGB and a number of MGBs with exactly similar properties, and so we cannot exclude the possibility of multiple MGBs. Of course, it would be merely question-begging for the monotheist to declare that the concept of an MGB entails 'not having a first-person point of view or any other form of consciousness that would act as distinguishing feature between beings with otherwise exactly similar properties'. The monotheist must find a way of showing that the concept of an MGB entails having just such a consciousness. However, if this can be shown, it seems to lead into a concept of the MGB that is very similar to the concept of Brahman in *Advaita Vedanta*.

I will suggest that there are two possible types of consciousness that an MGB could have that would make all MGBs identical with each other. The first type is consciousness with a first-person point of view that incorporates the first-person point of view of all other MGBs so that again there is only a single unified being. The problem with this is that if it is logically possible for an MGB to share the first-person point of view all other MGBs, then it is equally logically possible for that MGB to share the first-person point of view and consciousness of all lesser beings, including me, St Anselm, and next door's cat.

If an MGB could do that, is it logically possible for it not to? This depends on the concept of greatness. It seems to me that a being that shares the first-

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person point of view of lesser beings is greater than one which does not, and so to be an MGB it must share my first-person point of view. In that case, I am identical with that MGB in just the same way that the other MGBs are identical with each other. (It follows that I am also a necessary being, which I have always suspected.)

If it is logically possible for the MGB not to share my first-person point of view, then two problems arise. First, the notion of maximal greatness must be one of maximal possible greatness, rather than maximal actual greatness. The difficulty here is that it seems that the ontological argument depends on the notion that maximal possible greatness must be maximal actual greatness. If we allow that a positive quality need not be actualized for it to be included in maximal greatness, we seem to undermine the very principle of the argument. Second, if the being can be of maximal greatness without sharing my first-person point of view, then the being would still be of maximal greatness even if it did not share the first-person point of view of other MGBs. Thus, it would still be possible for several MGBs to exist, so long as they refrained from actually sharing each other's first-person point of view.

Perhaps my intuitions about greatness are wrong, and the being would be greater by not sharing my first-person point of view. Would it not then be greater still by not sharing the first-person point of view of other MGBs? Again, it would be possible for several MGBs to exist.

The second type of consciousness an MGB might have is one that does not have the restriction of the first-person point of view, and is shared with all other MGBs in such a way as to make them a single being. It is difficult to conceive of what such a consciousness would be like, but it would seem to be a consciousness that does not include the subject/object polarization, since it is that polarization that gives the first-person point of view. This type of consciousness seems even more like Brahman than the preceding type.

Thus, if the monotheist wishes to escape from the infinity of gods by declaring that an MGB would share the consciousness of other MGBs, he is committed to declaring the MGB is similar to Brahman.

But then further difficulties arise. If we interpret the notion of maximal greatness as being inclusive in this way, the slide into a pantheistic position becomes even harder to avoid. Is a being who includes every consciousness greater than a being who does not? If so, then it is tempting to conclude that a being who incorporates absolutely everything is greater than a being who does not, and so not only all consciousness, but everything else is also part of the being. The monotheist attempt to escape polytheism has led to pantheism.

If a being who incorporates absolutely everything is not as great as a being who can create things that are not itself, or a being who can create conscious beings that are not itself, then it is clear that a being who can coexist with

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things and conscious beings that are not itself can still be maximally great. In which case, an MGB can coexist with other MGBs that are not itself. Once again, the polytheism is back.

XIII
CONCLUSION

From the monotheist point of view, if the ontological argument is sound, its implications are destructive of the very position it was devised to uphold. It pushes the monotheist either into polytheism or pantheism. It is less damaging to the classical polytheist, though he cannot be entirely happy. To avoid having too many of the wrong sort of gods, the polytheist must accept a form of pantheism lying behind the gods. The ontological argument has proved to be a failure for the traditional monotheist, and not much comfort for the classical polytheist.[7]

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