XI. Gremlins Revenged: Gremlins Repulsed

GAUNILIO offered an ontological argument for the existence of a marvellous island, ‘more excellent than all other countries’ as a parody of Anselm’s argument for the existence of God.1 In ‘Plantinga’s God and Other Monstrosities’ I played Gaunilo to Alvin Plantinga’s Anselm by offering modal ontological arguments for maximally obnoxious, maximally mediocre, and maximally illiterate beings, special unicorns, griffons, and red and green leprechauns.2 The argument for the existence of a maximally uninformed being, for example, runs as follows:

(25a) It is possible that there is a maximally ignorant being.
(25b) So there is a possible world in which maximal ignorance is instantiated.
(26) Necessarily, something is maximally ignorant only if it is maximally uninformed in every world.
(27) Necessarily, something is maximally uninformed in every world only if it exists in every world.
(28) There are no maximally uninformed beings’ is impossible in at least one possible world.
(5) If a proposition is impossible in at least one possible world, then it is impossible in every world.
(29) Therefore there is in our world and in every world a maximally uninformed being.3

In ‘Gremlins and Parodies’, however, Robert Brecher has recently attacked my and Gaunilo’s parodies.4 Brecher is willing to concede that the parodies faithfully mirror the logical structure of Plantinga’s and Anselm’s arguments. The crucial difference, Brecher insists, lies in the first premise. He offers two attacks on the first premises of parodies, one of which is anticipated in Hartshorne’s reply to Gaunilo and the other in Plantinga’s. Let me take these one at a time.

1. Brecher, Hartshorne, and Necessary Contingents