

A Systematic Modelling of the Anselmian Thesis

Abstract

The so-called Anselmian thesis, according to which God is that than which no greater can be thought, has been widely accepted among theists for the last nine hundred years. Philosophers have rarely, however, discussed exactly what it means to say that God is that than which no greater can be thought. The aim of this paper is to offer an answer to this question by providing a rigorous, systematic model of the Anselmian thesis. The most straightforward model, which I call the 'Linear Model', says that God is that than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in the 'great chain of being', a universal linear ranking of all possible beings. Most contemporary philosophers believe, however, that the Linear Model does not succeed because the notion of the great chain of being is untenable. I therefore explore alternatives to the Linear Model. I argue that what I call the 'Extended Radial Model' characterises the Anselmian thesis correctly, even though the model faces a powerful objection. I argue further that the Linear Model should be taken seriously as a backup option for Anselmian theists because (i) it is not vulnerable to the objection that the Extended Radial Model faces and (ii) contrary to what many philosophers think, there is no knock-down objection to the model.

1. Introduction

In the eleventh century Anselm introduced in his *Proslogion* a thesis that is now widely accepted among Judaeo-Christian-Islamic theists: God is that than which no

greater can be thought.¹ Anselm presented primarily two applications of this thesis: (i) We can construct the ontological argument for the existence of God by using this thesis. According to the ontological argument, it is true *a priori* that God, as that than which no greater can be thought, exists. (ii) We can derive from this thesis individual attributes that God has, such as omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence. When we define God we need not list all the individual attributes that He has because, as George N. Schlesinger (1988) says, the property of being that than which no greater can be thought 'has the unique feature of implying all the other predicates traditionally ascribed to God'.^{2,3}

Over the last nine hundred years philosophers have concentrated on these applications of the Anselmian thesis. As to (i), they have tried to examine the cogency of the ontological argument. Some have attempted, in particular, to propose objections to the argument and some have tried to defend or improve on it. As to (ii), philosophers have tried to assess the doctrines of the individual attributes. Some have tried, in particular, to provide analyses of these attributes and some have tried to show the incoherence of and inconsistency between these attributes. Ironically, however, philosophers have rarely examined in detail the Anselmian thesis itself. Exactly what does it mean to say that God is that than which no greater can be thought? The aim of

¹ Anselm, *Proslogion*, in M.J. Charlesworth (ed.), *St. Anselm's Proslogion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965, originally 1077-1078), pp. 102-155.

² As is common practice, I use the pronoun 'He' to refer to God. This should not, however, be taken to imply that God has a gender.

³ George N. Schlesinger, *New Perspectives On Old-Time Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 16.

this paper is to propose an answer to this question by providing a rigorous, systematic model of the Anselmian thesis.

The most intuitive way of characterising the Anselmian thesis is to say that God is that than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in the ‘great chain of being’, a universal linear ranking of all possible beings. I call the model of the Anselmian thesis that is based on this view the ‘Linear Model’. It is widely agreed among contemporary philosophers, however, that the Linear Model does not succeed because, according to them, the notion of the great chain of being is untenable. They think that it does not make sense to assume that there can be a single objective scale of value that can rank *all* possible beings. In the central part of this paper, therefore, I explore alternatives to the Linear Model by systematically analysing God’s attributes. I argue that what I call the ‘Extended Radial Model’ is the most plausible alternative, even though the model faces a powerful objection. I argue, however, that the Linear Model should also be taken seriously as a backup option for Anselmian theists because (i) it is not vulnerable to the objection that the Extended Radial Model faces and (ii) contrary to what many philosophers think, there is no knock-down objection to the model.

This paper has the following structure: In Section 2 I introduce the Linear Model. From Sections 3 to 6 I discuss alternatives to the Linear Model and conclude that the Extended Radial Model is tenable. In Sections 7 and 8 I defend the Linear Model as a backup option for Anselmian theists. In Section 9 I respond to possible objections to my defence of the Extended Radial Model and the Linear Model. Section 10 concludes.

2. The Linear Model

Let us begin by reviewing several assumptions and preliminaries. First, I assume in the following that ‘that than which no greater can be thought’ is equivalent to ‘the being than which no greater can be thought’. Anselm uses the phrase ‘that than which no greater can be thought’ in his work, but the term ‘*the* being than which no greater can be thought’ is more convenient because it clearly excludes polytheism, which Anselmian theists reject.⁴ Second, I assume that the claim that God is the being than which no greater can be thought entails that He is the being than which no greater is possible or that He is the greatest possible being. This assumption relies on the entailment from thinkability (or conceivability) to possibility. The entailment is disputed in the philosophy of mind but, for the sake of simplicity, I accept it in this paper.⁵ Third, I assume that by ‘possible beings’ Anselmian theists mean actual or merely possible *concrete objects*, whether they are physical or nonphysical. I assume, therefore, that mere properties or mathematical objects cannot be included in a ranking of possible beings. Fourth, I use the terms in the following pairs interchangeably: (i) property/attribute; (ii) greater/superior; (iii) worse/inferior. This is not very elegant but it is unavoidable because the literature mixes up the terms in each pair. Fifth, I allow that what I defend in this paper might not be entirely consistent with Anselm’s theological system taken in whole. Following tradition I use the term ‘Anselmian thesis’ and call any version of theism that holds to the thesis ‘Anselmian theism’ but, because my interest is philosophical rather than exegetical, I am not ultimately concerned with whether my discussion is faithful to Anselm’s relevant

⁴ See Section 9 of this paper for the relationship between the Anselmian thesis and polytheism.

⁵ See, for example, Tamar Szabó Gendler and John Hawthorne (eds.), *Conceivability and Possibility*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

texts. Sixth, and finally, since the aim of this paper is to *model*, rather than defend, the Anselmian thesis I set aside attempts to eliminate the thesis itself. Some critics try to eliminate the thesis by saying, for example, that since for any possible being there is always another possible being that is greater, there is no such thing as the being than which no greater can be thought. Although I believe that Anselmian theists can respond to such criticism I do not discuss it in this paper.

The most straightforward model, the Linear Model, says that God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in the great chain of being while all other possible beings occupy other links lower in the chain. The great chain of being is a linear ranking of all beings, both actual and merely possible, which is established in accordance with a single objective scale of value and presented as a potentially infinitely long chain.⁶ The ranking tells us, for any pair of possible beings x and y , whether x is as great as y , greater than y , or less great than y .⁷ It is disputable whether the chain should include tokens, such as John F. Kennedy and Lassie, the television dog, or types, such as ‘human being’ and ‘dog’. As I explain in Section 3, however, given certain plausible assumptions it is reasonable to think that it

⁶ This is a philosophical formulation of the great chain of being. A typical medieval formulation of the great chain of being includes only what theists regard as actual beings (admitting no merely possible beings). So, starting with God, it contains such beings as angels, humans, animals and non-sentient beings. For the history of the great chain of being see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936).

⁷ The ‘as great as’ relation is not absolutely necessary for characterising distinct beings, but it *is* necessary to preserve the greatness of identical beings, which can be expressed as ‘ x is as great as x ’.

contains tokens rather than types. It should also be noted that there are cases in which the same being has different degrees of greatness in different possible worlds. (Such a being has the relevant properties at their respective intensity only contingently). This means that the same being can occupy multiple links in the great chain of being if we take into account possible worlds. In this paper, I treat a being in one possible world and the same being in another possible world as if they are two distinct beings, provided that the degree of greatness differs in these possible worlds. The degree of God's greatness, however, does not change in this way throughout all possible worlds because God has the relevant properties necessarily at correspondingly necessary intensity. Related issues will be addressed in Section 5. The Linear Model is committed to, using Thomas V. Morris's terminology, 'universal value commensurability'⁸:

Universal value commensurability: Every possible being is value commensurable.

According to universal value commensurability, we can compare the greatness of any two beings and locate them on the great chain of being. If we have access to the great chain of being, we can easily prove that God is the being than which no greater can be thought. We need only to look at the chain and confirm that God, and only God, occupies the top link. God's occupying the top link guarantees that, whichever being one picks, God is greater than that being (unless we pick God Himself). The Linear Model can be formulated as follows:

⁸ Thomas V. Morris, 'The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm', *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (1984), pp. 177-187, repr. in *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 10-25, at pp. 15-16 (page numbers refer to reprinting).

The Linear Model: God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in the great chain of being (Figure 1).

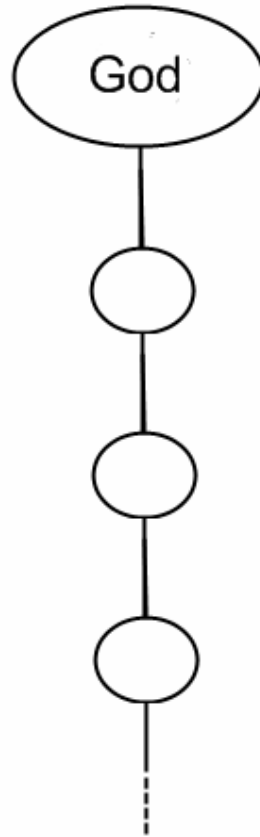


Figure 1

Despite its intuitive appeal, the Linear Model is not taken seriously today because most philosophers reject universal value commensurability and even the possibility that the great chain of being exists. C. D. Broad, for example, says that universal value commensurability is false because a correct analysis of relevant properties does ‘not allow us even in theory, to arrange everything in a single scale of perfection’.⁹

⁹ C.D. Broad, ‘Arguments for the Existence of God’, *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 40 (1939), pp.16-30; pp. 156-67, repr. in his *Religion, Philosophy and Psychological*

Morris, to take another example, claims that universal value commensurability is ‘a position which is clearly false’.¹⁰ He rejects the possibility of the great chain by saying, ‘It just makes no sense to ask which is of greater intrinsic value, an aardvark or an escalator’.¹¹ What Morris expresses is widely regarded as a knock-down objection to universal value commensurability, the thesis on which the Linear Model is based.

Theists need therefore to provide a new model of the Anselmian thesis, according to which God is the being than which no greater can be thought, a model that does not rely on universal value commensurability and the great chain of being. In what follows I discuss various alternatives to the Linear Model.

3. The Radial Model

Suppose, for the sake of simplicity, that there are only three possible beings: an aardvark, an escalator and God. How can God be the greatest possible being among them with the assumption that an aardvark and an escalator are not value commensurable? Under this circumstance God can be the greatest possible being only if He is value commensurable with an aardvark and an escalator individually and independently. That is, while an aardvark is value commensurable with God and an escalator is value commensurable with God, these relations are independent of one another. This example suggests that once universal value commensurability is given

Research: Selected Essays (London: Routledge, 1953), pp. 175-201, at p. 177 (page numbers refer to reprinting).

¹⁰ Morris, ‘The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm’, p. 19.

¹¹ Morris, ‘The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm’, p. 17.

up the following has to be true in order for God to be the being than which no greater can be thought:

Universal divine value commensurability: Every possible being is value commensurable with God.

In fact this is what Morris seems to endorse even though he does not explicate it in detail.¹² The idea is that while such beings as an aardvark and an escalator might not be value commensurable with one another, God is value commensurable with, and greater than, each of them. We can then maintain that God is the being than which no greater can be thought. Universal divine value commensurability is more modest than universal value commensurability because it is entailed by universal value commensurability but not *vice versa*.

Universal divine value commensurability is open to further options concerning the relationships among possible beings other than God. The most straightforward option is the following:

Universal non-divine value incommensurability: No non-divine possible being is value commensurable with any other non-divine possible being.¹³

By ‘non-divine possible beings’ I mean all possible beings except God. If universal non-divine value incommensurability is correct, then, for example, an aardvark is incommensurable with any other non-divine possible being, such as an escalator, an alligator or a human being, even though, given universal divine value

¹² Morris, ‘The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm’, p. 16.

¹³ Even if universal non-divine value incommensurability is true, any non-divine possible being is commensurable with one non-divine possible being, namely that non-divine possible being itself. That is why the phrase ‘any other’ is crucial in the formulation of universal non-divine value incommensurability.

commensurability, it is value commensurable with God and itself. This means that for each possible being there is one 'local chain of being' consisting entirely of that being and God. For example, there is a chain that contains only God and an aardvark and there is another chain that contains only God and an escalator. However, there is no chain that contains more than one non-divine possible being. Let us call this model entailed by the conjunction of universal divine value commensurability and universal non-divine value incommensurability the 'Radial Model'.

The Radial Model: God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in all local chains of being, each of which contains only one non-divine being (Figure 2).

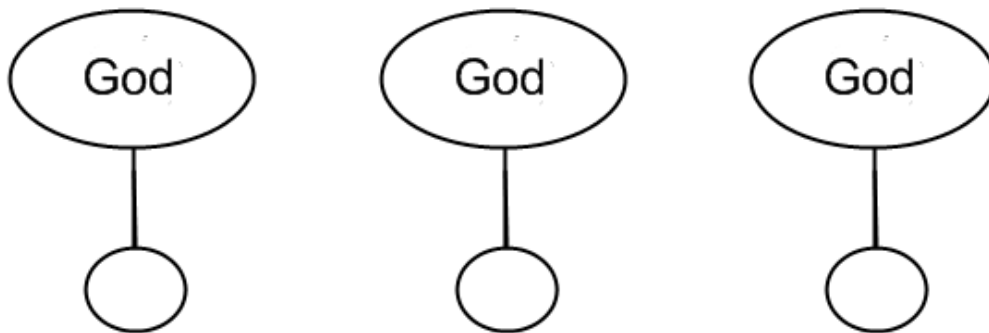


Figure 2

The Radial Model can also be illustrated as follows:

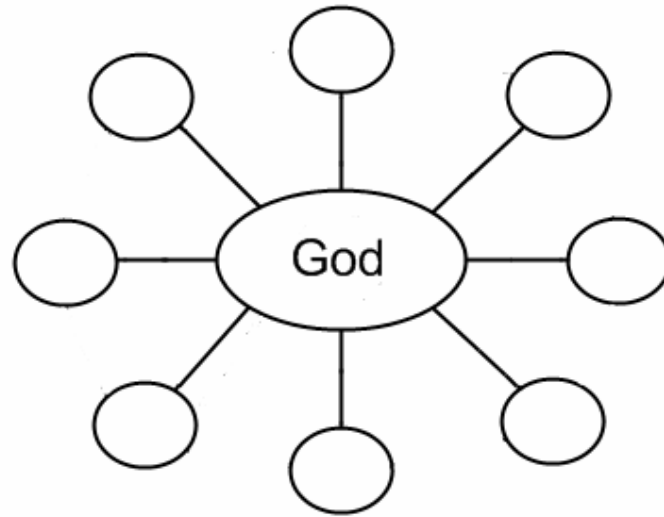


Figure 3

According to the radial model, God is the being than which no greater can be thought because He is greater than each member of the set of all non-divine possible beings, although no non-divine possible being is value commensurable with any other non-divine possible being.

The Radial Model is, however, implausible because universal non-divine value incommensurability is implausible. In order to see this, and in order to advance the discussion, we need to introduce and discuss in detail several important terms.

Great-making property: Property p is a great-making property if it contributes to the greatness of its possessor.

For example, being knowledgeable is, according to most philosophers, a great-making property because the property of being knowledgeable makes a person who possesses it greater than otherwise. As intuitively clear as that example is, it does not explain exactly what makes great-making properties great. Consider the following four different senses of greatness:

- A. *Great for oneself*: For example, the property of being smart is great for a thief to have because it is beneficial to himself.
- B. *Great for the world*: For example, the property of being smart is not great for a thief to have because it is not beneficial to the world.
- C. *Great in one's character/capacity*: For example, the property of being sharp is great for a knife to have *qua* knife.
- D. *Great intrinsically*: For example, the properties of being knowledgeable, powerful, benevolent, beautiful, and so on, are great in themselves, regardless of their greatness in the above three senses.

Anselm does not explain clearly in the *Proslogion* which of the four senses of greatness he has in mind. However, he writes as follows in the *Monologion*:

We have found, then, that there is something supremely good (because all good things are good through some one thing, namely that which is good through itself). But in the same way we arrive at the necessary conclusion that there is something supremely great, since whatsoever is great is great through some one thing, namely that which is great through itself. I do not mean great in terms of size, like some sort of body; but something which, the greater it is, the better or more valuable it is, like wisdom. And since only that which is supremely good can be supremely great, it is necessary that there is something that is best and greatest—i.e. of everything that exists, the supreme.¹⁴

Anselm's use of the phrase 'great through itself' seems to suggest that what Anselm has in mind is the fourth sense of greatness, which is indeed what most theists adopt

¹⁴ Anselm, *Monologion*, in Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (eds.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 5-81, at p. 13.

when they defend Anselmian theism. Thus in what follows I assume that great-making properties are *intrinsically great* properties that contribute to the greatness of their possessors. I should also note that I shall focus on the three individual great-making properties that are most commonly attributed to God: knowledge, power and benevolence. I set aside other candidates for God's great-making properties, such as simplicity, timelessness, incorporeality, and immutability. In this way, I can eliminate unnecessary complexity in my discussion and avoid further disputes over God's individual great-making properties.

Let me introduce several additional terms.

Extensive equality: x is extensively equal to y if and only if both of the following are true: (i) x has all the great-making properties that y has; (ii) neither x nor y has any other great-making property.

When we talk about the extensity of the great-making properties of possible beings, we are not concerned with their intensity. We are concerned only with whether these beings share the same great-making properties, regardless of their intensity. For example: Suppose that being A has only two great-making properties $G1$ and $G2$ and that another being B also has only the same great-making properties $G1$ and $G2$. Regardless of the intensity of each of the great-making properties that these beings have, A and B are extensively equal (Figure 4).

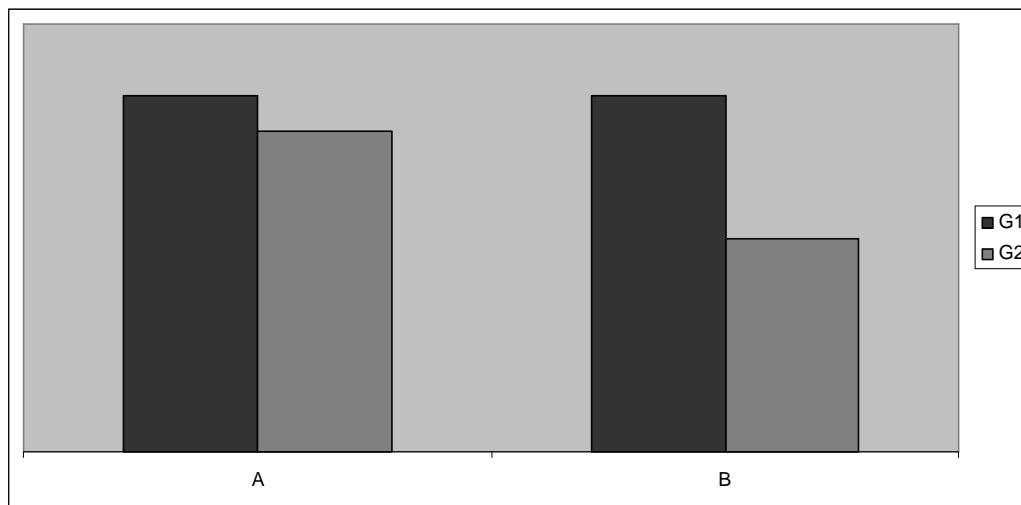


Figure 4

One might claim that in order to determine extensive equality we need to check also ‘worse-making properties’, i.e., properties that undermine the greatness of their possessors. For example, a being that has two great-making properties *G1* and *G2* but no worse-making properties might be judged as being extensively superior to another being that has two great-making properties *G1* and *G2* as well as a worse-making property *W1*, where *W1* cancels out the entirety of, say, *G1*. I set this point aside for the sake of simplicity. We can assume that when I talk about great-making properties in this paper this kind of calculation has already been made.

Extensive superiority: *x* is extensively superior to *y* if and only if both of the following are true: (i) *x* has all the great-making properties that *y* has; (ii) *x* has some great-making properties that *y* does not have.¹⁵

¹⁵ I borrow the terms ‘extensive superiority’ and ‘intensive superiority’ from Broad (1939), p. 177.

For example: Suppose that A has two great-making properties $G1$ and $G2$ while B has only one great-making property $G1$. Regardless of the intensity of each of the great-making properties these beings have, A is extensively superior to B (Figure 5).

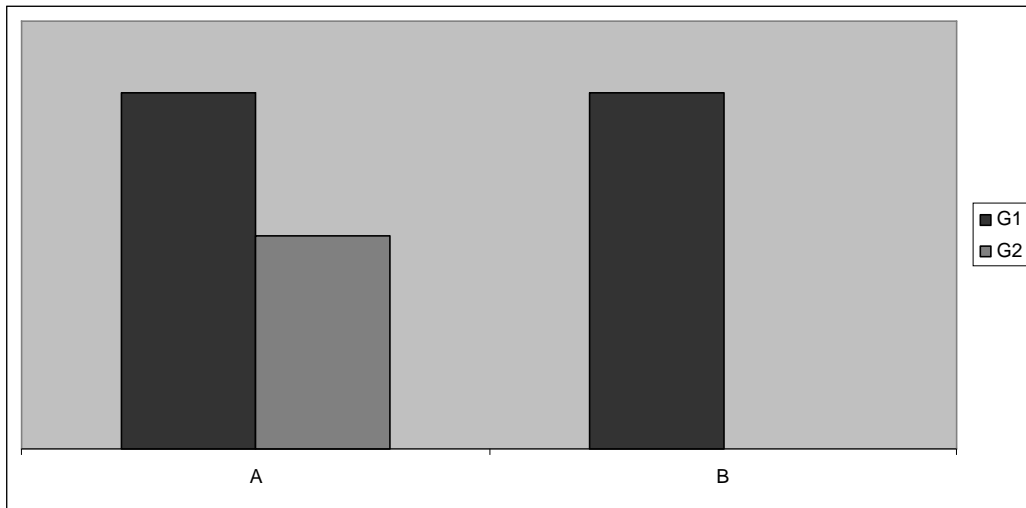


Figure 5

Extensive inferiority: x is extensively inferior to y if and only if both of the following are true: (i) y has all the great-making properties that x has; (ii) y has some great-making properties that x does not have.

For example: Suppose that A has only one great-making property $G1$ while B has two great-making properties $G1$ and $G2$. Regardless of the intensity of the great-making properties these beings have, A is extensively inferior to B (Figure 6).

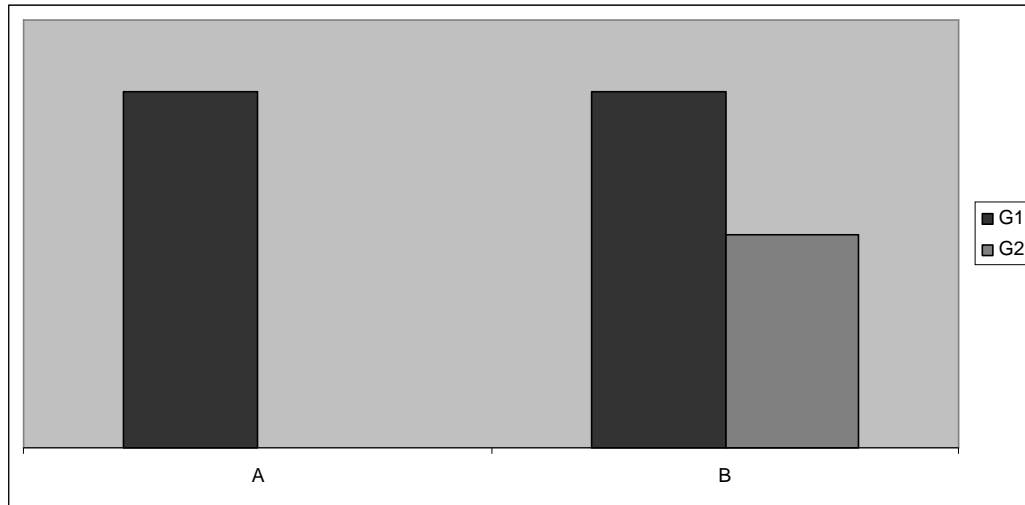


Figure 6

The extensity of great-making properties is not the only measure of the greatness of a being. In order to measure it we need to examine the intensity of great-making properties as well:

Intensive equality: x is intensively equal to y if and only if both of the following are true: (i) x is extensively equal to y ; (ii) great-making properties are present in x at the same degree of intensity as in y .

For example: Suppose that A has only two great-making properties $G1$ and $G2$ and B has also only two great-making properties $G1$ and $G2$ and that A and B have these two great-making properties at the exact same degree of intensity. In this case A and B are intensively (and also extensively) equal (Figure 7).

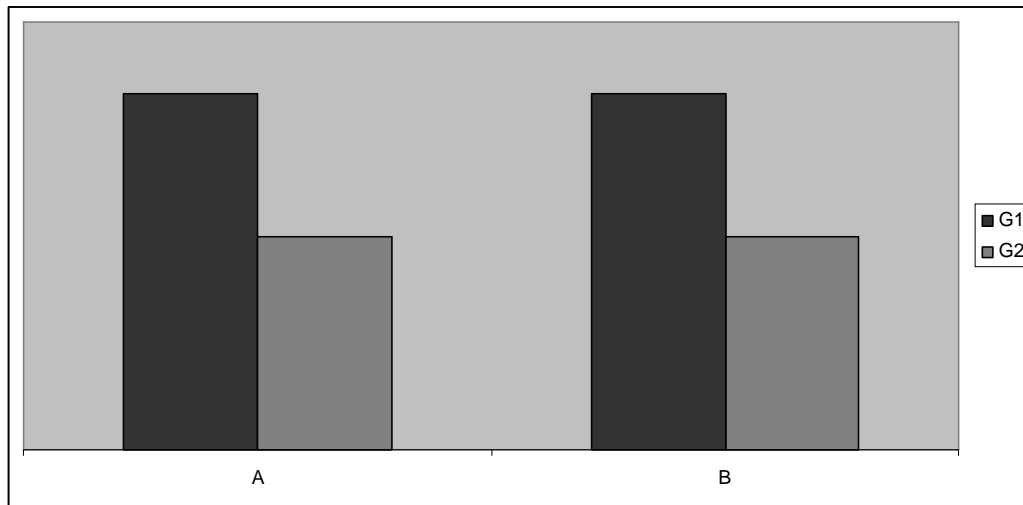


Figure 7

Intensive superiority: x is intensively superior to y if and only if all of the following are true: (i) x is either extensively equal or extensively superior to y ; (ii) one or more of the great-making properties that is common to both is present in x at a higher degree of intensity than in y ; and (iii) none of the great-making properties that is common to both is present in y at a higher degree of intensity than in x .

For example: Suppose that A has only two great-making properties $G1$ and $G2$ and B also has only two great-making properties $G1$ and $G2$. However, while $G1$ is present in both A and B at the exact same degree of intensity, $G2$ is present in A at a higher degree of intensity than in B . In this case A is intensively superior to B (even though they are extensively equal; Figure 8).

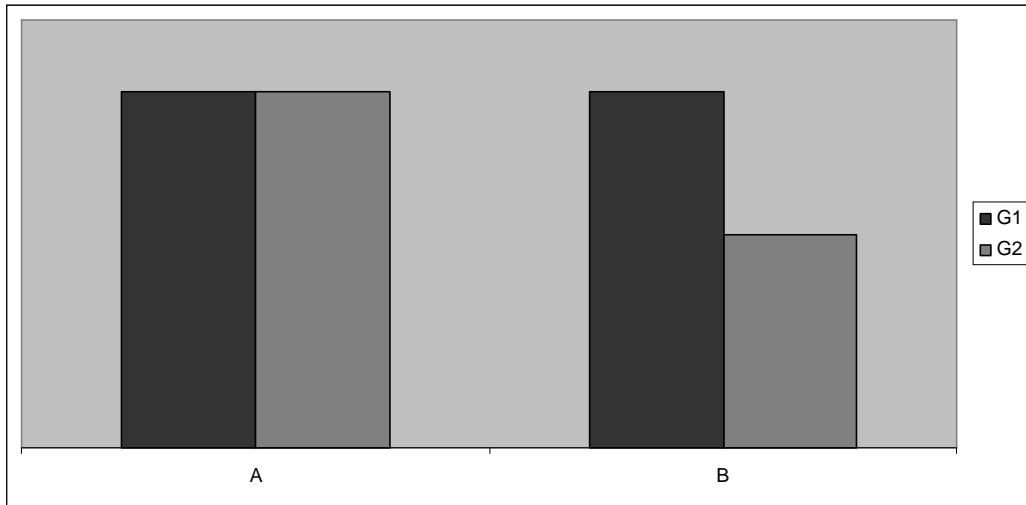


Figure 8

Intensive inferiority: x is intensively inferior to y if and only if all of the following are true: (i) x is either extensively equal or extensively inferior to y ; (ii) one or more of the great-making properties that is common to both is present in x at a lower degree of intensity than in y ; and (iii) none of the great-making properties that is common to both is present in y at a lower degree of intensity than in x .

For example: Suppose that A has only two great-making properties $G1$ and $G2$ and B also has only two great-making properties $G1$ and $G2$. However, while $G1$ is present in both A and B at the exact same degree of intensity, $G2$ is present in B at a higher degree of intensity than in A . In this case A is intensively inferior to B (even though they are extensively equal; Figure 9).

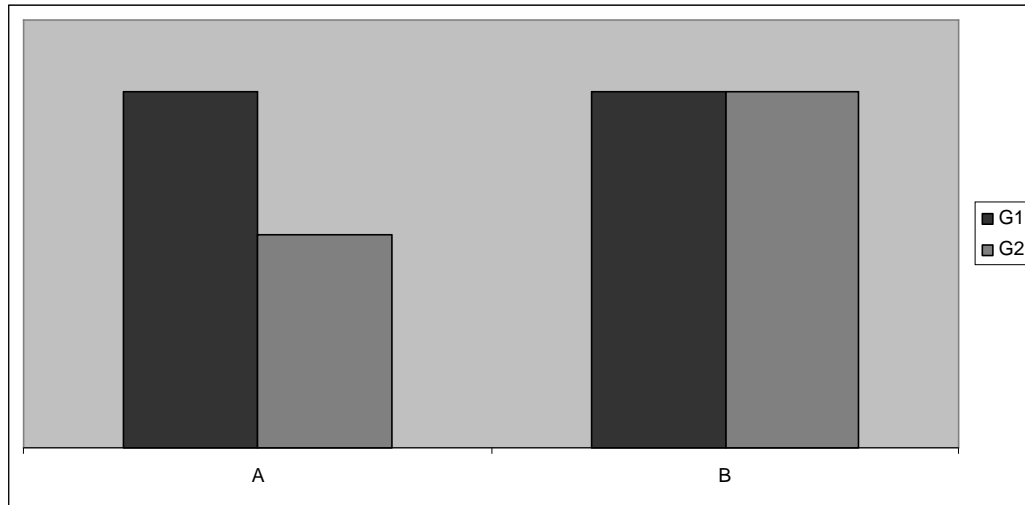


Figure 9

With these terms in mind, consider the following twelve possible combinations of relationships between x and y .

- (1) x is extensively equal and intensively equal to y .
- (2) x is extensively equal and intensively superior to y .
- (3) x is extensively equal and intensively inferior to y .

- (4) x is extensively superior and intensively equal to y .
- (5) x is extensively superior and intensively superior to y .
- (6) x is extensively superior and intensively inferior to y .

- (7) x is extensively inferior and intensively equal to y .
- (8) x is extensively inferior and intensively superior to y .
- (9) x is extensively inferior and intensively inferior to y .

- (10) x is neither extensively superior, equal nor inferior to y .

(11) x is extensively superior to y and the great-making properties that x and y share are present in x at the same degree of intensity as in y (in this case x is neither intensively superior, equal, nor inferior to y).

(12) x is extensively inferior to y and the great-making properties that x and y share are present in y at the same degree of intensity as in x (in this case x is neither intensively superior, equal, nor inferior to y).

(13) Other cases than (11) and (12) in which x is either extensively superior, equal or inferior to y but x is neither intensively superior, equal, nor inferior to y .

In case (1) x and y are *genuinely equal*, which means that the greatnesses of x and y are overall equal. In case (2) x is *genuinely superior* to y , which means that x is overall superior to y . In case (3) x is *genuinely inferior* to y , which means that x is overall inferior to y . Case (4) is impossible to obtain because if x is intensively equal, then x has to be extensively equal as well. In case (5) x is *genuinely superior* to y . Case (6) is impossible to obtain because if x is intensively inferior to y , then x has to be either extensively equal or extensively inferior to y . Case (7) is also impossible to obtain because if x is intensively equal to y , then x has to be extensively equal as well. Case (8) is, again, impossible to obtain because if x is intensively superior to y , then x has to be either extensively equal or extensively superior to y . In case (9) x is *genuinely inferior* to y . In case (10) x and y are value incommensurable. In case (11) x is *genuinely superior* to y because x has all the great-making properties that y has at the same degree of intensity and, moreover, x has some extra great-making properties that y does not have. In case (12) x is *genuinely inferior* to y because y has all the great-making properties that x has at the same degree of intensity, moreover, y has some extra great-making properties that x does not have. In cases (13) x and y are value incommensurable.

The above discussion assumes that a being's overall greatness is determined by how closely the being's great-making properties approach maximum extensity and intensity. This is based on the Anselmian idea mentioned above, according to which God's property of being that than which no greater can be thought subsumes individual great-making properties that God has, such as omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence. One might claim, however, that a being's overall greatness should be determined by how closely the being's great-making properties approach *optimum* intensity and extensity because, for example, the optimum amount of power might not coincide with the maximum amount of power. I set this point aside for the sake of simplicity. I should note, however, that my discussion can be reformulated in terms of optimality rather than maximality.

The above discussion also suggests that each chain of being includes tokens, rather than types, of beings. For example, they include such tokens as John F. Kennedy and Lassie, the television dog, rather than such types as 'human being' and 'dog', because distinct tokens of the same type could exhibit different degrees of greatness depending on the extensity and intensity of their individual great-making properties.

Let us return to the Radial Model, according to which God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in all local chains of being, each of which contains only one non-divine being. The Radial Model is based on universal non-divine value incommensurability, according to which no non-divine possible being is value commensurable with any other non-divine possible being. The above discussion shows clearly why universal non-divine value incommensurability fails, thus refuting the Radial Model as well. As we have seen,

there are possible cases, such as instances of (1), (2), (3), (5), (9), (11) and (12), in which two non-divine possible beings are clearly value commensurable.

4. The Extended Radial Model

The Linear Model seems to be untenable because universal value commensurability—the thesis that every possible being is value commensurable—seems too strong. On the other hand, the Radial Model seems to be untenable because while universal divine value commensurability—the thesis that every possible being is value commensurable with God—is plausible, universal non-divine value incommensurability—the thesis that no non-divine possible being is value commensurable with any other non-divine possible being—seems too strong. We therefore need to construct a new model which is (i) free from universal value commensurability, (ii) free from universal non-divine value incommensurability, and (iii) consistent with universal divine value commensurability. In addition to universal divine value commensurability, such a model can rely on the following thesis:

Partial non-divine value commensurability: Some non-divine possible beings are value commensurable with one another.

Partial non-divine value commensurability lies between universal value commensurability and universal non-divine value incommensurability. Partial non-divine value commensurability entails that even if universal value commensurability is false some non-divine possible beings remain value commensurable among themselves. One might plausibly say, for example, that while an aardvark and an escalator are not value commensurable an aardvark and a hedgehog are value commensurable.

An interesting question concerning partial non-divine value commensurability is whether there is a non-divine possible being such that it is not value commensurable with any other non-divine possible being. The answer seems to be negative because it is reasonable to think that for any being there is at least one being that jointly satisfies either (1), (2), (3), (5), (9), (11) or (12). (An easy way to see this is to realise the following: For any non-divine possible being x we can always conceive of another non-divine possible being y such that y is nearly as great as x , except it has one more great-making property than x does. This is an instance of (12).) This means that, contrary to what the Radial Model implies, there is no local chain of being that contains God and only one non-divine possible being. Thus any local chain of being will always include God and multiple non-divine possible beings. This observation suggests that the following thesis is true:

Universal partial non-divine value commensurability: Every non-divine possible being is value commensurable with one or more other non-divine possible beings.

Partial non-divine value commensurability remains true but universal partial non-divine commensurability, which is more specific, is also true. Given universal partial non-divine commensurability, we can conclude that there are many local chains of being such that (i) every possible being occupies a link in at least one of the chains, (ii) each of the chains contains multiple non-divine possible beings, and (iii) God occupies the top link in all of the chains. The Radial Model can therefore be revised as follows:

The Extended Radial Model: God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in all local chains of being, each of which contains multiple non-divine beings (Figure 10).

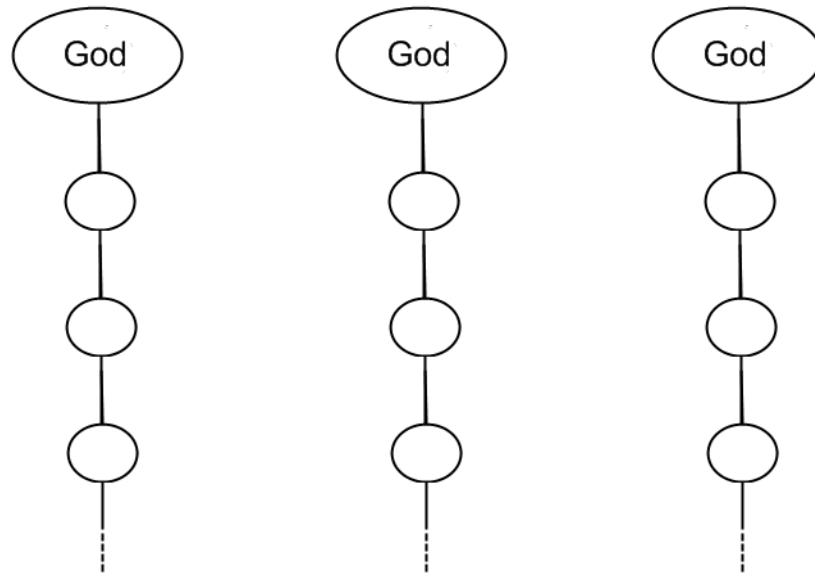


Figure 10

Contrary to the Radial Model, it is possible in the Extended Radial Model for one being to occupy multiple local chains. The Extended Radial Model can also be illustrated as follows:

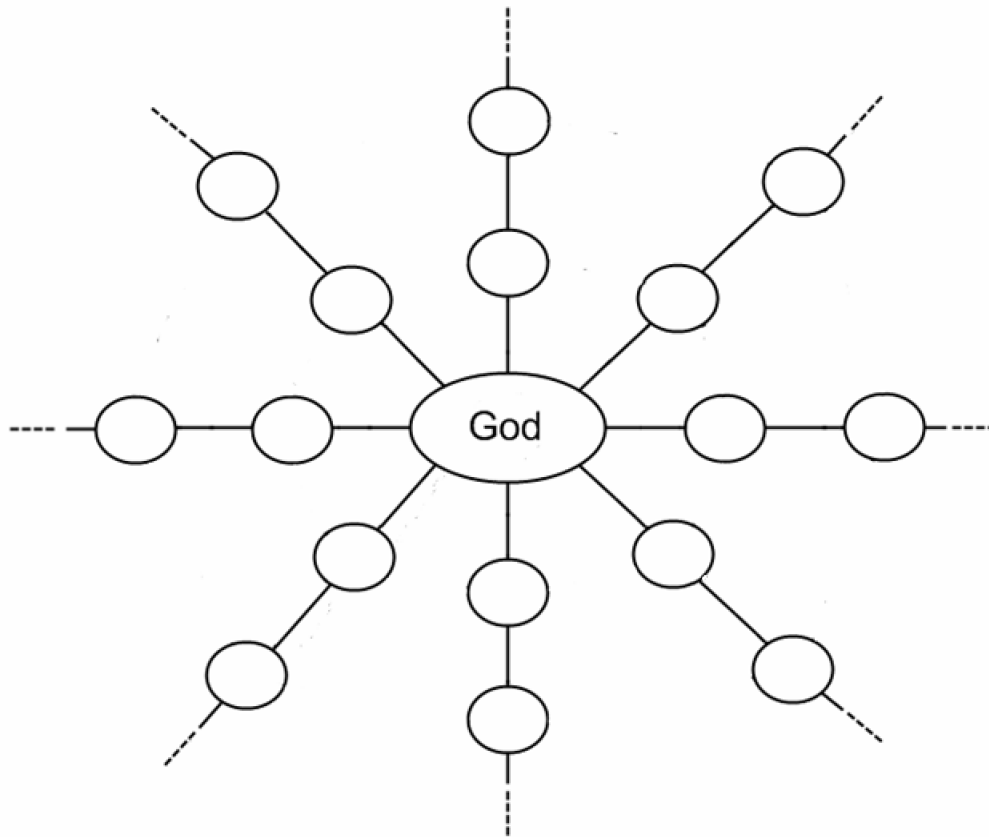


Figure 11

It is interesting to note that while we have attempted to avoid the Linear Model, which is based on the infamous theses of universal value commensurability and the great chain of being, we have settled on something that is not too dissimilar to that model. Instead of having a potentially infinitely long great chain of being with God at the top, the Extended Radial Model allows for many local chains of being, some of which could be infinitely long, with God at the top of each. In fact, the Linear Model is a special version of the Extended Radial Model, a version in which universal partial non-divine value commensurability coincides with universal value commensurability and there is only one 'local' chain, namely, the great chain of being.

5. The Comprehensive Greatness View

We have seen so far that once we give up the Linear Model, which relies on universal value commensurability and the great chain of being, the Extended Radial Model allows for the Anselmian notion of God as the being than which no greater can be thought. The Extended Radial Model is, however, still incomplete because it does not tell us exactly how God manages to occupy the top link in all local chains. In particular, it does not tell us what sort of relationship God has with other possible beings in this model. In this and the following sections I address this issue.

In Section 3 we saw that, in order for x to be genuinely superior to y , x needs to satisfy one of the following conditions:

- (2) x is extensively equal and intensively superior to y .
- (5) x is extensively superior and intensively superior to y .
- (11) x is extensively superior to y and the great-making properties that x and y share are present in x at the same degree of intensity as in y (in this case x is neither intensively superior, equal, nor inferior to y).

This means that in order for God to be genuinely superior to any other possible being He needs to satisfy one of the above three conditions jointly with each one of every possible being except Himself. This observation suggests the following view:

The Comprehensive Greatness View: God occupies the top link in all local chains of being because, for every non-divine possible being y , God is either: (i) intensively superior and extensively equal/superior to y or (ii) extensively superior to y and the great-making properties that God and y share are present in God at the same degree of intensity as in y .

The view is named as such because in order to satisfy either (i) or (ii) God must, first of all, be either extensively equal to or extensively superior to all possible beings.

This means that God has to have all possible great-making properties that at least one being has, that is, all possible great-making properties *simpliciter*.¹⁶ With this view in hand, the Extended Radial Model can be advanced as follows: God has all the great-making properties that other possible beings have and, moreover, He is genuinely superior to each one of every possible being. That is why He occupies the top link in all local chains of being, which is equivalent to saying that He is the being than which no greater can be thought.

6. Objections to the Comprehensive Greatness View

The Comprehensive Greatness View is plausible at first sight, but it faces two major objections, which I call the ‘extensity objection’ and the ‘intensity objection’. In this section I address these objections. I argue that we can successfully refute the extensity objection; whether or not we can also refute the intensity objection remains controversial.

(i) *The extensity objection*

Again, the Comprehensive Greatness View requires that God possess all possible great-making properties. However, the extensity objection points out that there are many great-making properties that God cannot have. As I mentioned earlier, property *p* is a great-making property if it contributes to the greatness of its possessor. So, for

¹⁶ Schlesinger seems to agree with this view when he says, ‘for any property P whether the putative [Anselmian] being does or does not possess P: if having P contributes to the excellence of a thing that does have P, then an absolutely perfect being has P; otherwise the being does not have P’. George N. Schlesinger, *New Perspectives on Old-Time Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 16.

example, one might say that having a healthy heart is a great-making property because it contributes to the greatness of a person who possesses it. A person would be greater with a healthy heart than otherwise. To take another example, one might say that being a fast runner is a great-making property because, again, it contributes to the greatness of a person who possesses it. A person would be greater as a fast runner than otherwise. However, God surely does not have these great-making properties. The Comprehensive Greatness View is, therefore, wrong in saying that God has all possible great-making properties. This is the extensity objection.

It is questionable whether the properties of having a healthy heart and being a fast runner are relevant to Anselmian theism because they do not seem to be intrinsically great. However, I assume, in favour of the extensity objection, that they *are* intrinsically great.

In response to the extensity objection one might claim that God does not have to have such great-making properties as having a healthy heart or being a fast runner because only *key* great-making properties are crucial in determining the greatness of a being and God has all of them. The term ‘key’ is vague but it is plausible to assume that key great-making properties include attributes that are traditionally ascribed to God, such as knowledge, power and benevolence, at maximum intensity. The main difficulty with such a response is that the use of the term ‘key attributes’ seems not only vague but also *arbitrary*; it is not clear why only certain great-making properties matter and others do not.

Fortunately, proponents of the Comprehensive Greatness View have a better response to the extensity objection. This response relies on a distinction between what I call ‘relative great-making properties’ and ‘absolute great-making properties’:

Relative great-making property: Property p is a relative great-making property if its acquisition would improve the greatness of some beings but would worsen the greatness of some other being.¹⁷

Absolute great-making property: Property p is an absolute great-making property if its acquisition would improve the greatness of some beings and would not worsen the greatness of any other being.

This distinction allows us to focus non-arbitrarily on some specific great-making properties that God should have. Consider, again, the property of having a healthy heart. This is only a relative great-making property because while its possession would improve the greatness of many people it would worsen the greatness of God by undermining some of His other great-making properties. For example, it would be likely to undermine God's omnipotence and incorporeality.¹⁸ Consider, on the other hand, for example, the property of being omnibenevolent. Assuming that omnibenevolence is a coherent notion, this is an absolute great-making property because its possession would improve the greatness of many beings, such as people

¹⁷ Perhaps there is a parallel definition of a relative worse-making property. In that case, some properties might be both relative great-making and relative worse-making; improving the greatness of some possible beings but leaving others worse off. Thanks to XXXX for this point.

¹⁸ One might claim that it is impossible for God to have a healthy heart because, necessarily, He literally does not have any heart. That is, the counterfactual, 'if God were to have a healthy heart, then . . .' is always counterpossible. In order to avoid this complication, we can refer to another being that is only contingently omnipotent and contingently incorporeal when we determine whether the property of having a healthy heart is a relative great-making property.

and other non-divine beings, and would not worsen the greatness of any other being, including God Himself.

One might claim that omnibenevolence is not an absolute great-making property because such a property is so overwhelmingly great that a non-divine being could not acquire it without diminishing—rather than increasing—its overall greatness, and possibly even threatening its very existence. I do not find such a claim plausible. Perhaps if a non-divine being were to acquire omnibenevolence the overwhelming greatness of the property might slightly diminish the intensity or extensity of its other great-making properties, but (assuming that omnibenevolence is a coherent concept) I find no reason to believe that acquiring omnibenevolence would diminish the overall greatness or even the existence of a non-divine being.¹⁹

By appealing to the distinction between relative great-making properties and absolute great-making properties we can claim as follows: The extensity objection fails because the mere fact that God cannot have all possible great-making properties does not undermine the Comprehensive Greatness View. The extensity objection needs to show, but fails to show, that God cannot have all *absolute* great-making properties.

(ii) The intensity objection

The second objection to the Comprehensive Greatness View is the intensity objection, which is potentially more troublesome than the extensity objection. The intensity objection says that the Comprehensive Greatness View cannot be sustained because there are powerful arguments that purport to show that God cannot have even such

¹⁹ XXXX.

absolute great-making properties as omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence. As I have explained elsewhere, there are largely three types of such arguments.²⁰

Arguments of Type A purport to show that at least one of the absolute great-making properties is internally incoherent. The paradox of the stone is a classic example of this kind.²¹ It runs as follows. Either God can create a stone that He cannot lift or He cannot create a stone that He cannot lift. If He can create a stone that He cannot lift, then He is not omnipotent. If He cannot create a stone that He cannot lift, then, again, He is not omnipotent. Hence, the concept of omnipotence is internally incoherent; no one, not even God, can be omnipotent.

To take another example, Patrick Grim purports to prove the incoherence of omniscience by showing that there is no set of all truths.²² Suppose, for the sake of

²⁰ XXXX.

²¹ For discussions of the paradox of the stone, see Harry Frankfurt, 'The Logic of Omnipotence', *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 73 (1964), pp. 262-263; George I. Mavrodes, 'Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence', *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 72 (1963), pp. 221-223; C. Wade Savage, 'The Paradox of the Stone', *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 76 (1967), pp. 74-79; Jordan Howard Sobel, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and against Beliefs in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²² Patrick Grim, 'There Is No Set of All Truths', *Analysis*, Vol. 44 (1984), pp. 206–208; Patrick Grim, 'On Sets and Scenarios: A Reply to Menzel', *Analysis*, Vol. 46 (1986), pp. 186–191; Patrick Grim, 'On Omniscience and a "Set of All Truths": A Reply to Bringsjord', *Analysis*, Vol. 50 (1990), pp. 271–276; Patrick Grim, *The Incomplete Universe: Totality, Knowledge and Truth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991); Patrick Grim, 'The Being That Knew Too Much', *International*

reductio, that there is a set T of all truths; $P(T)$ is its powerset. There exists then a unique truth corresponding to each element s_i of $P(T)$. For example, to each s_i there corresponds a unique truth as follows:

$$s_i \in P(T)$$

This means that there are at least as many elements of T as there are elements of $P(T)$. This contradicts Cantor's theorem, according to which the powerset of any set contains more elements than the set itself. Hence, Grim says, there is no set of all truths. Given that omniscience is supposed to subsume all truths, Grim concludes that the concept of omniscience is internally incoherent.

If an argument of Type A is successful, then at least one member of the attribute set comprising omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence is internally incoherent. The intensity objection says here that the Comprehensive Greatness View

Journal for Philosophy of Religion, Vol. 47 (2000), pp. 141–154; Patrick Grim, 'Impossibility Arguments', in Michael Martin (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 199-214. For discussions of Grim's argument see John E. Abbruzzese, 'The Coherence of Omniscience: A Defence', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 41 (1997), pp. 25-34; J. C. Beall, 'A Neglected Response to the Grim Result', *Analysis* Vol. 60 (2000), pp. 38-41; Richard Cartwright, 'Speaking of Everything', *Noûs*, Vol. 28 (1994), pp. 1-20; Gary Mar, 'Why 'Cantorian' Arguments against the Existence of God Do Not Work', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 33 (1993), pp. 429-442; Alvin Plantinga and Patrick Grim, 'Truth, Omniscience, and Cantorian Arguments: An Exchange', *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 71 (1993), pp. 267-306; Keith Simmons, 'On an Argument against Omniscience', the American Philosophical Association Central Division (1990).

is false because arguments of Type A show that God cannot possess such absolute great-making properties as omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence. This claim is, however, untenable. Suppose, for example, that the paradox of the stone is indeed successful and the concept of omnipotence is internally incoherent. In this case God cannot have the property of being omnipotent. However, this is not necessarily bad news for the Comprehensive Greatness View because what the paradox shows is merely that being omnipotent is not an absolute great-making property and that instead something slightly weaker than omnipotence is an absolute great-making property. Anselmian theists can maintain that since omnipotence is an incoherent notion God needs only to be slightly weaker than omnipotent. In order to undermine the Comprehensive Greatness View here one has to show that God cannot possess even the property of being slightly weaker than omnipotent. However, one cannot derive such a conclusion from the paradox of the stone itself. The same point applies to all other arguments of Type A. In sum, the intensity objection cannot be advanced with arguments of Type A. (Some Anselmian theists might claim that if, for example, the property of being slightly weaker than omnipotent—rather than being fully omnipotent—is an absolute great-making property, then we should conclude that God does not exist. This is because, they might say, by definition, God has to be omnipotent. I do not find any merit in such a claim. If the concept of omnipotence is internally incoherent, that is, if no possible being can be omnipotent even in principle, it is unreasonable to demand that God be omnipotent. I address a related point in Section 9.) There are, however, two more types of arguments against the omni-attributes that seem to support the intensity objection more forcefully.

Arguments of Type B say that some of the omni-attributes are mutually inconsistent. The most well-known argument of this type is probably the so-called

argument from God's inability to sin, which purports to show that omnipotence and omnibenevolence are mutually inconsistent.²³ Suppose that God is omnibenevolent. He should then be unable to perform morally wrong or sinful actions, such as killing hundreds of innocent children. Still, if God is omnipotent, He must be able to perform such an action; after all even we can do so in principle. Therefore, God cannot be omnipotent and omnibenevolent at the same time.

There is also an argument which purports to show that omniscience and omnipotence are mutually inconsistent.²⁴ If God is omniscient, then He must understand fully what fear and frustration are. However, given a modest form of concept empiricism, an omnipotent God cannot understand fear and frustration fully because He, who is omnipotent, cannot experience what it is like to suffer fear and frustration.²⁵

²³ For discussions of this argument, see T. J. Mawson, 'Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection are Compatible: A Reply to Morrision', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 38 (2002), pp. 215-223; Wes Morrision, 'Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are they Compatible?', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 37 (2001a), pp. 143-160; Wes Morrision, 'Omnipotence and the Anselmian God', *Philo*, Vol. 4 (2001b), pp. 7-20; Wes Morrision, 'Are Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection Compatible?: Reply to Mawson', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 39 (2003), pp. 441-449; Pike, 'Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin'.

²⁴ David Blumenfeld, 'On the Compossibility of the Divine Attributes', *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 34 (1978), pp. 91-103.

²⁵ For defences of similar arguments, see Selmer Bringsjord, 'Grim on Logic and Omniscience', *Analysis*, Vol. 49 (1989), pp. 186-189; Michael Martin, 'A Disproof of the God of the Common Man', *Question*, Vol. 7 (1974), pp. 115-124, repr. in Michael

Arguments of the Type C purport to show that the set consisting of the omni-attributes is mutually inconsistent with a certain contingent fact. The most prominent example of such an argument, which also happens to be *the* most prominent argument against the existence of God, is the argument from evil.²⁶ It seems obvious that, as a

Martin and Ricki Monnier (eds.), *The Impossibility of God* (Amherst New York: Prometheus Books, 2003), pp. 232-241; Michael Martin, 'Conflicts Between the Divine Attributes' in his *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), repr. in Michael Martin and Ricki Monnier (eds.), *The Impossibility of God* (Amherst New York: Prometheus Books, 2003), pp. 242-257; Michael Martin, 'Omniscience and Incoherency' in Ghita Holmstrom-Hintikka (ed), *Medieval Philosophy and Modern Times* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), pp. 17-34; John Lachs, 'Omniscience', *Dialogue*, Vol. 1 (1963a), pp. 400-402; John Lachs, 'Professor Prior on Omniscience', *Philosophy*, Vol. 37 (1963b), pp. 361-364. For discussions of these arguments, see Torin Alter, 'On Two Alleged Conflicts Between Divine Attributes', *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 19 (2002), pp. 47-57; Michael Beaty and Charles Taliaferro, 'God and Concept Empiricism', *Southwest Philosophy Review*, Vol. 6 (1990), pp. 97-105; Yujin Nagasawa, 'Divine Omniscience and Experience: A Reply to Alter', *Ars Disputandi*, Vol. 3 (2003) (<http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000098/index.html>); Yujin Nagasawa, *God and Phenomenal Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); A. N. Prior, 'Rejoinder to Professor Lachs on Omniscience', *Philosophy*, Vol. 37 (1963), pp. 365-366.

²⁶ According to Daniel Hill, more than 3,600 articles and books have been written on the problem of evil since 1960 alone. See Daniel Hill, 'What's New in Philosophy of Religion?' *Philosophy Now*, Vol. 21 (1998), pp. 30-33, at p. 32. For critical

matter of contingent fact, there is evil in the actual world. If, however, God has such attributes as omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence there should be no evil. If God is omniscient, then He must know that there is evil in the actual world; if God is omnipotent, then He must be able to eliminate evil from the actual world; and if He is omnibenevolent, He must be willing to eliminate evil from the actual world.

To take another example, what I call the ‘argument from the best possible world’ tries to show that the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent God is inconsistent with the existence of the actual world.²⁷ If God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent, then He would create the best possible world. It seems obvious, however, that the actual world is far from the best possible world. Therefore, the argument concludes, God cannot be omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent simultaneously.

Unlike arguments of Type A, arguments of Types B and C do seem to support the intensity objection to the Comprehensive Greatness View. Suppose, for example, that

assessments of the argument from evil see, for example, Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (eds.), *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); Michael L. Peterson (ed.), *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977).

²⁷ For discussions of the argument from the best possible world see, for example, Robert Merrihew Adams, ‘Must God Create the Best?’, *Philosophical Review* Vol. 81 (1972), pp. 317-332; Klaas J. Kraay, ‘Creation, World-Actualization, and God’s Choice Among Possible Worlds’, *Philosophy Compass* Vol. 3 (2008), pp. 854-872.

the argument from God's inability to sin is correct in saying that omnipotence and omnibenevolence are indeed mutually inconsistent. In this case, Anselmian theists have to compromise either God's omnipotence or omnibenevolence in order to maintain the existence of God as the being than which no greater can be thought. Let us assume that omnipotence should be compromised.²⁸ In this case while God is omnibenevolent He is not really omnipotent; His power extends only as far as it is consistent with omnibenevolence. If so, however, the Comprehensive Greatness View might be wrong, because being as powerful as possible consistently with omnibenevolence might not be an absolute great-making property. If there could be a non-omnibenevolent being that is omnipotent or very nearly omnipotent, the property of being as powerful as possible consistently with omnibenevolence diminishes, rather than maintains or enhances, the greatness of the being in question. Yet, by definition, no absolute great-making property diminishes the greatness of any being. The Comprehensive Greatness View, therefore, appears to fail. God does not seem to be able to have all absolute great-making properties.

The intensity objection is certainly more forceful than the extensity objection but defending it is not so easy. First, in order for the intensity objection to succeed at least one of the arguments of Types B and C has to be sound. However, many powerful objections have been proposed to refute these arguments. If one wants to defend the

²⁸ John Bishop makes this move in response to the problem of evil and Wes Morriston does in response to the argument from God's inability to sin. See: John Bishop, 'Evil and the Concept of God', *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 22 (1993), pp. 1-15; Wes Morriston, 'Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are they Compatible?', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 37 (2001a); Wes Morriston, 'Omnipotence and the Anselmian God', *Philo*, Vol. 4 (2001b), pp. 7-20.

intensity objection, therefore, one has to refute conclusively all existing objections to at least one of the arguments, which is a difficult task. Second, once proponents of the Comprehensive Greatness View compromise one of the omni-attributes, the onus of proof is on opponents of the thesis to show that the attribute with the compromised intensity is not an absolute great-making property. For example, once proponents of the Comprehensive Greatness View admit that God is not omnipotent and that He is only as powerful as possible consistently with omnibenevolence, opponents have to show, in order to advance the intensity objection, that the property of being as powerful as possible consistently with omnibenevolence is not an absolute great-making property. This is not an easy task either, especially, but not only, if an argument of Type A succeeds in showing that the concept of omnipotence is internally incoherent. In sum: While the intensity objection is a potential threat to the Comprehensive Greatness View, whether or not it ultimately succeeds remains contentious.

Our conclusion at this point is thus the following: (i) The Extended Radial Model seems tenable. God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in all local chains of being, each of which contains multiple non-divine beings. (ii) The Comprehensive Greatness View seems plausible. God occupies the top link in all local chains of being because for every non-divine possible being y , with respect to all absolute great-making properties, God is either intensively superior and extensively equal/superior to y or extensively superior to y and the absolute great-making properties that God and y share are present in God at the same degree of intensity as in y . I believe that the Extended Radial Model with the supplement of the Comprehensive Greatness View allows us to characterise correctly the Anselmian thesis, according to which God is the being than which no greater can

be thought. However, as I have claimed in this section, the intensity objection against the Comprehensive Greatness View remains controversial. In what follows, therefore, I reconsider the Linear Model, which relies on the great chain of being, as a backup option for Anselmian theists. I argue that despite its infamous reputation the Linear Model should be taken seriously because it undercuts the extensity and intensity objections and, also, what is widely regarded as a knock-down objection to the model might not be as compelling as people tend to think.

7. Reconsidering the Linear Model

We have seen in the previous section that the Comprehensive Greatness View faces two objections: (i) the extensity objection, which purports to show that there are great-making properties that God cannot have; and (ii) the intensity objection, which purports to show that God cannot have all absolute great-making properties at maximum intensity. I have argued that, while the Comprehensive Greatness View can refute the extensity objection, whether it can also refute the intensity objection remains controversial. I argue in this section that Anselmian theists should keep the Linear Model as a backup option because it undercuts both of these objections. Moreover, I argue in the next section that it undercuts what is widely regarded as a knock-down objection to the model.

As I explained in Section 2, the Linear Model says that God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in the great chain of being. This model assumes universal value commensurability, according to which all possible beings are value commensurable one another.

In Section 3 we saw that the Comprehensive Greatness View, which complements the Extended Radial Model, an alternative to the Linear Model, allows that x is genuinely superior to y only in the following cases:

- (2) x is extensively equal and intensively superior to y .
- (5) x is extensively superior and intensively superior to y .
- (11) x is extensively superior to y and the great-making properties that x and y share are present in x at the same degree of intensity as in y (in this case x is neither intensively superior, equal, nor inferior to y).

We also saw that, according to the Comprehensive Greatness View, x and y are not value commensurable in the following cases:

- (10) x is neither extensively superior, equal nor inferior to y .
- (13) Other cases than (11) and (12) in which x is either extensively superior, equal or inferior to y but x is neither intensively superior, equal, nor inferior to y .

The Linear Model agrees with the Comprehensive Greatness View that in cases (2), (5) and (11) x and y are value commensurable and x is genuinely superior to y . However, it disagrees with the Comprehensive Greatness View that x and y are not value commensurable in cases (10) and (13) by advancing the following view:

The Overall Greatness View: The intensity and extensity of one's great-making properties can be converted into its overall greatness.

According to the Overall Greatness View, all possible beings are ultimately extensively equal because we can convert the intensity and extensity of individual great-making properties into the extensity of one great-making property: the overall greatness. Once we determine the overall greatnesses of all possible beings we can show that God is the being than which no greater can be thought. He occupies the top

link in the great chain of being by achieving the combination of the great-making properties that produces the maximum intensity of overall greatness.

The Linear Model, supplemented by the Overall Greatness View, is not vulnerable to the extensity and intensity objections. The model undercuts the extensity objection because whether or not there are some individual great-making properties that God cannot have does not affect the Overall Greatness View, as long as He exhibits the maximum intensity of overall greatness. It also undercuts the intensity objection because whether or not God can simultaneously have all individual great-making properties at maximum intensity does not affect the model, again, as long as He exhibits the maximum intensity of overall greatness. In sum, the Linear Model and the Overall Greatness View are not vulnerable to the extensity and intensity objections because they purport to show that God is overall greater than any other possible being without directly comparing the extensity and intensity of individual great-making properties. If one takes seriously the Anselmian thesis, according to which God is the being than which no greater can be thought, then, as the Linear Model and the Overall Greatness View say, what matters is only whether or not God is *overall* greater than any other possible being. Whether or not He is greater than any other possible being with respect to every great-making property is a separate issue.

8. A Knock-Down Objection to the Linear Model?

As we have seen, the Linear Model, along with the Overall Greatness View, can undercut the extensity and intensity objections. However, it faces an objection of its own. According to this objection, the Linear Model is untenable because it is absurd to assume that the great chain of being, on which the model is based, can be constructed. As I noted at the beginning of this paper, this objection is widely

regarded as a knock-down objection to the Linear Model. In this section, however, I argue that it is far from obvious that this objection succeeds.

Morris puts forward the objection by stating, ‘It just makes no sense to ask which is of greater intrinsic value, an aardvark or an escalator’.²⁹ If the Linear Model and the Overall Greatness View are correct we must be able to locate both an aardvark and an escalator on the same great chain and compare their greatnesses. Morris thinks, however, that that is clearly impossible.

As Katherin A. Rogers says, if we focus only on this specific example, we might be able to reject Morris’s claim by saying as follows: An aardvark and an escalator *are* value commensurable.³⁰ An aardvark is clearly greater than an escalator because, unlike an escalator, it lives a sentient life, which is valuable. However, the point that Morris tries to make is not limited to this specific example. C. D. Broad makes the same point by introducing different examples: (i) the comparison of the greatnesses of a cat and a dog, where the cat can climb trees but the dog cannot, and the dog can track by scent but the cat cannot; (ii) the comparison of the greatnesses of a mathematical genius of very slight musical capacity and a musical genius of very slight mathematical capacity.³¹ Broad says that it is impossible to construct the great

²⁹ Morris, ‘The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm’, p. 17.

³⁰ Katherin A. Rogers (1993), ‘The Medieval Approach to Aardvarks, Escalators, and God’, *Journal of Value Inquiry*, Vol. 27, pp. 63-68, at p. 64.

³¹ Broad, ‘Arguments for the Existence of God’, pp. 177-178. Broad also introduces, as a counterexample to the great chain of being, a case in which one being is extensively superior but intensively inferior to the other. This is puzzling because we cannot obtain such an instance; by definition, if x is intensively inferior to y , then x cannot be extensively superior to y .

chain of being because the beings in these pairs are not value commensurable. (The abilities to track by scent and climb trees do not seem to be relevant to the Anselmian thesis because they are not intrinsically great properties. However, I assume otherwise in favour of Broad.)

Consider case (i). Assume, for the sake of simplicity, that the cat and the dog are genuinely equal, except that the cat has the property of being able to climb trees and that the dog has the property of being able to track by scent. In this case, according to Broad, the cat and the dog are not value commensurable. If we set aside other great-making properties that the cat and the dog have this case can be illustrated as follows:

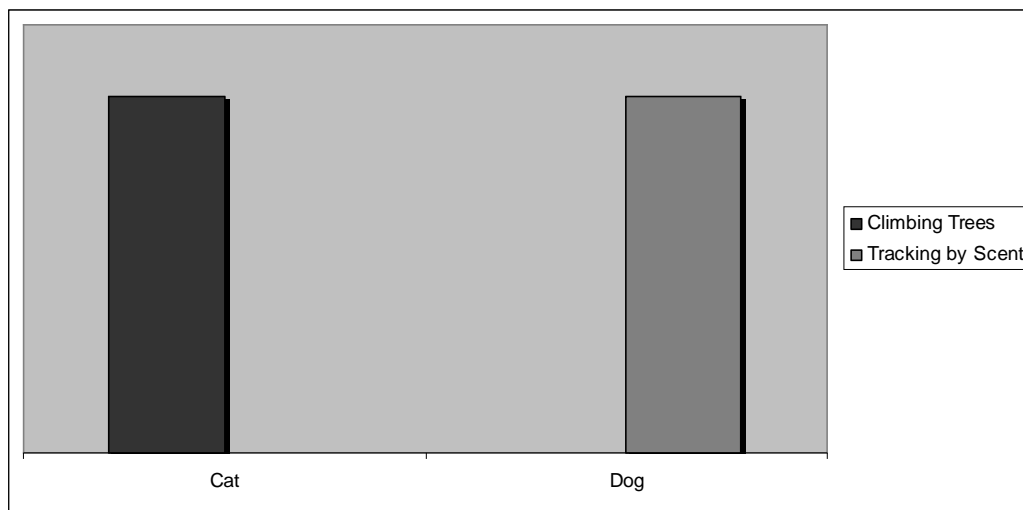


Figure 12

Consider case (ii). Assume, for the sake of simplicity, that the mathematical genius and the musical genius are genuinely equal, except for their mathematical and musical capacities. In this case, according to Broad, the mathematical genius and the musical genius are not value commensurable. If we set aside other great-making properties that the two geniuses have this case can be illustrated as follows:

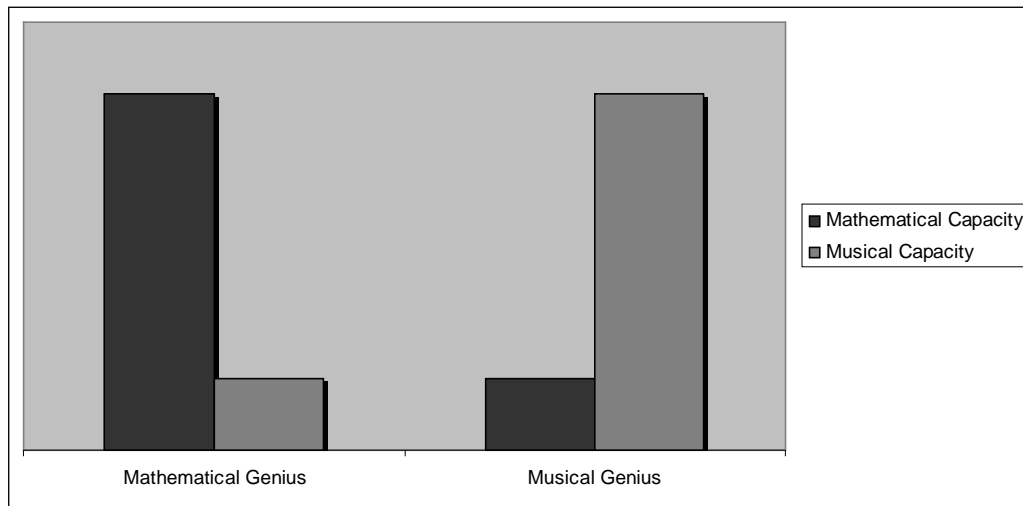


Figure 13

The example of the cat and the dog is an instance of (10) above, where a being is neither extensively superior, equal, nor inferior to another being. The example of the mathematical genius and the musical genius is an instance of (13) above where two beings are extensively equal but neither of them is intensively superior, equal, nor inferior to the other. The Linear Model and the Overall Greatness View reject Broad's objection by saying that two beings are value commensurable even in instances of (10) and (13) because we can convert the intensity and extensity of their great-making properties into the extensity of the overall greatnesses of these beings. So, for example, perhaps the cat is greater than the dog because the calculation of their great-making properties shows that, despite the inability to track by scent, the overall greatness of the cat exceeds the overall greatness of the dog. But how can we motivate such a claim without begging the question against Broad and Morris? One possible route here is to provide an instance of (10) or (13) in which two beings are clearly value commensurable.

Consider, for example, the comparison between the greatneses of Mother Teresa and Hitler. Broad and Morris would say that such a comparison is impossible because this is an instance of (10). That is, there are great-making properties that Mother Teresa has but Hitler does not and *vice versa* (i.e., they are not extensively equal). Even if we assume that Mother Teresa and Hitler do share the exact same great-making properties (i.e., they are extensively equal) it is still impossible to compare their greatneses because while there are great-making properties that are present in Mother Teresa at a higher degree of intensity than in Hitler (e.g., benevolence) there are also great-making properties that are present in Hitler at a higher degree of intensity than in Mother Teresa (e.g., power). That is, if this is not an instance of (10) it is still an instance of (13). It seems reasonable to say, however, that Mother Teresa is overall greater than Hitler because she is significantly more benevolent than Hitler. This example suggests that there are instances of (10) and (13) in which two beings are value commensurable.³²

Broad and Morris might respond to this point as follows: The above example shows only that there are *some* instances of (10) and (13) in which two beings are value commensurable. However, in order to construct the great chain of being we need to show that in *all* instances of (10) and (13) two beings are value commensurable. Morris tries to show that there are indeed instances of (10) and (13)

³² This example appears to imply that there is a separate ranking of great-making properties. Perhaps such a ranking shows, for example, that a significant amount of benevolence is greater than a significant amount of power, but a significant amount of power is greater than a small amount of benevolence, and so on.

in which two beings are not value commensurable, again, when he asserts, ‘It just makes no sense to ask which is of greater intrinsic value, an aardvark or an escalator’.

However, there seem to be at least two possible interpretations of Morris’s assertion that are consistent with the Linear Model. The first interpretation says that it does not seem to make sense to compare the greatnesses of an aardvark and an escalator (or, taking Broad’s example, the greatnesses of the cat and the dog, or the greatnesses of the mathematical genius and the musical genius) because of our intellectual limitations. That is, we cannot confidently compare the greatnesses of these beings because it is extremely difficult for us to list up all the great-making properties (and all the worse-making properties) that they have and perform a highly complex calculation of their overall greatnesses. But this means only that an aardvark and an escalator are not value commensurable *to us*, which is just an epistemic, not a metaphysical, problem. The second interpretation of Morris’s assertion says that it does not make sense to ask which is greater, an aardvark or an escalator, because neither of them is greater than the other. That is, their overall greatnesses are equal. Contrary to what Morris’s assertion implies, the great chain of being does not demand that for any pair of beings one has to be greater than the other. It only demands that for any pair of beings one has to be greater than *or equal* to the other. Given that it seems impossible for us to tell which one is greater between an aardvark and an escalator it might be reasonable to conclude that their overall greatnesses are equal.

9. Further Objections to the Linear Model

Throughout this paper I have defended the Extended Radial Model and, as a backup option, the Linear Model. Before concluding this paper I address some possible objections to my defence of these models.

Objection 1: One might claim that what I have argued so far in defence of the Extended Radial Model and the Linear Model does not help Anselmian theism because it undermines the so-called omniGod thesis that God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent, the one thesis that is essential to Anselmian theism. God is the being than which no greater can be thought, one might say, precisely because He is omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent.

First, as I mentioned earlier, by ‘Anselmian theism’ I mean only a version of theism that endorses the Anselmian thesis, according to which God is the being than which no greater can be thought. The Anselmian thesis is independent of the omniGod thesis.³³ Notice that the ontological argument is also independent of the omniGod thesis; it relies only on the Anselmian thesis. Thus it is not correct to say that the omniGod thesis is essential to Anselmian theism. Second, having said that, my approach is not committed to the claim that God is not omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent. It is only committed to the more modest claim that God exhibits the maximum intensity of overall greatness, which is consistent with the omniGod thesis.

Objection 2: One might argue that my defence of the Linear Model is unattractive because it implies that there are many combinations of great-making properties that generate the maximum intensity of overall greatness. This is bad news for Anselmian theism as a form of monotheism because it entails polytheism.

I grant that Anselmian theism is a form of monotheism because, as I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, I assume that ‘that than which no greater can be thought’ is equivalent to ‘*the* being than which no greater can be thought’. On this assumption Anselmian theists who defend the Linear Model need to maintain that there is exactly

³³ See XXXX.

one combination of great-making properties that generates the maximum intensity of overall greatness and that only one being, God, can achieve such a combination. Anselmian theists do not, however, need to worry too much about the objection in question because the onus of proof is on opponents of Anselmian theism to show that there is more than one such combination (or that while there is only one such combination more than one being can exhibit it); this is difficult to show. It is important to note that this objection arises not necessarily because of the uniqueness of the Linear Model but because of the commitment of Anselmian theists to monotheism in general. That is, a similar objection arises no matter which version of monotheism one endorses, regardless of one's commitment to the Linear Model. This is because any version of monotheism has to say that there is only one unique combination of properties that God needs to have and God is the only possible being that has it.

Objection 3: One might also claim that my assumption that great-making properties are properties that are intrinsically great creates trouble for Anselmian theism. For instance, given that power is an intrinsically great-making property, *A*, a serial killer with significant power, has to be deemed overall greater than *B*, a serial killer with average power (assuming that they are genuinely equal otherwise). This means that *A* occupies a higher link in the great chain or a local chain than the one that *B* occupies. One might claim that this is highly counterintuitive because it entails that *A* is closer to God than *B* is in the chain, which means that *A* is more worshipworthy than *B*.³⁴

First, this objection seems to mix up different senses of greatness that I discussed in Section 3. My assumption about great-making properties indeed entails that *A* is

³⁴ XXXX.

overall greater than *B* with respect to properties that are intrinsically great. This has nothing to do with whether the existence of *A* is more beneficial to the world than that of *B*. Second, the objection assumes that one's degree of worshipworthiness is correlated with one's knowledge, power and benevolence and corresponds to one's location in the great chain or a local chain. What I have said in defence of the Extended Radial Model and the Linear Model does not make such assumptions. (In fact I have argued against such assumptions elsewhere.³⁵)

Objection 4: In defending the Extend Radial Model and the Linear Model I have assumed that that one's overall greatness is determined by the extensity and intensity of great-making properties that one has, such as knowledge, power and benevolence. One might reject this assumption and model the Anselmian thesis as follows: God is the being than which no greater can be thought because He is the only possible being that has holiness. All other possible beings, which lack holiness, are less great than God and as great as one another.

The model in question can be illustrated as follows:

³⁵ XXXX.

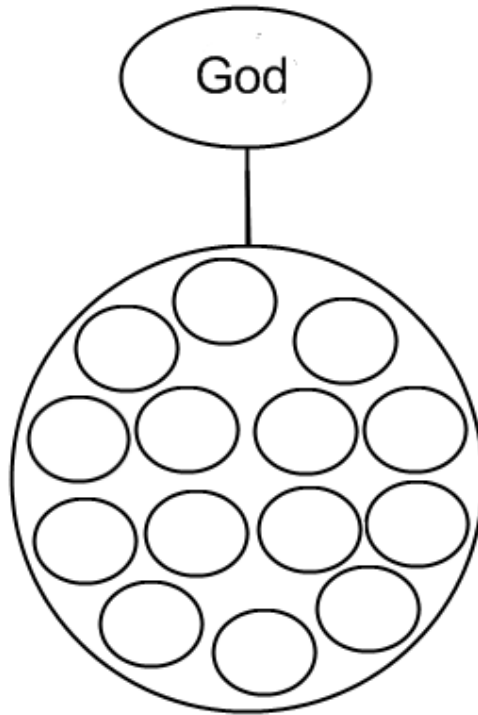


Figure 14

This model is interesting because it can be construed as a unique instance of the Linear Model, in which the great chain consists of only two links and the second link contains all non-divine possible beings. (It can also be construed as a version of the Extended Radial Model in which there is only one ‘local’ chain with two links and, again, the second link contains all non-divine possible beings.) In order to defend this model, however, a number of questions need to be answered. For example: What is holiness? Why can only God have the property of being holy? How is holiness related to God’s greatness? Until these questions are answered, this model cannot be a serious alternative to the Extended Radial Model and the Linear Model.

11. Conclusion

Throughout the paper we have seen various models of the Anselmian thesis, which says that God is the being than which no greater can be thought. First, I defended the Extended Radial Model, according to which God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in all local chains of being, each of which contains multiple non-divine beings. This model is based on universal divine value commensurability, partial non-divine value commensurability and universal partial non-divine value commensurability, and supplemented with the Comprehensive Greatness View. Second, I considered, as a backup option for Anselmian theists, the infamous Linear Model, according to which God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in the great chain of being. This model is based on universal value commensurability and supplemented with the Overall Greatness View. I argued that this model is more attractive than many philosophers have characterised it to be because it undercuts both the extensity and intensity objections. Moreover, I argued that it can respond to what is widely regarded as a knock-down objection.

The Anselmian thesis is a foundation of many debates concerning Judaeo-Christian-Islamic theism. I hope that my defence of the Extended Radial and Linear Models has succeeded in providing a rigorous modelling scheme that makes a correct understanding of the thesis possible.