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In contemporary thought about God, there is a great divide. On one side are those who work in the *a priorist*, Anselmian tradition which begins with a purportedly self-evident conception of God as the greatest possible being. This exalted yet simple conception of deity is taken to entail all the divine attributes, and acts as the single most important control on philosophical theology. On the other side of the divide are those who are committed to an *a posteriori*, empirical, or experiential mode of developing our idea of God. These theologians take as their starting point and touchstone for truth the data of religious experience and biblical revelation. Variations on these two very different procedures for conceptualizing the divine have resulted in a bewildering multiplicity of portrayals of God, ranging from the relatively naive and anthropomorphic to the utterly abstruse and mysterious.

Many philosophers who travel the high road of *a-priorism* are a bit perplexed by their biblicist colleagues, and find the God of the two testaments something of an embarassment. Those who draw their sustenance from the pages of scripture and the day to day realities of religious experience are for their part apt to contrast starkly the God of faith with the God of reason, the God of history with the God of the academy, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob with the God of the philosophers, even going so far as to denounce the latter as an abstract theoretical construct bearing no interesting relation to the true object of religious devotion. One respected Christian theologian, for example, not too long ago proclaimed with great flourish and finality that "*Deus philosophorum* is not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."[1]

There is a growing number of religious philosophers, however, who are attracted to the Anselmian conception of God and yet who also take seriously the empirical phenomena of religion. Many of us who find ourselves in this position have in effect internalized the dichotomy and are quite unsure how exactly to relate these two very different ways of thinking about God. Does, for example, one of them deserve our primary allegiance, the other properly serving an ancillary role? Or should one be chosen to the exclusion of the other?

In this paper I want to address the question of whether this deep divide in theology, or perhaps meta-theology, can be bridged. It seems to me that it can be and should be. I think an interesting *prima facie* case can be made that the God of Anselm *is* the God of the patriarchs. At least this is what I want to suggest. More pre-

cisely, I shall argue that under two simple conditions, the very different ways of thinking about God converge. I hope to show that if the object of worship in the Judeo-Christian tradition is intended to be God—the ultimate reality responsible for the existence and activity of all else—and if the Anselmian conception is coherent, then the God of Anselm is one and the same as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God and Father of Jesus the Christ. If I am right, then the only responsible way of developing either of the competing traditions of theological thinking is by drawing on the other. Philosophers can no longer discount the data of religious experience. Theologians can no longer ignore philosophical arguments about God. And those of us who have been caught in the middle can begin to map out some order amidst the disarray which has characterized recent talk about God.

The Anselmian conception of God is that of a greatest possible, or maximally perfect, being. On this conception, God is thought of as exemplifying necessarily a maximally perfect set of compossible great-making properties. To put it simply, a great-making property is understood to be a property it is intrinsically better to have than to lack. If, for instance, the exemplification of a state of knowledge is of greater intrinsic value than a lack of its exemplification, it will follow that one of the divine attributes is that of being in a state of knowledge. Likewise, if it is better to be omniscient than to be deficient in knowledge, God will be thought of as omniscient, and so forth. Traditionally, the Anselmian description has been understood to entail that God is, among other things, omnipotent, immutable, eternal, and impeccable as well as omniscient.

There are significant advantages to this conception of deity. For one thing, it can generate an ontological argument for the existence of God. It also appears to be a conception of great simplicity and power. All the divine attributes are unified under the single notion of maximal perfection. And in addition to these obvious benefits, there are less obvious ones as well. Consider for example the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, the belief that the entire contingent universe is created by God from nothing. The core of this doctrine is the claim that all things are ontologically dependent on God, that he relies on nothing existing independently of his creative power for the universe he has brought into being. What is the warrant for this doctrine? Biblical documents are not wholly unambiguous on this issue. There is significant scholarly dispute over whether it is even a biblical doctrine at all. Nor is there anything about religious experience which would clearly warrant this position. But it is entailed by the Anselmian conception of God, as standardly explicated. More precisely, it will follow from the Anselmian conception that if any contingent being, or universe of such beings, exists, it must stand in the relation of being created *ex nihilo*. For the Anselmian God is understood to be omnipotent or almighty. And it is a conceptual truth that an omnipotent or almighty being cannot rely on any independent source for its power or its products. In short, the Ansel-

mian conception of God has the powerful effect of logically integrating a good deal of traditional theology as well as of providing a completely *a priori* argument for its truth.

Because of its rational appeal and the many benefits it offers, the Anselmian formula has recently experienced a resurgence of popularity among philosophers. But a number of objections can be raised against the claim that it is a correct conception of God. Let us consider a few.

It might be suggested that the property of efficiency is surely the sort of property it is better to have than to lack. A maximally perfect being then will be perfectly efficient in whatever he does. But if any version of the story of evolution is true, the development of organized systems up to the point of the emergence of intelligent and rational life has been as inefficient a process as can be imagined. The story of evolution appears to many to be a tale of the grossest inefficiency on a colossal cosmic scale. The conclusion thus would seem to be forced on us that if the Anselmian conception of God were correct, there would be no maximally efficient being in charge of things, and thus no God. Conversely, it would follow that if there is a God, the Anselmian conception cannot be right. Since theists are committed to there being a deity, they must reject the *a priorist* account of what God is like.

An argument such as this can at first appear quite reasonable, and even compelling. It may even capture one way in which many people feel that the theory of evolution is incompatible with religious belief. But the flaws of the argument should be evident on even a moment's reflection. First of all, efficiency is always relative to a goal or set of intentions. Before you can know whether a person is efficient in what he is doing, you must know what it is he intends to be doing, what his goals and values are governing the activity he is engaged in. In order to be able to derive from the story of evolution the conclusion that if there is a God in charge of the world, he is grossly inefficient, one would have to know all the divine goals and values which would be operative in the creation and governance of a world such as ours. Otherwise, it could well be that given what God's intentions are, he has been perfectly efficient in his control over our universe.

But, more importantly, what reason do we have to hold that efficiency is a great-making property at all? Is it a property which it is *intrinsically* better to have than to lack? What is the property of being efficient, anyway? An efficient person is a person who husbands his energy and time, achieving his goals with as little energy and time as possible. Efficiency is a good property to have if one has limited power or limited time, or both. But apart from such limitations, it is not clear at all that efficiency is the sort of property it is better to have than to lack. On the Anselmian conception of God, he is both omnipotent and eternal, suffering limitations with respect to neither power nor time. So it looks as if there is no good reason to think that efficiency is the sort of property an Anselmian being would have to exemplify. This argument against the Anselmian conception thus does not succeed.

A more important and quite common worry about Anselmianism goes as follows. It is argued that the notion of a greatest possible being makes sense only if there is some single, all-encompassing objective scale of value on which every being, actual and possible, can be ranked, with God at the top. But surely, it is insisted, not all things are commensurable with respect to value. It just makes no sense to ask which is of greater intrinsic value, an aardvark or an escalator. The conclusion is then drawn that since there seems to be no such comprehensive scale of value, the Anselmian formula is meaningless.

This objection is well known. And just as well known is the Anselmian rejoinder that the characterization of God as the greatest possible being does not require universal value-commensurability. It does require that every object be value-commensurable with God, but not that every object be so commensurable with every other object. In fact, the Anselmian will often have the same intuitions about this latter claim as his critic. So the Anselmian will characteristically, and most plausibly, hold that God is greater than any other being, and that many other beings are incommensurable with each other.

There is an argument, however, by means of which the critic might be tempted to reject this common response and insist that the Anselmian is logically committed to universal commensurability. The Anselmian is attempting to defend his position by allowing that for some x and some y, God is greater than x, God is greater than y, and x and y are pair-wise incommensurable. Letting the sign '$>$' represent the predicate 'is greater than' and the sign '$> \underline{<}$' stand for 'is greater than, or less than, or equal to', the Anselmian is trying to acknowledge that:

(A): $(\exists x)\,(\exists y)\,((G{>}x)\ \&\ (G{>}y)\ \&\ -(x{>}\underline{<}y)$

where 'G' denotes God. But for any values of x and y, the following argument can be constructed to show that the first two conjuncts of (A) entail the denial of its third conjunct (letting 'a' and 'b' denote any two individual entities distinct from God):

(1) $G > a$	Assumption
(2) $G > b$	Assumption
(3) $(G > a) \rightarrow (G > \underline{<} a)$	1 Addition, def. of '$> \underline{<}$'
(4) $(G > g) \rightarrow (G > \underline{<} b)$	2 Addition, def. of '$> \underline{<}$'
(5) $G > \underline{<} a$	1,3 Modus Ponens
(6) $G > \underline{<} b$	2,4 Modus Ponens
(7) $a > \underline{<} G$	5 Symmetry of '$> \underline{<}$'
(8) $a > \underline{<} b$	7,6 Transitivity for '$> \underline{<}$'

If this argument is cogent, the Anselmian cannot consistently hold that God is greater than every other being, but that many beings are value-incommensurable with each other.

Is the argument sound? It certainly can appear to be. The inference rules it employs are all standard and truth-preserving. The relation of being greater than, less than, or equal to is clearly symmetric. And unlike the relation of being greater than or less than, it can seem to be transitive as well. The relation of being greater than or less than ('$><$') can easily be seen not to be transitive. Obviously, it is symmetric. If a $><$ b, then b $><$ a. So if it were transitive, it would be reflexive as well, which it clearly is not. No object is greater or less than itself in intrinsic value. But the relation denoted by '$>_<$' clearly is reflexive. So it is not on that ground ruled out from being transitive as well as symmetric. But is it after all a transitive relation?

The critic of Anselmianism has taken the original relation under discussion, that of being greater than—a transitive, asymmetric, and irreflexive relation—and performed a simple operation on it to attain additively a relation composed of it, its converse, and identity, a relation intended to be transitive, symmetric, and reflexive. However, a general proof can be given to show that this operation cannot be relied upon to succeed in producing relations with the desired properties of transitivity as well as symmetry, properties necessary for the critic's argument to go through.

Consider for example a case from set theory. Let '$\supset$' denote the relation of being a superset of (the converse of the subset relation) and '$\supset\subset$' denote the transform produced by our critic's general operation, the relation of being a superset of, a subset of, or the same set as. Now consider an argument strictly parallel to the one offered against Anselmianism (where 'G', 'a', and 'b' here denote sets of objects):[2]

(1) $G \supset a$	Assumption
(2) $G \supset b$	Assumption
(3) $(G \supset a) \rightarrow (G \supset_{\subset} a)$	1 Addition, def. of '$\supset_{\subset}$'
(4) $(G \supset b) \rightarrow (G \supset_{\subset} b)$	2 Addition, def. of '$\supset_{\subset}$'
(5) $G \supset_{\subset} a$	1,3 Modus Ponens
(6) $G \supset_{\subset} b$	2,4 Modus Ponens
(7) $a \supset_{\subset} G$	5 Symmetry of '$\supset_{\subset}$'
(8) $a \supset_{\subset} b$	7,6 Transitivity for '$\supset_{\subset}$'

The conclusion in this second argument can be shown diagrammatically not to follow from its assumptions:
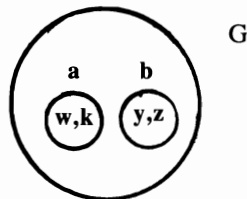
In what is represented by this diagram, it is true that:

(B) $(G \supset a)$ & $(G \supset b)$ & $-(a \supset_\subset b)$

which is precisely parallel to what the Anselmian envisions to be the case with respect to certain value rankings concerning God and his creatures, as expressed in (A).

The Anselmian can thus consistently affirm (A), because he can deny that the relation of being greater than, less than, or equal to—the relation of being value-commensurable with—is transitive. In particular, he can ground this denial with a claim that relations of intrinsic value comparison have a property akin to that ascribed to the identity relation by Geach and others. For want of a better name, let us speak of the Value Relativity Thesis, the thesis that for any objects x and y, x is greater than, or less than, or the same in value as y only if there is some feature with respect to which the comparison holds, and some scale on which the ranking can be made. Retaining our previous assignments, and letting the lower case letters 'f', 'g', and 'h' stand in for features or value scales with respect to which a relation of value comparison holds ('f' and 'g' acting as constants, 'h' as a variable), the Anselmian can consistently hold that:

(C): $(G >_f a)$ & $(G > b)$ & $-(\exists h) (a >_{\underset{h}{}}< b)$

The argument against the standard Anselmian position on value-commensurability is thus a failure. The Anselmian can quite consistently concur with the common intuition that not all objects are value-commensurable. The Anselmian conception of God thus does not require at this point a position which is clearly false.

There are a number of worries one might have about the notion of intrinsic value being employed here, and about our epistemic access to the value rankings requisite for the Anselmian conception. But I can think of no other *arguments* by means of which this conception of God can be impugned along these lines. So let us then turn our attention in another direction.

There is a simple yet forceful thought experiment which can appear to show the Anselmian description not to capture the properly religious concept of God at all. This is the last of the major objections to Anselmianism I shall consider at any length, because it is the only remaining line of reasoning which I think could be perceived as counting decisively against the *a-priorist* view.

Suppose we somehow discovered that a less than Anselmian being, an individual who was very powerful but not strictly omnipotent, very knowledgeable but not literally omniscient, and very dependable but not altogether immutable, etc., had created our universe and was responsible for the existence of intelligent life on earth. Suppose we found that he had been the one to call Abraham out of Ur, to speak to Moses, and to send the prophets. Suppose he had somehow become incar-

nate in the man Jesus, and that he will be the one responsible for giving eternal bliss to all who are properly related to him. Let him even sustain directly the very existence of the universe moment to moment. Would we rightly on *a-priorist* grounds refuse to call him 'God', just because he did not satisfy St. Anselm's precise requirements?

The most common response to this question is to say of course not—it would be absurd to refuse to call such a being 'God'. If he is the being the Bible is about, then Jews and Christians would just be committed to acknowledging him as God, regardless of the requirements of *a-priorism*. Few if any people would doubt whether the Anselmian formula specifies a sufficient condition for deity. But many would deny that it presents a necessary one. And this is what our brief thought experiment could be taken to show. Surely, it might seem, we have here a set of circumstances in which a being would rightly be characterized as God without his satisfying the Anselmian description. I think this would be a common judgment, and that it is on the basis of some such consideration as this that many people reject the *a priorist* tradition. Our thought experiment can appear to show that Anselm's concept of God just is not the Judeo-Christian concept.

This, however, would be a hasty conclusion to draw. For consider the Anselmian conception. As standardly understood, it entails that among the properties of a maximally perfect being is that of being necessarily existent, or existent in every possible world. If the Anselmian conception as a whole is coherent, or more exactly, if maximal perfection is possibly exemplified, then it is necessarily exemplified as well. With this in mind, let us return to our story. Call the less than Anselmian being 'El' and the world in which he accomplishes all those prodigious feats *W*. If Anselmianism is coherent, an Anselmian being exists in some possible world. But by virtue of being necessary, he exists in every other world as well, including *W*. Now if in *W* there is a being who is omnipotent, omniscient, and all the rest, surely El is *not* God, but rather, at best, the vicegerent or deputy of God, a sort of demiurge. If El is less than omnipotent, and there is an omnipotent, omniscient individual, then clearly anything El accomplishes is done only at the good pleasure, or according to the wishes, of the Anselmian being. El would not be the ultimate reality. He would not be God. I think this conclusion is fully in accord with the properly religious usage of 'God' in Judeo-Christian orthodoxy, and in fact that it is a conclusion forced on us by that usage. If the object of worship in the western tradition of theology is intended to be the ultimate reality, and if the Anselmian conception of God is coherent, the God of religious devotion is the God of the philosophers.

A number of problems could be raised for what has just been argued. Suppose for example that El was less than Anselmian not by lacking all the maximal perfections but rather by lacking just one or two. He could be fully omnipotent and completely omniscient, but less than wholly immutable, or somewhat short of per-

fectly just. In that case, he need not be dependent on any other being, even a fully Anselmian one, for his power and deeds. In light of this apparent possibility, my response to the thought experiment might be considered incorrect.

However, this second supposition, unlike the original one, could rationally be judged not to portray a real possibility at all. For it is a commitment of many Anselmians that the divine perfections are all necessarily co-exemplified. Further, I think it is also implicitly held by many that the exemplification of any perfection entails the exemplification of some maximally perfect set of great-making properties. This might even be taken to be the clearly intelligible core of the doctrine of divine simplicity. Note that it is not claimed that all great-making properties are necessarily co-exemplified—an obviously false proposition—only that all the divine perfections are. Great-making properties fall into various categories. First, there are those that are degreed and those that are not. Likewise, among degreed properties, such as that of being powerful, there are those that have logical maxima, or highest possible degrees, and those that admit of infinite increase.[3] A property which is constituted by the logical maximum of an upwardly bounded, degreed great-making property is a perfection. Clear examples of perfections would be omnipotence and omniscience. If the divine perfections are all necessarily co-exemplified, then the supposition that a being could have some without others conveys an impossibility, and thus can raise no genuine difficulties for the position that the Anselmian description expresses a necessary condition for deity.

It should be noted that the claim that the divine perfections are necessarily co-exemplified is an ontological position which does not entail the epistemological claim that *we* can deduce the various perfections from each other. Claims to display entailment relations between conceptually distinct divine attributes, such as R. G. Swinburne's recent attempts to deduce God's goodness from his omnipotent freedom and omniscience, are notoriously less than absolutely convincing.[4] The Anselmian need not hold that this second supposition is *demonstrably* inconsistent, only that what it supposes is in a broadly logical sense impossible. The existence of an omnipotent and omniscient but less than maximally perfect being may then be *conceivable*, but it is not, in a metaphysical or broadly logical sense, *possible*. So if the Anselmian conception so understood is coherent, or possibly exemplified, then no less than Anselmian being is God.

However, at this point, an epistemological query could be raised. Can we not imagine a set of circumstances in which (1) we have found no logical or metaphysical flaw in the Anselmian conception, and thus on these grounds have good reason to believe it coherent, but (2) we have a body of strong evidence that a being, El, exists who created the world, spoke to Moses, etc. and is not Anselmian, and (3) on all the available and relevant evidence, we are justified in believing that El is the ultimate reality in the actual world, and thus is God? In such circumstances, would not (2) and (3) block the conclusion we would otherwise draw from (1), the conclu-

sion that the Anselmian description is both possibly and actually exemplified, and thus that an Anselmian being is God?

Of course, if we had a strong *proof* that the Anselmian description is possibly exemplified, then (3) would not be true, we would not be justified in believing that any less than Anselmian being is actually the ultimate reality. But short of such a proof, (2) and (3) could both be true, and thus the most obvious and otherwise justified inference from (1) would be overturned.

These are some of the dynamics of the situation. There are two ways of blocking the Anselmian claim. One would be to show that conditions (2) and (3) obtain. We would then have good evidence that maximal perfection is not actually exemplified, and thus good indirect evidence that it is not possibly exemplified, however coherent the conception might otherwise appear. Unfortunately for non-Anselmians, conditions (2) and (3) clearly do not obtain in our present circumstances. At worst, we could be thought to lack sufficient evidence that maximality is possibly exemplified. And lacking good evidence that there is an Anselmian ultimate reality is quite different from having good evidence that there is a non-Anselmian ultimate. So Anselmianism cannot be circumvented in this way.

The second way to dispose of the *a priorist* claim would be to show directly an incoherence or inconsistency in the Anselmian conception of deity. This could be done in either of two ways. First, it could be argued that the notion of maximal perfection entails individual properties which are self-contradictory, or not possibly exemplified. This has been tried quite recently, for example, by Morris Lazerowitz.[5] Lazerowitz argues that a perfect being is understood to have infinite properties, and that no such properties can be had. The paradox of omnipotence could also be taken to have the same force: maximal greatness requires omnipotence, and there can be no omnipotent being.

The second strategy would consist in arguing that some two or more properties entailed by maximal perfection are logically incompatible with each other, and so not compossibly exemplified by any single being. This is a common sort of move used against traditional theism. It has been argued in recent years that there is a logical incompatibility between immutability and omniscience, necessary omnipotence and essential goodness, incorporeality and agency, and omniscience and omnipotence, to name a few. If the Anselmian conception could be shown to entail two such incompatible properties, it would be shown not to be a coherent conception.

If this were accomplished what would follow? That there is no God? No, only that there is no Anselmian being. I have argued that the Anselmian formula provides a necessary condition of deity only if it is coherent, or possibly exemplified. That is the condition under which, and under which alone, the ultimate reality will be Anselmian. Otherwise, it could be that there is a less than Anselmian being, such as El, who is the ultimate reality and is a proper object of religious devotion.

Or it could be that there is no such being at all.

Is the Anselmian right in thinking there is no incoherence in his specification that God is the greatest possible being? I think it would be extraordinarily difficult, much more difficult than most critics realize, to show Anselmianism to be incoherent. One obvious flaw in most incoherence arguments is that they deal with explications of the divine attributes which some Anselmians may hold but which are not necessary for the Anselmian to espouse. A critic will, for example, present a faulty definition of omnipotence and then go on to show to almost no one's surprise that there cannot be an individual with the property defined. Detractors such as Lazerowitz then hastily conclude that they have shown the conception of a perfect being to be incoherent. And it must be admitted that many theists encourage this sort of thing. For many Anselmians act as if the formula of maximal perfection self-evidently entails all the divine attributes, and even gives us a precise understanding of each of those properties God must have. And surely this is not the case at all.

It is well known that the classical divine attributes are seriously under-determined by the data of religious experience and biblical revelation. What is not as widely recognized, or at least acknowledged, is that there is under-determination in the *a-priorist* tradition as well, such that the core elements of the Anselmian tradition do not yield self-evidently a determinate array of precisely defined attributes. When a certain understanding of omniscience is shown to be incompatible with a particular interpretation of immutability, as Kretzmann has attempted, or with an explication of omnipotence as Blumenfeld has argued, the Anselmian can thank the critic for his help and conclude that those precise versions of the divine attributes are not the ones a maximally perfect being must exemplify[6] The specific properties an Anselmian God must have are under-determined by the Anselmian formula and by the basic intuitions by means of which it is applied (e.g. in identifying great-making properties).

Of course, Anselmians could not with any legitimacy endlessly exploit this fact. If every attempt to explicate the perfections was an obvious failure, the Anselmian could not responsibly appeal again and again to the "open texture" of his conception of God to evade the obvious conclusion that it is incoherent. But it has been argued by a number of philosophers in recent years that the traditional divine attributes can be seen to be coherent after all—in spite of the many attacks which have been launched against them. I believe this is correct, that there exists at least a strong *prima facie* case for the coherence of an *a priori* conception of deity understood as entailing these elements.[7] If this is right, then there is a strong *prima facie* case for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, if indeed he is God, being the God of Anselm, a maximally perfect being.

There must be controls over philosophical theology, if it is to be anything more than just creative speculation. There is good reason to believe that one of the con-

trols must be the Anselmian formula. But in light of the open texture of even Anselmianism, it seems that the data of religious experience and purported revelation must function as a control as well. A Christian, for example, need not and in fact should not follow any Anselmian construction of an idea of deity which disallows the possibility of a divine incarnation—the central doctrine of the Christian faith. Such fundamental beliefs as this can rightly act as a control over the specification of what God is like. *A priori* and *a posteriori* elements should thus both enter into an articulation of the nature of deity. Neither should be ignored.

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NOTES

1. W. R. Matthews, *God in Christian Thought and Experience* (London: Nisbet, 1930), p. 104.

2. This parallel was first suggested to me by Chris Menzel.

3. For a defense of the claim that there are such maxima, see William Mann, "The Divine Attributes," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 12, No. 2. (April 1975), pp. 151-59.

4. The attempt is made in *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), chapter 8 and p. 202, and in *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 97-102.

5. "On a Property of a Perfect Being," *Mind*, XCII (April 1983), pp. 257-63.

6. For the arguments referred to, see Norman Kretzmann, "Omniscience and Immutability," *Journal of Philosophy*, 63 (1966), pp. 409-21, and David Blumenfeld, "On the Compossibility of the Divine Attributes," *Philosophical Studies*, 34, No. 1 (July 1978), pp. 91-103.

7. I have tried to show this with respect to some difficult problem cases in a number of recent papers, including "Impeccability," *Analysis*, 43, No. 2 (March 1983), pp. 106-12, "Duty and Divine Goodness," forthcoming in the *American Philosophical Quarterly*, and "Properties, Modalities, and God," to appear shortly in the *Philosophical Review*. For a well known, extensive argument to this effect, see Swinburne's book *The Coherence of Theism*.