Can the ontological and cosmological arguments (O and C) for the existence of God, whose complex relationship was discussed by Kant\(^1\), achieve more together than they can achieve apart? Yes, but what they achieve is not necessarily a proof of monotheism.

IA

To explain my terms. Monotheism, whose outstanding representative in the West is Christianity, has a characteristic theory of being, adopted by Christianity from Plato and other Greek parents, which both C and O express. According to this theory the higher forms of being, which have spiritual or intellectual – but not necessarily physical – qualities, produce the lower forms which often have physical but often lack spiritual qualities. If any lower beings like ourselves have a share of wisdom they need to show it by understanding their comparative insignificance – and this is the conviction on which Anselm’s prayer, where O was first stated, works. But there are other ideas about being.

Atheists in the Epicurean tradition find the whole idea of higher and lower forms suspect. For them all known beings are transient and limited in ways which are hard to know or predict, so that even definite degrees of greatness are hard to discern. So known beings would not in the least support the idea of a hierarchy of being, especially not of an apex to that hierarchy, and the idea of an unsurpassably great being would seem as foolish as the idea of a quantity incapable of increment.

Polytheists, who are unduly despised, accept the idea of higher or greater and lower or lesser forms of being. But they often regard the higher forms as coming later, with their arrival marked by the increasing progress and differentiation of the universe, symbolized by the successive generations of the gods. They might well say that the idea of a hierarchy of greatness makes much more sense if we introduce lesser gods from whom the greater can gradually emerge without the inelegant monotheists’ leap straight from humanity to the Most High God. Furthermore they might say that the monotheists’ insistence on the necessary and unchangeable nature of God

---

* My thanks are due to my colleagues Jonathan Lowe and David Whewell and to my former colleague J. L. H. Thomas.

\(^{1}\) Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A 609, B 637.
flies in the face of experience: inability or refusal to change while the universe changes is, as far as experience goes, anything but a sign of perfection.

C is the argument that the common form of being we find around us – physical being – is inherently conditioned and dependent and so needs an origin in something of a higher, non-physical kind. God is the name of the spiritual being or power suggested by this argument as the origin of all things. I find the greatest difficulty with C in its supposition that pure mind or spirit has in any sense power to make anything real or to control the form or nature of anything real. I argue that it is precisely here that O can help.

C is often held to depend on U – 'U' is my label for any proposition to the effect that the universe is not empty or that something exists. The denial of U, which invokes the idea of an empty universe, may in certain minds seem like an utterly idle, foolish speculation, not even to be entertained for a minute. How can we really think about nothing or regard the empty universe as a universe? I mention this feeling because I think many non-philosophers incline to it – and if they do their views make my intended conclusions seem natural.

There is an initial problem about the relationship between U and phrases such as 'nothing exists' or 'there is nothing but an empty universe': are these phrases negations of U or do they entail its truth? If we asserted that they do entail its truth we would mean that what exists is nothing, or just the empty universe: and that assertion might point to a cheap victory for the claim that U is necessarily true. In all that follows I take U to assert that there is something other than an empty universe, more precisely that the universe is populated and that we can accordingly apply classical logic to the population which the universe contains: that is, draw the distinction between all that population and some of it. So U is necessarily true only if the claim that there is nothing but an empty universe contains a latent contradiction: that is to say that, after sufficient argument, the idea of an empty universe would be exposed as not making sense.

There is a connected problem concerning the relationship between the idea of an empty universe and the logical idea of an empty set. I take the idea of an empty universe to be the idea that there is strictly nothing whatever apart, on certain ways of speaking, from an empty set: the empty universe constitutes rather than contains the empty set. Hence we cannot follow the familiar procedures for generating natural numbers in an empty universe because the sets associated with the natural numbers do not exist. So a universe which did contain these sets, together perhaps with other abstracta, would be different from the empty universe. Could there be a universe which was different from the empty universe only in this respect – that is, a universe where, conformably to Plato’s theories of necessary being, only abstracta existed? The affirmative answer, the belief that abstracta can exist independently, entails recognition of abstracta as a kind of being in their own right and this recognition brings with it, in its own way, conclusions which bear
comparison with those I intend to reach. All the same, my answer is negative: surely any claim that abstracta exist in any universe depends on the claim that abstract terms can be used intelligibly in the course of what we say about that universe: and I argue later that any such claim about the intelligible use of abstract terms depends on ‘import’ of meaning for those terms from our familiar universe and that these imports are illegitimate.

Another initial problem arises over the meaning of ‘something’: does the term apply only to matter? To apply the term ‘something’ more widely seems more natural and does not detract from my argument. We are told that it is possible for only curved, empty spacetime to exist or for only pure spirits to exist: and I take U to be true if either of these possibilities is realised, even in the absence of matter. To take U in this way by no means deprives U of interest: on the contrary it reminds us of the historical importance of the idea just mentioned, that there are forms of being from which other forms, perhaps higher or lower or perhaps just different, can emerge. I have discussed elsewhere the suggestion that matter may be a special state of spacetime, a suggestion which is a modern version of just this idea: perhaps spacetime, even if it exists alone, may be the womb of a material world. Moreover those who believe in pure spirits have usually believed that they can create pure matter.

O is an argument seeking to demonstrate the necessity of God’s being. If the proposition ‘God exists’ is necessary in any system of thought which includes (a) standard logic, (b) the conceptual means to ascribe more greatness to some beings than to others and (c) U, then I say that God has ‘relative necessity’ – if anything exists God does. If we can detach U from the system and still find that ‘God exists’ is necessary then I say that God has ‘absolute necessity’. The spiritual, unconditioned, independent nature of the God of C makes Him (at first sight, at least) the ideal candidate for absolute necessity.

The two best-known versions of O are Descartes’, which turns on the idea of perfection, and Anselm’s, which turns on the idea of unsurpassable greatness and was soon subject to a critique by Gaunilo. I prefer the latter because I think Gaunilo’s objections are completely devastating if addressed to Descartes. Perfection is either perfection in one kind the perfection we might ascribe to a rose for its scent, colour and shape – or unrestricted perfection, in which all good qualities from all contexts converge. The former idea, perfection in one kind, opens the way not to a clearly acceptable proof of God’s existence but to the confusion predicted by Gaunilo where the argument about God is permanently suspect because, by the same reasoning, all kinds and natures can claim a perfect example which necessarily exists – and this claim most people find absurd.

The latter idea, unrestricted perfection, is not really a clear idea. For

---

instance, it seems impossible to insist that the absolutely perfect being, God, should have, as an essential part of His perfection, a pleasant smell like a rose. But if we start to restrict the perfections of God to those which seem appropriate to a divine being we find that we retreat to the idea of perfection in a kind and so fall into Gaunilo’s trap. These difficulties arise immediately for Descartes rather than for Anselm.

Not that Gaunilo leaves Anselm, his intended target, completely unscathed: indeed his objection was more powerful than he, considering his own orthodoxy, can have intended. He faces all orthodox believers, whether or not they advocate O, with the question whether they really envisage the problematic convergence of all kinds of merit and excellence in God. Anselm can sidestep the question only while he concentrates on his technical argument about greatness. Moreover Gaunilo, more importantly for my purposes, raises another question: must a necessary being be God? I seek to take this aspect of his argument further by suggesting that ‘something exists necessarily’ may be true but not true because there is some one thing which exists necessarily at all times, or even a number of excellent things which all exist at all times, but true because something or other, but not the same being at all times, must exist.

Anselm does in fact, in reply to Gaunilo, supplement his argument with an attempted proof that the only being which could exist necessarily is God; I shall argue later that this supplement to Anselm’s argument raises considerable problems for Anselm himself and for his version of O.

I begin my argument from Kant’s claim that C rests covertly on O – covertly because the two are not really reconciled. O is a matter of pure concepts whereas C makes use of U, which is certainly not a purely conceptual statement. According to Kant the congruence which appears at first sight between the God of C and the God of O is spurious and the debt to O, whose existence the defenders of C cannot admit, is fatal to their argument. The difficulty, or one of the many difficulties, is that C represents God as (in my terms) relatively necessary and O represents Him as absolutely necessary. Kant’s problem could be eased on one of two conditions – either O itself makes use of U as if it were a necessary truth or U, as used in C, is independently defensible as a necessary truth. My argument is that both these conditions can be met. That is part of the ability of O and C to cooperate.

My reason for saying that O needs U is that, without U, the way is open for the following atheist argument. ‘You religious people talk of the visible world as if it came from nothing and will return to nothing. You do this freely, quite apart from philosophical efforts by some of you to prove that God is a necessary being. We do not believe in God, so we take this as your
admission that the idea of an absolutely empty universe makes sense. Once you have made this admission you cannot achieve anything by introducing the idea of the greatest or unsurpassably great being. The nature of an empty universe is to have no discernible elements to be compared with each other or with the whole. So, in respect of an empty universe, it is a true observation that “the greatest being” “the least being” and “nothing” have the same denotation and that nothing surpasses nothing in greatness. If, in the fullness of time, there will be an empty universe it follows that there is no God. That is because you understand God as nothing if not eternal: so, if at some time in the future there will be an empty universe, God is at all times nothing – does not exist. So if the empty universe is even possible God may not exist and O fails.’ The only way, I suggest, to avoid this atheist argument is to deny the possibility of the empty universe and so assert that U is a necessary truth. I now turn to arguing that U is indeed a necessary truth.

IIA

First I approach the question from the point of view of traditional logic, but with a word at the end of the section about those who find strict systems unduly constraining and would rather think naturally or commonsensically.

In traditional logic there are well-known problems caused by use of terms like ‘Greek god’ to which we suppose there is no corresponding reality in this universe: these problems increase in respect of an empty universe. It is not possible to insist that positive universals like ‘All Greek gods were radiant’ fail to be true simply because there never were any Greek gods: this would imply, since one of every contradictory pair is true, that ‘Some Greek Gods were not radiant’ is true and this seems to conflict with the facts yet more strongly since it lets us suppose that the Greek Gods existed and could be sorted into different categories.

We find that Greek gods impede us by making our use of the Square of Opposition, the heart of logic, difficult in one topic. So in the worst conditions, where the difficulty rises to impossibility and spreads to all topics, the Square becomes useless and we cannot think logically. So there can be no logical discourse ‘about’ a universe where these worst conditions obtain and the idea that there might ‘be’ a genuine universe like this is absurd. This rules out the empty universe for the following reasons.

The Square becomes useless if it is impossible to make the essential distinction between ‘all’ and ‘some’. It may seem to be a matter of common sense that the distinction vanishes and the collapse occurs as soon as we try in any way to talk about an empty universe. Certainly any attempt to maintain the Square brings disastrous problems in respect of universal propositions. The problems would begin for one of a number of reasons. First, we might extend the privilege just given to Greek gods to all subject terms (on the grounds that all now stand for what does not exist) and declare all
positive universals true. Or second, because it is hard to deny that, in an empty universe, no men are wise and no food is nourishing, we might declare all negative universals true. Or third, we might try to discriminate.

The first two options rapidly lead to disaster. If the essential rules which provide for the transformation of syllogisms of one figure into those of another are to work, each positive universal must have a negative and each negative universal must have a positive equivalent ('no Cretans are truthful', 'all Cretans are untruthful', sentences related by obversion). So if all positive universals are true so are all negatives and if all negatives are true so are all positives. So all contrary pairs are true. Meanwhile, by the law of contradiction and since we cannot in an empty universe sort out truthful and lying Cretans, all subcontrary pairs ('Some Cretans are liars'/'some are truthful') are false and the *dictum de omni* (which says that what is true of all is true of some) does not apply. Its removal removes the rules for relating 'all' and 'some' and thus for understanding these words. This means that in the empty world the terms of traditional logic cannot, on either of the first two options, make sense.

Now for the third, discriminatory option. We would have to discriminate among positive universal statements according to their topic or subject-matter, since they all have the same logical form. We could make those with abstract subject terms true and those with non-abstract ones false. Thus in the empty universe 'all syllogisms in Barbara are valid' would be true and 'all men are mortal' false; presumably 'no syllogisms in Barbara are invalid' and 'no men are immortal' – the obverse forms – are both true. On this option we would escape the problem of making all contrary pairs true but at a heavy price: we would have to accept that the subject matter of the sentence determined a matter of logic – that is whether negative universal statements have obverse forms which are truly equivalent to them. And if we pay that price we abandon the basic idea of traditional logic that valid forms are valid and invalid ones invalid without regard to the meanings of the *categoremata* – *categoremata* being either non-logical terms or logical ones which happen to play no logical role in the sentence (as 'syllogisms' does not in the example above).

If this price is not to be paid we might consider simply importing the rules of discourse from some non-empty universe. This might appeal to common sense and perhaps to those who would rather trust common sense than the rules of strict logical systems. If we said 'In an empty universe if anything were a raspberry it would be a soft fruit and not a prime number: so the universal “All raspberries are soft fruit” is true and “All raspberries are prime numbers” is false, just as in our universe' we would be importing a convention about word-use from discourse concerning this universe to discourse concerning the empty universe. I suggest that this is not a natural or common-sense procedure. Discourse cannot concern, in any natural sense,
CREATION, CREATIVITY AND NECESSARY BEING

one subject-matter and yet be controlled in every aspect by discourse about
another subject-matter. Consider the implications of this kind of control for
the empty universe. Some suppose that this populated universe was created
‘from’ nothing and so succeeded an empty universe. Then the truths about
this empty universe are determined after it ceased, which goes against
common sense. These points reinforce my suggestion that common sense
should treat all talk of an empty universe with suspicion. I claim some
implicit support from the philosophers for this suspicion in the course of the
next section.

IIB

If we use modern logic we find a family of apparently true statements such
as ‘This is an empty world’ or even ‘There exists this world and it is empty’.
Outside this family it seems that every statement beginning ‘There exists…’
is false and every statement beginning ‘There is no such thing as…’ is true
even if what would in the familiar world be category mistakes are made and
even if logical terms are mixed in. There is no such thing as a centaur which
is not a unicorn, no such thing as a raspberry which is not a prime number,
no such thing as a crime which is not a subcontrary. Then certain statements
of implication become true, so that if anything is a raspberry it is a prime
number, a crime and a subcontrary. I call these the free implications which,
by a convention apparently adapted from normal discourse, characterize
discourse about the empty universe, if indeed any such discourse can even
start; provisionally I assume that it can.

This situation creates great difficulty for the act of definition, whose
purpose is to bring terms into use with clear meaning. Traditionally, defini-
tion is per genus et differentiam, that is by a consideration of some members of
a kind which have a distinguishing property: and this procedure would
collapse with the removal (mentioned above) of the rule relating ‘all’ and
‘some’. By traditional rules or by any rules definition is, at very least, (a)
instruction in the use within discourse of certain terms and (b) instruction by
means of discourse itself. ‘Instruction in the use’ requires that there be
different topics (soft fruit, logic) with boundaries; beyond the boundaries lie
what is irrelevant to that topic. Free implication means that nothing is
irrelevant and thus that no instruction can be given. ‘Instruction by means
of discourse’ requires us to learn something of the conventions of language.

The method of imports, which seeks to maintain words with distinct usages
even in respect of the empty universe and which takes conventions about
how we discuss this universe and makes them conventions about how we
discuss the empty universe, surely fails. We cannot import identical con-
ventions – because the ones we normally use depend on the facts of the
universe to exclude free implication and this exclusion could not be main-
tained when we tried to talk of the empty universe. Even though conventions
can be adapted to facts and to purposes we cannot, faced with problems about the empty universe, import conventions which are genuinely adapted to meet those problems. There are no facts about the empty universe except that it is empty and we have no purpose in making distinctions which correspond to nothing. The adaptation apparently required by the very emptiness of the empty universe, provisionally accepted above, is the admission of free implication. But this admission is what creates rather than meets our problems; I suggest we should withdraw our provisional acceptance of it and so agree that discourse ‘about’ the empty universe cannot even start.

We cannot start even to the extent of defining, even in the wide sense of ‘defining’ just used, even the terms of logic and the term ‘empty’. What I claim is that the emptiness of an empty universe resists discussion: it offers no topics and no exclusions for irrelevance, which are the essential materials of discussion. If a universe is a totality or overall state of affairs which can be discussed it turns out that ‘empty universe’ is a contradiction in terms and that if there are no objects there are no concepts. So U is a necessary truth and when we frame U in our minds we frame a thought with which reality cannot but accord.

I take thought with which reality cannot but accord as the logical counterpart of reality or being which, if thought, cannot merely be thought or cannot ‘exist in the mind alone’. Feuerbach supports me obliquely: he rejected O as an excessive claim not only for God but for the power of human thought.

Here I claim a little further support from major philosophers for another aspect of my argument. Wittgenstein’s criterion for the success of language as a means of communication is that there should be agreements in judgement as well as agreements about meaning. We can expect no agreements about judgements concerning the empty universe except that it is empty – and this paucity of agreements would discredit the method of imports, which attempts to create a range of conventions almost as complete as the range we use here and now; if the method of imports is discredited one premiss of my argument is supported. David Lewis, in his influential book on counterfactuals, remarks that, from the point of view of a given world, there are many other worlds with an ascertainable degree of likeness to the given world – but also others less like or ‘more remote’. From the original point of view, it is as if these more remote worlds (in my usage, universes) were not really possible worlds. A degree of remoteness must result from the removal of any major feature of our universe. Since an empty universe requires the removal of all major features from our familiar universe it follows that the empty universe is either more unlike, more remote from, this

---

universe than any other populated universe would be or else comparable in remoteness to the very strangest fantasies about whose possibility we would have strong doubts: even these fantasy universes must be more like our universe than the empty universe, in that entities of some sort are present in them. Accordingly, we cannot use vantage point in this universe to frame conventions for the discussion of what, from that vantage point, does not seem possible. For the conventions suggested by the method of imports, being so directly tied to our normal conventions, take no account at all of the remoteness or seeming impossibility of the empty universe.

For the procedure of the argument I refer to Rescher and Brandom on *The Logic of Inconsistency*\(^7\): they draw a distinction between a consistent-world description and a consistent world-description. My claim is not that the empty universe cannot with consistency be described as containing observers to discuss it – that is obvious but uninteresting – but that, from the vantage point of this populated world, we necessarily lack a consistent universe-description for the empty universe and so must judge ‘empty universe’ as a contradiction in terms and a failed attempt to describe what is impossible.

Further support from the philosophers comes, tacitly, from the mere fact that O is taken with some seriousness despite the fact that O, the claim that it is necessarily true that God exists, manifestly conflicts with the claim that it is possibly true that nothing exists: whereas, surely, a proposition can be taken seriously only if there is neither full commitment to any conflicting proposition nor any reason, both very strong and clearly known to us, for thinking that any conflicting proposition is true.

Having claimed some support, I acknowledge that the opposite to my claim that something must exist has been argued forcibly, one paper using the apt aphorism that ‘logic abhors an entity’\(^8\). The authors, Meyer and Lambert, and others in their tradition, have proved that, if we suppose it possible to create rules for word-use in respect of an empty universe, then no insuperable problem arises over the question of denotationless names. Their procedure of ‘nominal interpretation’ seems to be what I call the method of imports, whereby meanings or rules for use are carried over from a populated universe. Denotationless forms of words (like ‘present king of France’) were placed in the forefront of this discussion by the debate over Russell’s theory of descriptions. But my contention is that the problem centres on the way the empty world, with its topic famine, may make terms – even the basic terms of logic – connotationless; also that the method of imports fails. So I am still not convinced that logic does abhor an entity.

This logical question is very important for philosophy of religion. For the claim that there is no logical objection to the idea of an empty universe is the

strongest justification for the familiar protest against building bridges from the purely conceptual to the real. However, if it is possible for a rational mind to believe that the universe is empty it is not possible for a rational mind to believe that God exists necessarily.

III

My contention that there can be a thought with which reality cannot but accord may seem like the claim of C that mind, or at least the supremely powerful mind of the great non-physical being, causes the existence and movements of physical things – but this is not so except after further theological argument. In the first place, what does it mean to ascribe great power to minds? We do not refer to a high degree of the power by which bodies are moved. Some may not accept that minds have the power to move bodies and most who do accept the existence of this power regard it as inherent in all minds equally. Paralysis is always taken as a defect of body, not mind. Lesser mental power cannot here be attributed to an ant which carries a grain of sand and greater to a man who lifts an iron weight because this would assimilate mental power to physical force by measuring it according to physical mass moved, hence assimilate mind to body and God to nature, contrary to the hypothesis of C. But the equal lack or equal possession by minds of the power to move bodies does not support the idea of differentially powerful, hence of supremely powerful minds.

In fact we use the term ‘power of mind’ in respect of the quality of thoughts. If someone cannot cope with any kind of problem we may use the term ‘feeble-minded’; if someone produces great thoughts in the arts or sciences we face a mind of remarkable power. Then if we place God at the apex of mental power we must ascribe to the thoughts of the divine mind perfection – all the logical, moral and aesthetic merits. If the mind has the power its thoughts give it, it is really the thoughts which have the power (as the ‘power of the purse’ is the power of the money within it) and to say that God creates is to say that His thoughts – in ancient terms, His Word – have creative power. To say that a thought is creative is evidently to say that reality cannot but accord with it.

But it is not necessary for a creative thought on this definition to be the prior cause of the corresponding reality. Thought which was both creative and prior to the reality which accorded with it would be a cause: this is the special case in which creativity becomes creation in the traditional sense. But if a creative mind is one which thinks creative thoughts it does not necessarily create in the traditional sense. If my argument in favour of U is correct we human beings can think creative thoughts even though we are not creators in the traditional sense.
I argue that U is a necessary truth: to argue for U is not to argue for O but is still to argue about ontology, even though there is no attempt to specify what kind of thing exists or whether the same thing exists all the time. We have not yet found God but have found a bridge from the conceptual to the real. The question of whether any such bridge is possible is so important in itself that I believe that the claims made by ontology concerning the human mind are as remarkable as those concerning the being which our minds consider. As Feuerbach notes, those who claim necessity for being claim for the mind the remarkable power of creativity, of thinking creative thoughts, thoughts with which reality cannot but accord.

This is the reason why O, or even my argument for U, can support C: C needs something to dispel scepticism concerning the power of mind to be creative. Here both O and my argument help by offering themselves as examples of creative thought. C also needs a reply to the question ‘Who made God?’ The reply suggested by my argument draws the sting from this question by suggesting that, even though C always assigns a cause to material beings, it has no reason to assign a cause to a creative mind, seeing that a mind whose thoughts are such that reality cannot but accord with them stands in a relationship to reality and to material beings which is determined by logic, not by the ability of the mind to act causally on material beings.

This is a defence of C, not a proof of it. As noted above, creative thought does not necessarily precede the reality which must accord with it. Furthermore, O weakens C’s drive to monotheism by the very fact that it attributes creativity to thought in lesser minds, not only in the mind of the Most High God. And if O uses U as I suggest a second stage in the argument is needed to progress to absolute from relative necessity. If this progress cannot be made it may well be polytheism which draws strength.

I say ‘may well’ because monotheism can certainly triumph if the only possible condition for the necessary truth of U is the truth of the claim that the Most High God exists – and I shall shortly come to Anselm’s attempt to establish just this by an argument which sweeps aside all candidates for proven existence other than God. But if O simply uses U as a premiss it must be doubtful whether the God whose existence O seeks to prove can be the God of monotheism. Consider how O in this version would be regarded in the mind of God Himself, the divine being who is the greatest existent being (whose will is therefore supreme) and whose existence is, given U as a premiss, proved. The proof bestows relative necessity upon Him. He would know the truth of the disjunction ‘If I exist I exist or if anything else exists I exist’. But if there is no absolute necessity for His existence and if all other existence, since His will is supreme and He can realise any logical possibility, is dependent on His will His own existence must be a matter for His own
choice – that is to say He has power over Himself as we to some extent have power over ourselves. It seems impossible to ascribe to Him a power which it is impossible to use for a good purpose – that would imply that He dislikes an aspect of Himself. So this power must have a good purpose, which surely can only be the same as the good purpose for which we can use our power over ourselves, the purpose of self-development. Then He must always have the power to transform Himself into something yet higher – and it is this which reveals Him as a god in the polytheist sense, not as the God of monotheism.

I turn to Anselm’s effort, in his first reply to Gaunilo, to bind O firmly to monotheism by a second stage of argument additional to his original statement of O. He claims that any being could conceivably not exist unless not just its being, but every aspect of the totality of its being, were realized everywhere in space and time. Modern followers extend God’s omnipresence to all possible worlds. But this is not satisfactory: it threatens the idea of hierarchy, an idea which is essential to the distinction of greater and less, the distinction used by O, and an idea which polytheism captures well. Consider the hierarchy of values. If God is realized in all His fullness in every situation comparisons are meaningless and so there is no hierarchy: everything is equally good. Or consider the hierarchy of power. We normally assess power as greater because, if physical, it can overcome greater resistance or, if mental, it can solve harder problems. How can a fully and eternally realized being, who by definition faces neither problem nor resistance, be drawn into these comparisons?

If there were lower beings, facing problems, from whom God’s nature differed only in degree comparisons could be drawn. But the relationship of necessary to contingent being is not a matter of degree but of radical unlikeness. So the idea of necessary being and even the ideas of omnipresent and eternal being, though Anselm postulates them, actually threaten the idea of hierarchy, based on the distinction of greater and less, on which his own argument is based.

I am not advocating polytheism, only saying that cultural inertia may have reduced our interest in the polytheists’ ideas about being, which may have philosophical life in them yet, just as it has left in near oblivion those ancient philosophers who, when atheism and Christianity were both available, deliberately chose to work within the polytheist tradition.

I seek to extend to O Hume’s\(^9\) claim, made concerning the design argument, that we exaggerate the degree to which the familiar arguments support the religion familiar to us, monotheism rather than polytheism. Moreover O does not help C answer the question ‘Who made God?’ by assigning priority in time to the being which is both thinking and necessary. Yet it does help C by drawing, as mentioned, the sting of the question.

According to Kant in the passage cited above, O is a ‘path which we had deserted at the bidding’ of C. Historically, this may be a true comment on the scholastic rejection of O – but logically O and C may still be mutually supportive. O helps with C’s worst problem, that of explaining how thought can in any case be creative. It provides in itself the example of creative thought which C needs.

University of Durham, 
England