ACTUALITY AND ANSELM*

1. *Introduction.*

In 'Anselm and Actuality', David Lewis argued that the assessment of Anselm's ontological arguments is best achieved when the familiar modal expressions in which the arguments are typically formulated are translated into counterpart theory. Once the arguments are translated into the language of counterpart theory—into non-modal, ordinary reasoning about possible things—then we can apply our well-known and widely accepted standards for validity. We can then determine—ideally once and for all—whether these perennially debated arguments are successful.

> Given an obscure modal argument, we can translate it into a nonmodal argument—or into several nonmodal arguments, if the given argument was ambiguous. Once we have a nonmodal argument, we have clear standards of validity; and once we have nonmodal translations of the premises, we can understand them well enough to judge whether they are credible. Foremost among our modal headaches is Anselm's ontological argument.[1]

The distinctive advantage of Lewis's approach to Anselm's ontological argument is that counterpart theory combined with the vast domain of Lewis's pluriverse makes a perfectly extensional interpretation of the ontological argument possible. On Lewis's approach, modal operators are replaced with quantifiers

ranging over worlds and possibilia, modal propositions occurring in Anselm's ontological arguments are translated into non-modal propositions, and Anselm's modal arguments are translated into the familiar lexicon of non-modal arguments. The modal reduction puts us in a better position to assess the credibility of Anselm's premises. The translation of Anselm's ontological argument into one—or many, as it happens—non-modal arguments permits the application of well-known and widely accepted standards of validity—the standards of classical logic—to determine the cogency of Anselm's argument.

It is indeed a fruitful and fascinating project to translate Anselm's ontological arguments into the extensional language of counterpart theory. But translating Anselm into counterpart theory—granting that there is a good translation—is much less philosophically neutral than Lewis suggests.

Lewis's translations of premises (2) and (3) of Anselm's argument are extraordinarily strong propositions. Indeed, they are much stronger propositions than are required for the ontological argument. Lewis concludes that the necessary counterpart theoretic translations of premise (3)—his premises (3A) and (3C)—are not credible. And indeed many will find them incredible. But (3A) and (3C) are not necessary to a valid formulation of the ontological argument. There are weaker translations of premises (2) and (3) available that many will find credible.

In sections (2) – (4) I present Lewis's formulation of the ontological argument in Anselm's *Proslogium II*. (2) focuses primarily on the translation of premise (1) into the language of counterpart theory, and sections (3) – (4) focus on translations of premises (2) – (3) respectively. In section (3) several translations of premises (2) are advanced—(2.1) – (2.6). It is argued (2.1) – (2.6) improve in a variety of ways upon Lewis's translation of Anselm's premise (2). In sections (4) – (6) Lewis's translation of premise (3) in (3A) is discussed in detail. It is argued that the ontological arguer should replace Lewis's (3A) with (3A') or, perhaps better, (3E). The corresponding conclusion of Anselm's ontological argument is (C"). The argument in translation is valid and its premises are all plausible—faro more plausible than those offered in Lewis's original translation. Some concluding remarks are offered in section (7).

2. *Premise (1)*

The version of the ontological argument that Lewis considers is from *Proslogium II*. Lewis formulates the argument in English as follows.

Premise 1. Whatever exists in the understanding can be conceived to exist in reality.

Premise 2. Whatever exists in the understanding would be greater if it existed in reality than if it did not.

Premise 3. Something exists in the understanding, than which nothing greater can be conceived.

Conclusion. Something exists in reality, than which nothing greater can be conceived.

Premise (1), Premise (2) and the Conclusion all employ the locution 'exists in reality'. Lewis renders the locution 'x exists in the understanding' as 'x is an understandable being'. He does not commit himself on the existence of understandable beings, but leaves the analysis of that phrase to the ontological arguer. Concerning premise (1), Lewis argues that its proper translation into counterpart theory is in (1)

1. $\forall x(Ux \supset \exists w(Ww \ \& \ xEw))$

In quasi-English, (1) states that, for any understandable being x, there is a world w such that x exists in w. Lewis does not talk explicitly of beings existing in the understanding, and indeed regards quantificational talk in relation to the understanding as ill-advised.

> It is ill-advised to speak of them as existing in the understanding: they do not bear to the understanding the same relation which something existing in a world bears to that world! Let us simply call them understandable beings.[2]

Beings that exist in the understanding are just those beings—merely possible or actual—that have the property of being understandable. According to premise (1), every understandable being exists somewhere in reality.

Existing in reality, as Lewis translates that phrase in premise (1), is *existing in some world or other in the pluriverse*. The pluriverse is the totality of metaphysical reality and is the largest domain of quantification. So, the quantifiers in (1) are absolutely unrestricted, quantifying over the largest domain of discourse. The largest domain of discourse for Lewis includes everything in every world, and perhaps much more than that.[3] It is conceivable that x exists, according to (1), just in case (unrestrictedly) x exists. The locution that (unrestrictedly) x exists is true just in case x exists somewhere in metaphysical space. x exists, that is, just in case x inhabits (or just is) some possible world, including of course the actual world.

> It is our plan to reason explicitly about possible worlds and possible things therein. These possible beings will be included in our domain of discourse. The idioms of quantification, therefore, will be understood as ranging over all the beings we wish to talk about, whether existent or nonexistent.[4]

The worlds in question are *conceivable worlds*, which may not coincide with the metaphysically possible worlds or with possible worlds simpliciter.[5] So, premise (1) comes to the assertion, on Lewis's rendering, that understandable beings are among the beings in the broadest domain of discourse. It is difficult not to see that assertion as trivial. Could there be an understandable being that is *not* in the broadest domain of discourse? (1') is just the negation of (1), so (1) is false just in case (1') is true.

1'. $\exists x(Ux \ \& \ \sim\exists w(Ww \ \& \ xEw))$

(1') states that there *exists an understandable being that exists no where in reality*. But given Lewis's understanding of quantification, (1') is either trivially false or incoherent. It misunderstands the univocity of quantificational idioms.

> We of the establishment think that there is only one kind of quantification. The several idioms of what we call 'existential' quantification are entirely synonymous and interchangeable. It does not matter whether you say 'Some things are donkeys' or 'There are donkeys' or 'Donkeys exist'- you mean exactly the same thing whichever way you say it. The same goes for more vexed cases: it does not matter whether you say 'Some famous fictional detective uses cocaine', 'There is a famous fictional detective who uses cocaine', or 'A famous cocaine-using fictional detective exists'- whether true or whether false, all three statements stand or fall together.[6]

If there are understandable beings, then they must exist in the largest domain of discourse. (1') therefore seems trivially false, and (1) trivially true. And if understandable beings exist somewhere in the totality of reality, then, they exist in the same way that any actual being exists. If a round square or the largest prime enjoys the property of being understandable—if round squares and largest primes are understandable objects—then a round square and a largest prime exists

somewhere in reality. These objects exist, again, in the very same way that any actual object exists. For Lewis, quantificational idioms are univocal. There isn't *existence* on the one hand, and other sorts of *being* on the other.[7]

If the largest domain includes objects that exist in no possible world at all, then it might be that (1) is false. Lewis acknowledges that numbers and propositions—and perhaps cross-world objects—do not exist in any possible world, though they are no doubt understandable objects.

> When we evaluate the truth of a quantified sentence, we usually restrict the domain and quantify over less than all there is. If we evaluate a quantification at a world, we will normally omit many things not in that world, for instance the possible individuals that inhabit other worlds. But we will not omit the numbers, or some of the other sets. Let us say that an individual exists from the standpoint of a world iff it belongs to the least restricted domain that is normally—modal metaphysics being deemed abnormal—appropriate in evaluating the truth at that world of quantifications. I suppose that this domain will include all the individuals in that world; none of the other individuals; and some, but not all, of the sets. There will be many sets that even exist from the standpoint of all worlds, for instance the numbers. Others may not; for instance the unit set of a possible individual might only exist from the

> standpoint of the world that the individual is in. Thus we have three relations: being in a world, i.e. being part of a world; being partly in a world, i.e. having a part that is wholly in that world; and existing from the standpoint of a world. Postulate 2, the principle that nothing is in two worlds, applies only to the first of these.[8]

Objects that *exist from the standpoint of* all possible worlds—things such as numbers, properties, propositions, and events—do not *exist in* any possible worlds. The distinction is a particularly important one for the Anselmian argument, since God might be among the objects that exist in reality—that exist from the standpoint of every possible world—but do not exist in any possible world. We might also want to acknowledge those understandable beings that do not wholly exist in any possible world, but that have parts in various possible worlds. So, the largest domain of discourse might include understandable individuals that do not exist in any possible world: individuals that, strictly speaking, are not possible individuals. It might include understandable objects, too, that exist from the standpoint of every world but do not exist in any world. These sorts of objects would render (1) false as well.

3. *Premise (2)*

According to premise (2), whatever exists in the understanding would be greater if it existed in reality than if it did not. Beings that exist in the understanding, recall, are just the understandable beings. So, premise (2) states that

if x is an understandable being, then x would be greater if it existed in reality than if it did not.

Premise (2) entails that existing in reality is what we might call a *great-making property* of understandable beings. Since, according to (1), every understandable being exists in some world or other, Lewis urges that every understandable being conceivably has the great-making property of existing in reality. The great-making property of existing in reality is a property that objects exemplify in certain possible worlds—those in which they exist—and a property that objects fail to exemplify in certain possible worlds—those in which they fail to exist. There are, according to Lewis's rendering of premise (2), no objects that are simply greater than others. The greatness of objects is relativized to possible worlds. For objects x and y, it is not true that x is simply greater than y, but it might be true that x in w is greater than y in w'. So, according to Lewis, the proper translation of premise (2) into counterpart theory is in (2).

2. $\forall x\ \forall w\ \forall v\ (Ux\ \&\ Ww\ \&\ Wv\ \&\ xEw\ \&\ \sim xEv \supset xwGxv)$

In quasi-English, (2) states that, for any understandable being x, and for any worlds w and v, if x exists in w but x does not exist in v, then the greatness of x in w exceeds the greatness of x in v.

It's important to observe that Anselm's premise (2) does not talk explicitly about greatness relative to worlds or the *greatness of object x in w*. Premise (2) states that whatever exists in the understanding would be greater if it existed in reality

than if it did not. The reading of premise (2), taken at face value, is that if x exists in reality then x is *greater simpliciter* than if x does not exist in reality. And Anselm certainly seems to mean by *x's existing in reality* that *x actually exists*. If x *actually exists* then x is greater than if x does not. For Lewis, this is equivalent to saying that if x exists in our particular region metaphysical space, then x is greater than if x does not exist in our region. Actual existence is a great-making property and merely possible existence is not.

The quantificational idiom, existing in reality, as Anselm is using the phrase, is a restricted quantifier. Something exists in reality just in case it actually exists. For any understandable object x, then, if x actually exists then x is greater than if x merely possibly exists. And it is not implausible to maintain, quite generally, for any objects x and y, if x actually exists and y merely possibly exists then x is greater simpliciter than y.

Indeed, merely possible beings of any sort barely exemplify any greatness at all. Anselm might exchange Lewis's (2) for (2.1) which makes actual existence a great-making property and replaces the relativized greatness-in-a-world with greatness simpliciter.

2.1 $(\forall x \forall w((Ux \,\&\, Ww \,\&\, xEw \,\&\, w = @) \supset Vx)) \,\&\, (\forall y \forall w((Uy \,\&\, Ww \,\&\, {\sim}yEw) \supset V'y)) \,\&\, \forall x \forall y(Vx \,\&\, V'y \supset xGy)$

The proposition in (2.1) states that actually existing things are greater simpliciter than merely possibly existing things. Being actual is the property that confers greatness on existing objects.

Of course a merely possible being x might be quite a wonderful being in world w. It might be *true in* w that x is among the best beings that we can imagine. But it does not follow from the fact that it is *true in* w that x is among the greatest beings we can imagine that it is true simpliciter that x is among the greatest beings we can imagine. If it is true that x is a merely possible being, for instance, then x is not among the greatest beings we can imagine. Merely possible beings exemplify very little greatness.

But then, contrary to (2), x in world w might not be greater than x in world v. It is perfectly possible that x does not actually exist. So, x's existence in some possible non-actual world w is at best dubiously greater—from the point of view of the actual world—than x's non-existence in some other possible non-actual world v. It is not obvious in any case that Anselm is committed to taking any stand at all on that claim. And this is consistent with the fact that it is true in w that x is a much greater being than any being y not in w.

But the ontological arguer need not advance any principle as strong as (2.1) for her ontological argument. She might argue instead that, for any two understandable objects x and y that are otherwise indiscernible with respect to their great-making properties, if x actually exists and y merely possibly exists, then

x is greater than y. So, we have a restricted version of (2.1) that is even more credible than (2.1)

2.2. $\forall x \forall w((Ux \ \& \ Ww \ \& \ Px \ \& \ xEw \ \& \ w = @) \supset Vx)) \ \& \ \forall y((Uy \ \& \ Py$

$\forall w(Ww \ \& \ \sim yEw)) \supset V'y)) \ \& \ \forall x \forall y(Vx \ \& \ V'y \supset xGy)$

The proposition in (2.2) states that any actually existing being that exemplifies all of the great-making properties in P is greater than any merely possibly existing things that exemplify all of the great-making properties in P.

It is true that unrestrictedly existing beings exemplify many properties including many great-making properties. But according to (2.2)—and certainly intuitively—exemplifying the property of omniscience in some non-actual region of metaphysical space is less impressive and less significant than actually exemplifying the property of omniscience. It is not a very impressive or significant property of Jones that he is possibly omniscient, if Jones is in fact mostly ignorant.

Of course, Anselmians might be persuaded that *absolutely unrestricted existence* is a great-making property rather than actual existence. An Anselmian might be persuaded that, if x is an understandable being, then x is greater if it exists in some world in the pluriverse than if x does not exist in pluriverse at all. Existing in the pluriverse—existing in some possible world—makes everything that does so greater than it would be were it to exist in no possible world at all. Premise (2) on such a reading amounts to the claim that if x is a possible being then it is greater than it would be were x an impossible being.

In that case, we could render premise (2) as stating that if x and y are understandable beings and x exists in some possible world and y exists in no possible world, then x is greater than y.

2.3 $\forall x \forall y(Ux \ \& \ Uy \ \& \ \exists w(Ww \ \& \ xEw) \ \& \ \sim\exists w(Ww \ \& \ yEw)) \supset xGy)$

In quasi-English, (2.3) states that, for any understandable beings x and y, if x exists in reality and y does not exist in reality then x is greater than y. Any possible thing—whether or not it is actual— is greater than any impossible thing, or, equivalently, any (unrestrictedly) existing thing is greater than any (unrestrictedly) non-existing thing. Here we have the greatness of beings not relativized to possible worlds, but relativized to the pluriverse or the largest domain of discourse.

We might again find some reason to restrict (2.3) to possible beings that exemplify all of the great-making properties P. We might find it more credible to substitute (2.4) for (2.3).

2.4. $\forall x \forall y(Ux \ \& \ Uy \ \& \ Px \ \& \ Py \ \& \ \exists w(Ww \ \& \ xEw) \ \& \ \sim\exists w(Ww \ \& \ yEw)) \supset xGy)$

(2.4) states that, for any understandable beings x and y, if x and exemplify all of the great-making properties in P and x exists in reality and y does not, then x is greater than y. Any possible being that exemplifies all of the great-making properties in P—whether or not it actually exists—is greater than any impossible being.

If a greatest conceivable being is one that exemplifies all of the great-making properties and exists in reality as a whole—and not necessarily in our particular region of it—then theists have reason to celebrate the absolutely unrestricted existence of a greatest conceivable being.

If something like (2.4) is true, then an unrestrictedly existing God exists in *the right way* for theists—it would be no better were it to actually exist. If an unrestrictedly existing God exists in the right way for theists, then we should expect it to have the properties of being worthy of devotion and worship, worthy of veneration, praise, love, petition, and prayer. It would not be more worthy of praise, devotion and worship were it an actually existing being.

Of course it might be urged that no merely possible God is the proper object of any of those attitudes or a worthy object of those practices. Perhaps those attitudes are appropriate only if God exists in our particular region of reality. Merely possible Gods stand in no causal relation to our world—they cannot be the creator of our world or respond to petitions in our world or take responsibility for conditions in our world. Of course such a God would know everything about our world, would know our petitions and prayers. Nonetheless perhaps merely possible Gods are not the proper object of those attitudes and practices. If so, that is just as well. We might better conclude that God exists in just the right way, then, only if he actually exists—only if he exists in our neighborhood of reality.

There is another version of premise (2) that is worth considering. Perhaps it is a great making property that something *exists from the standpoint of* every possible world. It might be that anything that exists from the standpoint of any world is greater than anything that doesn't. Anselmians do have reason to believe that the proper object of creation for a being than which none greater is conceivable is the *totality of reality*, the entire pluriverse. It is greater to create all of reality—all possibilia and all possible worlds—than to create just part of reality. Each possible world constitutes a mere part of total reality. Each candidate for the greatest being existing in each world creates, at most, the possible world in which he exists.

Every object that exists in any possible world, exists simpliciter. So, (2.3)-(2.4) distinguish possible beings from impossible beings: any *possible* being is greater than any *impossible* being. But (2.5) distinguishes objects that exist from the standpoint of every possible world from objects that do not. Beings that exist from the standpoint of all worlds are greater, according to (2.5), than beings that do not. We let 'E!x' stand for x exists from the standpoint of every world.

2.5. $\forall x \forall y((Ux \,\&\, Uy \,\&\, E!x \,\&\, \sim E!y) \supset xGy)$

According to (2.5), anything that exists from the standpoint of every possible world is greater than anything that doesn't.

If something like (2.5) is true, then if God exists from the standpoint of every world, then God exists in the right way for theists. A God that exists from

the standpoint of every world would have the properties of being worthy of devotion and worship, being a proper object of veneration, praise, love, petition, and prayer.

And there is a rationale for the view that a God that exists from the standpoint of every world is the proper object of any of those attitudes. A God that creates all of reality—that creates all possibilia in all worlds—cannot exist restrictedly. Everything that exists restrictedly exists in some possible world or in some sub-region of worlds. But anything that *exists in* some world w creates, at most, the contingent beings in w. So everything that exists restrictedly creates at most some sub-region of all reality.

Of course there is the alternative of assuming that God exists in every possible world. This is the view that all possible worlds overlap with respect to God. There are lots of unnecessary costs in the assumption that worlds overlap with respect to God.[9] But there seems to me the insurmountable cost that if the same God literally exists in every possible world, then it is a direct consequence of the indiscernibility of identicals that God in any arbitrarily chosen world w must be indiscernible from God in any other arbitrarily chose world w'. But if God in w is indiscernible from God in w', for any arbitrarily chosen worlds w and w', then God has all of his properties essentially. The hyperessentiality conclusion is untenable.

If God creates all of metaphysical reality, then God exists from the standpoint of every world. There is again a restricted and more plausible version of (2.5) available to the ontological arguer. (2.6) restricts (2.5) to beings that exist from the standpoint of every possible world otherwise exemplify all of the great-making properties.

2.6. $\forall x \forall y((Ux \,\&\, Px \,\&\, Uy \,\&\, E!x \,\&\, \sim E!y) \supset xGy)$

According to (2.6), anything that exemplifies all of the great-making properties in P and exists from the standpoint of every possible world is greater than anything that doesn't exist from the standpoint of every possible world.

4. *Premise (3)*

Anselm's third premise says that there is some understandable being x whose greatness is not conceivably exceeded by the greatness of anything. The greatness of x is not exceeded by the greatness in any conceivable world w of any being y. Because Lewis relativizes the greatness of things to possible worlds—there is no greatness simpliciter, but only greatness-in-world-w—Lewis finds Anselm's premise (3) to be multiply ambiguous. Lewis offers at least three ways to disambiguate premise (3) in counterpart theory.

> We have seen that greatnesses, as thought of by the ontological arguer, belong to beings paired with worlds; according to the third premise, no such pair has a greatness exceeding the greatness of a certain understandable being x.

> But if greatnesses belong to beings relative to worlds, what are we talking about when we say: the greatness of x? Which greatness of x? The greatness of x in which conceivable world? Different answers to the question yield different nonmodal translations of Premise 3.[10]

We might consider a nonmodal translation of premise (3) according to which there is an actual object whose greatness in the actual world is not exceeded by the greatness of anything in any other possible world. On this understanding of premise (3), there is an understandable being x whose *greatness in* the actual world is unexceeded by the *greatness of any other being in* any other possible world. Lewis calls this version of premise (3), 3A.

3A. $\exists x\ (Ux\ \&\ \sim\exists w\ \exists y\ (Ww\ \&\ ywGx@))$

According to (3A), there is an understandable being x, such that for no world w and being y does the greatness of y in w exceed the greatness of x in the actual world.

(3A) might be a welcome translation to the ontological arguer—it does entail the preferred conclusion that God actually exists—but it is an extraordinarily strong claim. It is indeed a much stronger claim than the ontological arguer needs. Recall that the ontological arguer in (2.2) claims that a being x that otherwise exemplifies all of the great making properties P and actually exists is *greater than* any being y that exemplifies all of the great making properties P and does not actually exist. According to (2.2), actual existence is a great making

property. And recall that the fact that x is greater than y does not entail that x in @ is greater than y in w. For instance, an actual dog might be a greater being than a merely possible griffin, even if in the *great chain of being* an actual griffin is greater than an actual dog. So, it might be true that the greatness of the griffin *in his own world* w exceeds the greatness of the dog *in his own world* @. It might be true in w, for instance, that the value of the griffin is V on the scale of greatness and true in @ that the value of the dog is V', and necessarily true that anything with value V is greater than anything with value V'. The value of the griffin in his own world is greater than the actual value of the griffin. But in the actual world, the griffin doesn't have much value at all. It is a merely possible being.

The view that actual existence confers greatness on beings that existence in other regions of the pluriverse does not is not a mere bias on the part of ontological arguers. The pluriverse, after all, does not differ ontologically from region to region. Griffins in a non-actual region of the pluriverse exist in the very same way as dogs do in the actual world. It is not as though non-actual griffins have a diminished form of existence that affects their greatness and actual dogs have an enhanced form of existence that affects their greatness. So, the distinction in greatness between actual beings and non-actual beings can seem invidious.

The ontological arguer has a persuasive response. The proper response to the fact that you might have discovered the calculus is not to offer you the Fields Medal. You might have discovered the calculus and no doubt you do discover the

calculus in some other region of the pluriverse. But that possible, non-actual achievement is not worthy of the Fields Medal. The actual discovery of the calculus, by contrast, is worthy of accolade. Why so? Your possible, non-actual achievement is not ontologically any different from your actual achievement. The difference is that, despite the ontological symmetry, it is *false* that you discovered the calculus. Mathematicians are not awarded for what might have been.

The response is the same for possible, non-actual, Gods. If there is no actual God, then it is false that there is a being that exemplifies all of the divine attributes. There might have been such a being, and no doubt there is such a being existing in some region of the pluriverse, but there isn't such a being. Such a being, despite the ontological symmetry with actual beings, is unworthy of worship, honor and praise. An actual God does in fact exemplify all of the divine attributes, and therefore is worthy of worship, honor and praise.

Lewis urges that (3A) is a candidate translation of premise (3), but it is not credible without independent evidence. Why believe (3A)? The ontological arguer might accept (3A) on the basis of (G).

G. $\forall v(Wv \supset \exists x(Ux \ \& \ \exists w \exists y(Ww \ \& \ ywGxv)))$

> G states that, for any world v, there is an understandable being x such that for no world w and being y does the greatness of y in w exceed the greatness of x in v. . . Why might he accept G? . . . Unless inferred from 3C, G does not seem credible. Let v be a bad world—

> say, one containing nothing but a small chunk of mud-and let w be the most splendid conceivable world. Then according to G there is some understandable being whose greatness in v is unexceeded by the greatness in w of anything—even the greatest of the inhabitants of w. What could this understandable being be?[11]

The principle in (G) is just the generalization of (3A). It entails that, in every possible world w, there is a being whose greatness *in w* is unexceeded by the greatness of any other being *in any other world v*. (G) is true just in case there are unexceeded beings, x, y, z, and so on, in possible worlds, w, v, u, and so on, such that the greatness of x in its world equals the greatness of y in its world equals the greatness of z in its world, and so on.

Lewis's counterexample to (G) invites us to consider a possible world w that contains nothing except a small chunk of mud and a possible world v that is the most splendid conceivable. What being in w is such that its greatness in w is unexceeded by the greatness of any being in the splendid world v? Certainly the greatness of the mud in w is exceeded by the greatness of almost any being in v.

But the ontological arguer can offer some resistance to the chunk of mud counterexample. If (G) is true, the ontological arguer might insist, then there are no possible worlds like w. There are no possible worlds that include only chunks of mud. Lewis's counterexample is only as good as his evidence that there are mud-worlds. Is there better reason to believe that there are mud worlds than there

is to believe that (G) is true? It's not obvious, so there are epistemological reasons for the resistance. Still, it might be urged, if there are no mud worlds, then perhaps there are worlds that contain no rational beings at all or inorganic worlds which contain no living matter at all or metaphysically nihilistic worlds that include no concrete objects at all. Similar counterexamples can be generated on the assumption that there are such worlds.

Lewis notes that one natural way to argue for (G) is on the basis of (3C), the third non-modal translation of premise (3).

3C. $\exists x(Ux \& \sim\exists v\exists w\exists y(Wv \& Ww \& ywGxv))$

According to (3C), there is an understandable being x such that for no worlds v and w and being y does the greatness of y in w exceed the greatness of x in v.

(3C) is true just in case there is some being x such that the greatness of x in any world whatsoever is unexceeded by the greatness of any being y in any world. If (3C) is true, then there are no counterexamples to (G). Indeed, if (3C) is true, then we have a direct argument for (3A). On the trivial assumption that the actual world is a possible world, (3C) entails (3A).

Is there a reason to believe (3C)? One reason to believe that (3C) is true follows from the fact that we understand *maximal greatness*. Maximally great beings are essentially maximally excellent. Plantinga, following Findlay, urges that the greatness of a being in a possible world w does not depend merely on the properties of that being in w.

> . . . what it is like in other worlds is also to the point. Those who worship God do not think of him as a being that happens to be of surpassing excellence in this world but who in some other worlds is powerless or uninformed or of dubious moral character.[12]

Plantinga distinguishes between the properties of greatness and excellence. He allows the excellence of a being in a world w to depend on its (non-world-indexed) properties in w. But the greatness of a being in any world w depends on *both* the excellence of that being in w and its properties in other possible worlds.

We will say that the property of maximal excellence entails the following properties.[13]

ME. Maximal excellence entails omnipotence, omniscience, rational perfection, and moral perfection.

(ME) just tells us that, necessarily, something is maximally excellent in a world w only if it is omnipotent, omniscient, rationally perfect and morally perfect in w. Presumably, something might be maximally excellent in some worlds and not in others. (ME) tells us nothing about whether a being that is possibly maximally excellent in w enjoys any excellence at all in w. We'll say that a being has maximal greatness only if it is essentially maximally excellent.

MG. Maximal greatness entails maximal excellence in every possible world.

According to (MG), a being is maximally great only if it exists in every possible world and is essentially maximally excellent. It follows from (ME) and

(MG) that a being is maximally great only if it necessarily exists and is essentially omnipotent, essentially omniscient, essentially morally perfect and essentially rationally perfect.

There is also good reason to believe that there is ontological space for maximally great beings under Lewisian modal assumptions. Ross Cameron confirms the view expressed above, that God is the creator of reality, not merely particular regions of reality.

> Either each God created the world He exists at, or He didn't. If the former, then there is no sense in which God is responsible for all of creation since, for the modal realist, all of creation is the pluriverse of worlds, not just the actual world. But if there are Gods that didn't create the world they exist at then it's not clear why they deserve to be called 'God' ; being the creator is essential to God if anything is, so a God that didn't create the world He exists at would seem not deserve the title, thus undercutting the claim that He is in fact a counterpart of the actual God, and hence undercutting the claim that God is a necessary existent. But there is no need for the theist modal realist to go the route of postulating distinct counterparts of our actual God at each non-actual world.[14]

But might possible worlds—possible regions of reality—overlap with respect to God? Might God—the very same God—exist in every possible world? There are

no objections to that view from modal realism. If God has all of his intrinsic properties essentially, then God might well exist in every possible world. Lewis allows that possible worlds might overlap with respect to universals precisely because universals have all of their intrinsic properties essentially.

> If two worlds are said to overlap by having a coin in common, and if this coin is supposed to be wholly round in one world and wholly octagonal in the other, I stubbornly ask what shape it is, and insist that shape is not a relation to worlds.…I do not see any parallel objection if worlds are said to overlap by sharing a universal. What contingent, nonrelational property of the universal could we put in place of [the] shape of the coin in raising the problem? I cannot think of any.[15]

Of course, one may doubt whether God does have all of his intrinsic properties essentially. God's anger and disappointment are presumably intrinsic properties, but it is hardly an essential property of God to be angry and disappointed.

In any case, Lewis would no doubt grant that we understand maximal excellence, so by premise (1) there are maximally excellent beings in some worlds. But how could we understand maximal excellence and not understand maximal greatness? A maximally great being just is a maximally excellent being that exists in

more than one world. Despite these observations, Lewis simply rejects the thesis that a maximally great being is understandable.

> [The ontological arguer] might assume that for every description he understands, there is some understandable being answering to that description. But what of such well-understood descriptions as 'largest prime" or "round square"?[16]

The point presumably is that there is not an understandable being for every understandable description. And if it were insisted that, for some plausible notion of understandable, there is an understandable being for every understandable description, then Lewis urges that he would have to reject premise (1) in Anselm's argument. He would reject the thesis that every understandable being exists in some world or other. So, either there are understandable descriptions for which there are no understandable beings or there are understandable beings for which there are no (unrestrictedly) existing beings. Either way, the fact that maximal greatness is understandable does not entail that there (unrestrictedly) exists a maximally great being.

Ontological saturation principles—and perhaps, principles of plenitude—are also ineffective approaches to supporting (3C). Consider the principle of saturation that any sentence saying that there exists an understandable being of so-and-so description is true unless provably false. It follows directly from such an ontological saturation principle that (3C) is true. But that is no reason to believe

(3C). Lewis urges that saturation principles prove too much. (*) also follows from such an ontological saturation principle.

(*) $\exists x \exists w \exists v$ (Ux & Ww & Wv & Vy (y ≠ x ⊃ xwGyw) &

$\exists y$(yvGxv)

If the Principle of Saturation supports 3C, it should equally well support (*); otherwise it makes a discrimination unjustified by any visibly relevant difference between 3C and (*). But (*) is incompatible with 3C. So if the Principle of Saturation supports 3C, then it is a bad principle.[17]

(*) states that there is an understandable being which is greater than anything else in some world, but is exceeded in greatness in another world. So, clearly, (*) is inconsistent with (3C). But it is also true, as Lewis notes, that (*) is no less supported by the saturation principle than (3C). The principle of saturation entails inconsistent propositions and ought to be rejected.

5. *A Better Translation of Premise (3)*

According to Lewis, the translation in (3A) is necessary to any valid rendering of Anselm's argument in counterpart theory. Only the translations in (3A) and (3C) make the argument valid, and (3C) entails (3A). Since Lewis argues that there is no non-circular reason to believe (3A), he concludes that Anselm's argument is unsound.

But we noted that the ontological arguer might well reject (3A), too. (3A) expresses a much stronger claim that the ontological arguer needs, and perhaps much stronger than the ontological arguer believes. According to (3A), there is an understandable being x, such that for no world w and being y does the greatness of y in w exceed the greatness of x in the actual world. The ontological arguer in (2.2) claims that a being x that otherwise exemplifies all of the great making properties P and actually exists is *greater than* any being y that exemplifies all of the great making properties P and does not actually exist. According to (2.2), actual existence is a great making property. And the fact that x is greater than y does not entail that x in @ is greater than y in w. The ontological arguer might therefore wish to replace (3A) with (3A').

3A'. $\exists x(Ux \ \& \ @Ix \ \& \ \forall y{\sim}(yGx))$

According to (3A'), there is some actual being whose greatness is unexceeded by any other existing being. The quantifiers in (3A') are all unrestricted. The greatness of x exceeds—actually exceeds—the greatness of all other existing beings—all beings that exist anywhere in metaphysical space, any beings that exist anywhere in reality. If there is a greatest conceivable being, it would have to have the property of being actual.

(3A') does not make the strong claim that there actually exists a being x whose greatness in the actual world is unexceeded by the greatness of any other being y in its world w. That extreme claim, we have found, is otiose. The

ontological arguer wants to show that there is some actual being whose greatness is actually unexceeded by any other existing being.

But what reason is there to believe (3A')? There is an understandable being x that exemplifies all of the great-making properties P. According to (1), x exists in some possible world or other. According to (2.2) any actually existing being that exemplifies all of the great-making properties in P is greater than merely possibly existing things that exemplify all of the great-making properties in P. So, x exemplifies all of the great making properties only if x actually exists.

But, once again, why does actual existence confer greatness on x while possible existence does not? The answer is not far to seek. Only an actually existing God has the properties of being worthy of devotion and worship, worthy of veneration, praise, love, petition, and prayer. No being in any other world—no matter how great that being is *in its world*—is great enough to be worthy of devotion, worship, praise, honor, love or prayer. No being in any other world—no matter how great that being is in its world—is the proper object of these religious attitudes. It is the actual existence of God that makes these attitudes appropriate to the actually existing God. It is the possible non-actual existence of other great beings that makes these attitudes inappropriate to the possible non-actual beings.

Concerning the conclusion of Anselm's ontological argument, Lewis observes the following

So our nonmodal translation of the conclusion resembles 3A, our first version of Premise 3:

C. $\exists x(xE@ \ \& \ \sim\exists w\exists y\ (Ww \ \& \ ywGx@))$

(There is a being x existing in the actual world such that for no world w and being y does the greatness of y in w exceed the greatness of x in the actual world.)[18]

But as we have been at pains to show, the ontological arguer does not want to show anything like (C). The conclusion in (C) is much too strong a claim for the arguer to establish. The premises (1), (2.2) and (3A') do not establish (C). Rather the premises (1), (2.2) and (3A') establish the conclusion in (C').

C'. $\exists x(xE@ \ \& \ \forall y\sim(yGx))$

There is a being x existing in the actual world such that for no being y does y's greatness exceed x's greatness.

6. *Existing from the Standpoint of Every World*

We noted in section (3) above that, if God creates all of metaphysical reality—all possible worlds and all possibilia—then God must exist from the standpoint of every world.[19] But then if God exists from the standpoint of every possible world, then God exists in the right way for theists. A God that creates all of reality and exists from the standpoint of every world might well be greater than any being—however great that being is in its own world(s)—that *exists in* some possible world or other in metaphysical space. A God that creates all of reality and

exists from the standpoint of every world might well be greater than any being existing in the actual world, however great that being actually is.

A being that exists from the standpoint of every world would have the properties of being worthy of devotion and worship, being a proper object of veneration, praise, love, petition, and prayer. And, as we have noted, there is a rationale for the view that a God that exists from the standpoint of every world is the proper object of any of those attitudes. A being that exists from the standpoint of every world can create all of the pluriverse—all of creatable reality.

There is again a restricted and more plausible version of (2.5) available to the ontological arguer. (2.6) above restricts (2.5) to beings that exist from the standpoint of every possible world and otherwise exemplify all of the great-making properties. Recall that, according to (2.6), anything that exemplifies all of the great-making properties in P and exists from the standpoint of every possible world is greater than anything that doesn't exist from the standpoint of every possible world.

If existing necessarily—existing from the standpoint of every possible world—is a great-making property, rather than merely actually existing, then (2.6) might be found appealing. Corresponding to (2.6) is (3E)

3E. $\exists x \forall w(Ux \ \& \ wE!x \ \& \ \sim\exists y(yGx))$

According to (3E), there is an understandable being existing from the standpoint of every world whose greatness is unexceeded by any other existing being. The

quantifiers in (3E) are all unrestricted. The greatness of x exceeds the greatness of all other existing beings y—all beings that exist anywhere in the totality of creation, anywhere in metaphysical reality. And our corresponding conclusion is (C").

C". $\exists x(xE!@ \ \& \ \sim\exists y(yGx))$

There is a being x existing from the standpoint of the actual world such that for no being y does y's greatness exceed x's greatness.

7. *Concluding Remarks*

The interest and advantage of Lewis's approach to Anselm's ontological argument is that it makes a perfectly extensional interpretation of the argument possible. The modal reduction puts us in a position to assess the credibility of Anselm's premises. The translation of Anselm's ontological argument into a non-modal argument permits the application of the standards of classical logic to determine the cogency of Anselm's argument.

The central difficulty in Lewis's versions of Anselm's ontological argument are his translations of premises (2) and (3). According to Lewis, (2) states that, for any understandable being x, and for any worlds w and v, if x exists in w but x does not exist in v, then the greatness of x in w exceeds the greatness of x in v. That is, whatever exists in some world is greater in that world than it is in any world in which it does not exist. (2) is a claim about the greatness of objects in worlds. But because (2) is formulated in terms of greatness in worlds, Lewis's greatest

conceivable being in (3) requires a formulation as strong as (3A). According to (3A), there is an understandable being x, such that for no world w and being y does the greatness of y in w exceed the greatness of x in the actual world.

But Anselm is offering an argument that does not rely on such radical and implausible premises. Anselm is arguing from the premise that actual existence is a great-making property. For any beings x and y sharing all of the divine attributes P, the actual existence of x and mere possible existence of y makes x greater than y. That can be true though the greatness of x in the actual world does not exceed the greatness of y in w.

Notes

* Thanks to Peter Forrest for very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

[1] See David K. Lewis, 'Anselm and Actuality', *Noûs*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1970) p. 175

[2] Ibid. p. 177.

[3] In addition to items that exist in possible worlds, there are items that exist partly in possible worlds (e.g. cross world objects), and there are items that exist in the pluriverse but do not exist even partly in possible world (e.g. numbers, properties, propositions and the like)

[4] 'Anselm and Actuality' op. cit. p. 176

[5] Lewis initially includes among the conceivable worlds the set of impossible worlds. He retracts this view in David K. Lewis, 'Postscripts to Anselm and Actuality' in his *Philosophical Papers Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 21 ff.

[6] See David K. Lewis, 'Noneism or Allism?', *Mind* Vol. 99, 393 (1990) 24-5.

[7] The principle of classical possibilism contrasts the *being* of possible objects and the *existence* of possible objects. The principle states that all possible objects—indeed everything simpliciter—have *being*, or in some sense *are*, though not all possible objects exist. There is a brief and clear exposition of classical possibilism in Russell.

> *Being* is that which belongs to every conceivable term, to every possible object of thought. . . . Numbers, the Homeric gods, relations, chimeras, and four-dimensional spaces all have being, for if they were not entities of a kind, we could make no propositions about them. Thus being is a general attribute of everything, and to mention anything is to show that it is. *Existence*, on the contrary, is the prerogative of some only amongst beings.

See Bertrand Russell, *Principles of Mathematics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), sec. 423. Compare Christopher Menzel, 'Actualism', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/actualism/ According to classical possibilism at least some non-actual objects are contingently non-actual. Such objects have being, but they fail, as a matter of contingent fact, to be actual objects. These are objects, in general, that have being and that might have been actual. Golden mountains have being, for instance, and it is a matter of contingent fact that there are no actual golden mountains. There are possible golden mountains, and if golden mountains had existence in addition to having being, then they would be actual golden mountains.

[8] See David Lewis, Postscript to 'Counterpart Theory and Quantified Modal Logic' in his *Philosophical Papers Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983). p. 40 ff.

[9] There is the alternative of allowing worlds to overlap with respect to God. See, for instance, Kris McDaniel, 'Modal Realism with Overlap', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 82 (2004) 137-152. But the other costs of this account include compositional pluralism, the view that there's more than one fundamental part-whole relation. The view also threatens a failure of modal reductionism. On this account, x is a part of y at w iff. there is some spacetime region R such that x is a part of y at R and R is a part of w. But of course y might be a part of no proper subregion R of w and be a part of w. For instance, y might be a musical event that occupies all of w. In that case, x is a part of y at w iff. x is a part of y at w. So, we are not offered an analysis of objects existing at worlds that does not appeal to possible worlds. Indeed, we do not have here an analysis of objects existing at worlds.

[10] See David Lewis, 'Anselm and Actuality', *Noûs*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1970) p. 179

[11] Ibid. p. 183

[12] See Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1974) p. 214 ff.

[13] When I speak of a property P entailing another property Q, I mean that in every world in which x exemplifies P, x also exemplifies Q or $\Box(\forall x)(Px \supset Qx)$. There are interesting weaker entailment relations among properties. We might also say that P weakly entails Q just in case, necessarily, something is P only if something is Q or $\Box(\forall x)(\exists y)(Px \supset Qy)$.

[14] See Ross Cameron, 'God Exists at Every (Modal Realist) World: A Reply to Sheehy', *Religious Studies* 45 (2009) p. 98 ff.

[15] David Lewis 'New Work for a Theory of Universals', 11, n. 5, in his *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 8–55.

[16] See David Lewis, 'Anselm and Actuality' op. cit. p. 182.

[17] Ibid. p. 183.

[18] Ibid. p. 181.

[19] The alternative is to claim that God exists in every possible world. This requires either the assumption that God exemplifies all of his intrinsic properties essentially, which seems false, or threatens the failure of modal reductionism. See Kris McDaniel, 'Modal Realism with Overlap', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 82 (2004) 137-152.